

22
Chapters

Dr. J. Ligon Duncan

COVENANT THEOLOGY

A Biblical, Theological,
and Historical Study of
God's Covenants

IN ONE Volume



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by J. Ligon Duncan, III

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Introduction to Covenant Theology

The study of Covenant Theology is a topic vital to pastoral ministry and, frankly, to Christian ministry of any kind. And so I am convinced that the time that you put into your study will be well spent. It will pay not only you dividends but the people of God whom you serve dividends for years to come. Let's hear God's word in Hebrews chapter 6, we'll begin in verse 9.

"But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way. For

God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, "I WILL SURELY BLESS YOU, AND I WILL SURELY MULTIPLY YOU." And thus, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise. For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute. In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, in order that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong encouragement, we who have fled for refuge in laying hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."

Thus ends this reading of God's holy and inspired Word, may He add His blessing to it. Let's look to Him in prayer.

"Our Lord and our God, we thank You for these words. Words of Scripture, words inspired by the Holy Spirit. Words about the covenant designed to strengthen us in the faith and comfort us in the everlasting hope. As we study the truths of the covenant, we pray that not only would our minds be enlightened, but that our whole heart, the very essence and inner aspect of our being would be captivated, mind, will, affections. That our desires would be moved as we see the glories of Your covenant displayed in Your Word. We ask that You would help us today even as we begin this study. May we honor You in our work. For Your glory and our good, we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen."

I want to note just a couple of things about this passage. This passage puts something very important in perspective about the covenant. The whole function of the covenant, and especially of the covenant signs, is to assure us of God's favor. This passage talks about God confirming His

promise by the covenant, a mechanism that He put in place in order to assure us of His purposes in salvation towards us. Every one of us as believers, from time to time, struggles with doubt. And when we struggle with doubt, usually corresponding to that, there is a struggle with assurance. Isn't it comforting for you to know that one of the things that God has spent the most time on in His inspired Word from the very beginning, from the book of Genesis, is the assurance of believers. When Abraham was wavering in his faith in Genesis 15 and in Genesis 17, what did God come to his rescue with? The signs of the covenant. When David was wavering in his faith in II Samuel 7, what did God do? He established His covenant with David, establishing David's line on the throne. When we waver in our faith, about the purposes of God towards us, what has God given us to be strengthened in assurance? The signs of the covenant: Communion, The Lord's Supper, the covenant meal, and Baptism, which we see administered from time after time, reminding us of God's initiative for us. So the covenant constantly functions to assure believers of God's steadfast purposes toward them. Even though we are fickle, He is not, and the covenant speaks to that issue. He is a God who binds Himself. He comes towards us and He says, "I will do this. And I not only promise it to you, I bind Myself by oath, and since there is no one greater than me, I bind myself by my own oath, to perform the promises that I have made to you." Don't forget that that is what the Covenant is about, very close to its heart, the assurance of God's people of God's purposes towards them. Now, I want to read to you a quote and I want you to guess who said this:

"The doctrine of the Covenant lies at the root of all true theology. It has been said that he who well understands the distinction between the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace is a master of divinity. I am persuaded that most of the mistakes which men make concerning the doctrines of Scriptures are based upon fundamental errors with regard to the covenants of law and the covenants of grace. May God grant us now the power to instruct and you the grace to receive instruction on this vital subject."

That wasn't a Presbyterian. That wasn't even an Anglican. That was a Baptist. His name was C.H. Spurgeon. And he knew that Covenant

Theology is at the heart of the Gospel ministry because Covenant Theology is the Gospel. And if you don't understand Covenant Theology, you are not ready to convey the Gospel in all of its glory and in all of its fullness to the people of God and to those outside of the covenant in order to draw them in to the experience of the fullness of the Covenant mercies. So what we are talking about is not something peripheral. We are not talking about something that simply divides Christians, like Dispensationalists or Baptists and Presbyterians. We are talking about something that strikes at the very heart of our understanding of the person and work of Christ, of the Gospel of salvation, of redemptive history, of the relationship between the Old and the New Testament. Covenant Theology is that central.

Goals and objectives.

Now before we look at the syllabus of the course, I want to tell you my goals and objectives here. First of all, it will be my goal to communicate useful information and knowledge to you, about the biblical and historical and theological teaching about the covenant. Primarily, of course, this information will consist of the knowledge of God revealed in the Scriptures, but it will also properly involve our knowledge of God's creation, including ourselves, our time, the world, our own flock. And of course the major source of this knowledge will be the special revelation of Scripture. So I want you to come armed with your Scriptures, your Hebrew and your Greek, because we will be delving into God's Word and plumbing its depths.

Secondly, my goal is to explain and encourage you towards a right use of this knowledge. I don't simply want you to have understanding; I don't want you simply to stockpile information. I am aiming for something more than a cognitive grasp of this truth. I want you to know how to use this truth in your own life and in the lives of others. The sort of knowledge of God which can be taught in a theology class is never an end in itself. It is always a means to a deeper and higher end. And that end is, of course, the glory of God and union with Him. And that flows from communion with God. We learn about God in order that we might know Him. And by knowing Him, I mean entering into a full relationship and fellowship with Him. If I could repeat this in another way, saving

knowledge of God is covenant knowledge, and covenant knowledge is personal knowledge. It is not just knowledge about God; it is knowledge of God Himself. Covenant knowledge is the knowledge of communion and fellowship with the living God.

Propositional knowledge is knowledge that we can express in sentences speaking about God. Propositional knowledge is an essential element of that personal saving knowledge. There are a lot of people today who would like to tell you that you cannot express truth in words. Rubbish. That is a truth expressed in words. It is an untruth I might add, but it is a proposition expressed in words. You cannot talk about truth apart from the Word. The idea of truth being nonpropositional is one of the biggest and most ridiculous statements being made today. Propositional knowledge is essential for us to have a personal and saving knowledge of God and hence, it is imperative in the spiritual walk of all Christians.

But that is not the only element of saving knowledge. There are plenty of people who are capable of cognitively grasping the teachings of the covenant who are as far away from the experience of the true knowledge of God as they could possibly be. In fact, one could argue that the greater grasp that you have cognitively of the truth, paralleled with a lack of true experience, actually puts you farther from God, rather than nearer, because you are more apt to be blinded to your lack of personal relationship with God, because you have all this cognitive information about Him. So knowledge is a dangerous thing. And we pursue it wisely only when we are pursuing our cognitive knowledge and our systematic studies with a view to a personal knowledge of the Lord.

Thirdly, one of the other goals that I want to pursue is the development of your analytical skills. You need to develop your ability of discernment to the point that you are capable of synthesizing knowledge and capable of critical thought and possessed of good judgment so that you can pick up a book on the covenants and you can rapidly come to know where that person is coming from theologically, where the gaps are in their teaching, or where the strengths are in their teaching. And most of you are going to become a walking reference source for the people that you serve, even if you are training for something other than the Gospel ministry. If you have a special training from a seminary and you are working in Christian

ministry, you may be assured that people will view you as a person who has special expertise. And hence, they will use you as a resource to guide them in their own growth. And I want to give you the kind of discernment, or help you to obtain the kind of discernment and analytical abilities, that you need for that.

Fourth, it is a goal of mine to inspire you to learn and to obey and to worship, and if it is applicable to you, to pastor. We should be thirsty for the knowledge of the Word of God and for the knowledge of His world, including God's people in their context. And not all of us are going to be equally interested in the same things, but each of us should be hungry for commanding knowledge of something. We must not only be hungry to put this knowledge to work in the service of our studies, but we must be hungry to put this knowledge to work in the service of our own growth in obedience. Now there are a lot of folks who are very practically oriented and they are very impatient about doing the hard work of thinking through and getting things right. I mean, they just want to get on with the Christian living. And there is something admirable about that at a certain level, but it can lead to real problems. Especially if you have left some very essential work undone in the area of the understanding of God's Word. Zeal without knowledge is not more spiritual. It is less spiritual. Zeal without knowledge is in fact prideful, because it is saying, "I don't need that knowledge that God took a lot of time to sit down in His Word. I am just going to live the Christian life." And God didn't design us to work that way. He designed us to understand His Word and to operate from the base of His Word in Christian living. So we must burn in our hearts to worship the Lord even in our pursuit of knowledge. To glorify Him as we pursue knowledge that we might learn and obey.

Let me also warn you of the sober work to which we are called as we go into the Christian ministry and the danger that accompanies that for our own souls, should we be careless in that calling. We are called to be stewards of the mysteries of God, and one day, we will stand before the Lord and we will give an account of how we handled those mysteries. Spiritual self-examination and self-criticism is a very important part of that. Seminary was a rich time of experience for me, but it was also a hard time, because I had to take a good hard look at me. And it was not very

often a pretty picture. And as we study the Word, there are going to be some things here, and I mean this for your encouragement, that if you take them and you look at them and you use them in the process of self-examination, they may be very discouraging. Don't be ultimately discouraged by that struggle. That struggle ought to be there. And we are not here simply to fill our notebooks. We are here to see our own hearts transformed. We are here to grow in grace. We need to be open to rebuke from the Word and correction from the Word. That is absolutely essential if we are going to avoid the pitfalls of Christian ministry.

One last thing: it is my goal to encourage a warm, full, natural, practical piety in godliness in our study. That godliness ought to be characterized by a reverence to God and a love of neighbor and a seriousness of purpose in your calling and a determination to holiness. My desire is that you would be God-centered in your thoughts and God-fearing in your hearts and God honoring in your lives. So I say that upfront, because I want you to know what I am trying to do. I am not simply trying to make you these creatures with really big heads and tiny little hearts and tiny little legs and hands. I hope that the truth set forth in our study will be something that will impact you in every aspect of your character in spiritual growth, for yourself and for the sake of the Kingdom. Now let's look at the syllabus together.

The Syllabus: Resources and References.

In your syllabus, you will see that this is Covenant Theology and we are going to be looking at Covenant Theology from an exegetical and a historical perspective. We will be doing Scripture exegesis. As you see the description of the course and the course objectives, we will be referring to the following required texts.

Required Texts

Standard Track [For students who desire a basic grasp of Covenant Theology.]

Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology [211-218; 262-301]

Vern Poythress, Understanding Dispensationalists

O. Palmer Robertson, Christ of the Covenants

Syllabus Articles: Donald Macleod Covenant Theology in DSCH&T, 214-218

Donald Macleod, Covenant: 2 in Banner of Truth [BoT] 141:22-28

Donald Macleod, Federal Theology—An Oppressive Legalism? in BoT 125:21-28

Donald Macleod, The Lord's Supper as a Means of Grace in BoT 64:16-22

Donald Macleod, Qualifications for Communion in BoT 65:14-20

Donald Macleod, The Real Presence in BoT 66:13-16

The Westminster Confession of Faith 7: Of God's Covenant with Man

Larger Catechism Questions 20-22,30-36

Shorter Catechism Questions 12,16, & 20

Advanced Track [For students who have already read Vos, Biblical Theology and Robertson, Christ of the Covenants, and who are well-grounded in Covenant Theology. ThM students are required to master the Advanced Track material, as well as the Standard.]

Patrick Fairbairn, The Typology of Scripture

John L. Girardeau, The Federal Theology

O. Palmer Robertson, Christ of the Covenants[‡]

Syllabus Articles: Donald Macleod, Covenant Theology in DSCH&T, 214-218

Donald Macleod, Covenant: 2 in Banner of Truth [BoT] 141:22-28

Donald Macleod, Federal Theology -- An Oppressive Legalism? in BoT 125:21-28

Donald Macleod, The Lord's Supper as a Means of Grace in BoT 64:16-22

Donald Macleod, Qualifications for Communion in BoT 65:14

Donald Macleod, The Real Presence in BoT 66:13-16

Heinrich Heppe, Reformed Dogmatics [281-319; 371-409]

Westminster Confession of Faith 7: Of God's Covenant with Man

Larger Catechism Questions 20-22,30-36

Shorter Catechism Questions 12,16, & 20

Recommended Books

Every Reformed minister should be a master of the federal theology, historically and theologically. Though the following works are by older

divines, and are hence written in a less accessible style, they are a veritable gold mine for the pastor and Bible student alike. Each will provide interesting historical and theological discussions of covenant theology, and will prove to be rich resources for preaching the covenants.

1. Anonymous (E.F.), *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* [with Thomas Boston's notes]

The Marrow is a thorough-going expression of federal theology, not only valuable for its historical significance but for its insights for preaching and applying the covenants. Boston's notes make it even more worthwhile.

2. Thomas Boston, *A View of the Covenant of Grace*, *Collected Writings*, Vol. 8

A representative treatment of the subject by the famous "Marrow Man".

3. Thomas Boston, *A View of the Covenant of Works*, *Collected Writings*, Vol. 11

Boston's exposition of the pre-fall relations between God and Adam place him squarely in the tradition of Reformed federal theology. His understanding of the theological implications of the covenant of works is evident throughout, and his searching (and moving) pastoral applications are those of both a seasoned shepherd and an astute theologian.

4. James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification*

Buchanan's established study of justification reveals the necessity of the covenantal framework for a proper understanding of this cardinal doctrine of the Reformation.

5. Hugh Martin, *The Atonement*

Another theological treasure from a Free Church of Scotland minister, this work relates the covenant theology to the Biblical doctrine of the atonement, and (implicitly) responds to various contemporary (nineteenth-century) errors on the subject.

6. Herman Witsius, *An Economy of the Covenants Between God and*

Man

Recently republished with a lengthy commendation by J.I. Packer, this is an exemplary presentation of continental covenant theology.

The following works are by twentieth-century scholars (save for Fairbairn, who is included on merit) who have ably carried the Reformed tradition of covenant theology into a new era. Some of the volumes and articles are historical in nature. Others are exegetical or theological. They represent a quality sampling of the best Reformed, conservative scholarship on the covenants available today. The pastor and diligent layman will find here treasures both old and new.

1. O. Palmer Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*

The best book-length, conservative, scholarly, exegetical treatment of covenant theology to appear in the past hundred years. Robertson utilizes the insights of G.E. Mendenhall and Meredith Kline, and steers a middle course between John Murray's and Meredith Kline's divergent views on the unilateral/bilateral nature of the divine covenants.

2. Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology*

The standard conservative treatment of biblical theology ("the study of special revelation from the standpoint of the history of redemption"). Not easy reading, but rewarding nevertheless.

3. Geerhardus Vos, "The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology" in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation*

A good historical overview of the history of the doctrine of the covenants in the Reformed tradition (it is nicely complemented by Louis Berkhof's helpful sketch in his *Systematic Theology* 211-213, 265). This article is not the last word on the subject but a good start.

4. Patrick Fairbairn, *Typology of Scripture* (19th century)

Classical covenantal exposition of the subject of biblical typology by a great nineteenth-century Scottish Presbyterian Old Testament scholar.

5. Patrick Fairbairn, *The Interpretation of Prophecy* (19th century)

Fairbairn again brings his formidable powers to bear on the subject of the proper method of interpretation of prophecy. This book (along with his other great works *Typology*, *Hermeneutics Manual*, and *The Revelation of Law in Scripture*) are sturdy treatments of themes which have been neglected or mishandled in our own time.

6. Meredith Kline, *By Oath Consigned*

In this book, as in his *Treaty of the Great King*, Kline draws on the twentieth-century discoveries regarding Near-Eastern treaty forms to elucidate the biblical doctrine of the sacraments. Kline is helpful and innovative, but sometimes eccentric.

7. John Murray, *The Covenant of Grace*

This seminal pamphlet by John Murray provides a good introduction to covenantal thought for the beginner. The more advanced student will pick up quickly on Murray's stress on the unilateral nature of the divine covenants (he is following Vos).

8. John Murray, "Covenant Theology" in *Collected Writings*, vol. 4

Another useful historical introduction to Covenant Theology, though Murray's own reticence about the covenant of works does show through at points.

9. Donald Macleod, "Covenant: 1" in *BoT* 139:19-22; "Covenant: 2" in *BoT* 141:22-28; "Federal Theology—An Oppressive Legalism?" in *BoT* 125:21-28; and "Covenant Theology," in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993), 214-218.

In these articles, Macleod shows himself to be an able twentieth-century expositor and defender of the traditional federal theology of the Westminster standards. In the later two articles, he specifically responds to the standard "new" (neo-orthodox) criticisms of covenant theology.

10. John von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought*

The best available historical-theological survey of the federal theology of the Puritans. It successfully avoids the "Calvin versus the Puritans" mythology and provides a helpful review of current (and errant) theories on the development of covenant theology.

11. Geerhardus Vos, *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation*
A collection of the writings (not all related to the covenant idea) by one of the most distinguished recent proponents of covenant theology. Vos's evident exegetical powers combined with his historical-theological competence (traits not often seen in tandem in Biblical studies specialists today) make his works quite valuable and formidable enough to still demand a reckoning with. He was a major influence on John Murray.

In addition to the above-recommended texts, the following books provide interesting historical and theological discussions of the covenants and covenant theology:

O.T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church*

A study of the biblical doctrine of the church in the OT and NT from a covenantal perspective, designed to respond to old-style dispensational errors (especially the "church as the 'great parenthesis'" doctrine).

C. Bass, *Backgrounds to Dispensationalism*

An informative historical account of the origins of old-style dispensationalism, as well as a critique (especially with regard to John Nelson Darby).

C.A. Blaising & D.L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism** [* written from a Dispensationalist perspective.]

A presentation of a new form of dispensationalism, and a comparison of it with what it calls 'classical' and 'revised' forms of dispensationalism. Blaising and Bock define these three forms of dispensationalism with reference to the "two purposes of God/two peoples of God theory." Classical dispensationalism, then, holds to this theory, revised dispensationalism significantly modifies this theory, and progressive dispensationalism jettisons this distinction altogether. An important book for any evangelical who wants to intelligently dialogue with modern day dispensationalists of whatever ilk.

John Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*

A controversial polemical work critiquing dispensationalism. It is a scaled-down version of a massive treatment that Gerstner had been working on for years. It could still use some editing, evidences some theological quirks, and was poorly received in the dispensational community (surprise, surprise!) but nevertheless contains a number of insightful points of critique.

John L. Mackay, *The Covenants of the Bible*

A new work produced by the Professor of OT at the Free Church of Scotland College in Edinburgh. Mackay's lecture at the Banner of Truth Conference on Covenant Theology is probably the best brief introduction, overview and analysis of covenant theology available on tape.

O. Palmer Robertson, *Covenants: God's way with his people*

This is the "Sunday School version" of *Christ of the Covenants* produced for Great Commissions Publications. It has some material not found in *Christ of the Covenants* and is easily understandable.

C.C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today** [* indicates a book written from a Dispensationalist perspective.]

Ryrie's attempt to respond to the criticisms of dispensationalism which have been leveled by evangelical covenant theologians.

David Weir, *The Origins of Federal Theology*

A former-Th.M thesis (St Andrews) and one of the better historical treatments of the origins of covenant theology. Nevertheless, there are gaps in this treatment and Weir himself is sometimes too reliant on the revisionist Torrance historiography of covenant theology.

If you feel like, "Well, I have already mastered Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, and I have read the section on the Covenants in Berkhof's *Systematic Theology*, and I have a good grasp of it and I think I could articulate an outline of Covenant Theology. I know that I am a Covenant Theologian and I disagree with Dispensationalists at this point and I have really wanted to be challenged by some of the historical material that I haven't read." Well then, the advanced track is for you. Perhaps you feel like you are coming into Covenant Theology, as I came into Covenant

Theology in seminary, not exactly quite knowing what it was. I was interested in the guy who was going to teach it, his name was O. Palmer Robertson, but a little bit suspicious. I wasn't sure what this Covenant Theology was, and it took him three days, and he had me hook, line and sinker. But I needed to start from the bottom.

For the advanced track, Fairbairn, Typology of Scripture. Robertson once said, "Sell all that you have and buy Fairbairn." Fairbairn's works are invaluable, Interpretation of Prophecy, Typology of Scripture, Revelation of Law in Scripture, Pastoral Theology, Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles. Anything that you can get your hands on by Fairbairn, you ought to buy and have in your library. Also Girardeau's Federal Theology, a little paper that he gave on the subject of Covenant Theology.

Walking through the articles in the syllabus, let me tell you just a little bit about them. The first article in the syllabus is Macleod's essay from the Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology on Covenant Theology. It is the best single thing in print giving a theological and historical overview of Covenant Theology, period, and that is why I ask you to read it. Then, his articles, all of which are drawn from the Banner of Truth, are excellent for a variety of reasons. First of all, they are exegetically confident. Second of all, he has a commanding grasp of Historical Theology. Thirdly, Macleod is constantly interacting with Barthian theology. And you need to understand that Barth and his successors within the Reformed and Protestant mainstream community have been the loudest critics of traditional orthodox Covenant Theology, period. Often times, those of us that come from an evangelical background, and have grown up in a general evangelical or fundamental setting, are more aware of the battles between Dispensationalists and Covenant Theologians. That is, in a sense, a popgun fight at the pool, compared to the argument which has been going on between the Barthians and traditional Covenant Theologians. In Church Dogmatics, Barth has a ten-page footnote, small print, interacting with seventeenth century Covenant Theology, critiquing Witsius and several other seventeenth century men who worked on Covenant Theology. And Barth knew those men and appreciated their writings to a certain extent, but he hated certain aspects of their theology and his followers have ever since

been doing their dead level best to try and scuttle traditional Covenant Theology.

And one reason why Macleod is so helpful is that he writes in the backyard of Barth's biggest bulldogs on this question, T.F. Torrance and J.B. Torrance. These two men have devoted their lives to trying to destroy Covenant Theology and so Macleod has a sensitivity to the attacks that have come against Covenant Theology and so does an exposition of it that is very, very helpful.

Now one last thing in your syllabus. You will see immediately after the last Macleod article a large print version of the section on the Covenants of Works and the Covenants of Grace from Heinrich Hepppe's Reformed Dogmatics. This is sort of a compendium, statements about the covenants, from some of the historic Protestant scholastic theologians, and it is very rich and we will be referring to it. So that is the material in your syllabus.

Why study Covenant Theology?

I want to start off with the question of, "Why study Covenant Theology?" Why study Covenant Theology? I want to give you several answers to that question.

The first answer to that question is this: Because biblically and theologically speaking, the covenant is the bridge between anthropology and soteriology. What I mean by that is, as you study the biblical doctrine of man and you find him fallen, the answer to the question as to "How God gets man out of that predicament?" is found in the area of the doctrine of the covenants. It is by a covenantal redemptive design that God saves us. A design that begins before the foundation of the world, I might add. And so the covenant is the bridge between your doctrine of fallen man and your doctrine of salvation, theologically speaking.

Secondly, because the covenants structure the Scripture. Covenant Theology is important because the covenants structure the Scriptures. The Covenants give order to creation and redemption. They delineate the Bible's various historical periods. Many of us are familiar with Scofield's arrangements of dispensations. That is an entirely artificial arrangement from the standpoint of the Scriptures themselves. But all you have to do is

turn to say, Psalm 89 or to the book of Hebrews, and know that the Bible itself talks about the epics of Scripture in terms of covenants. So this isn't something that men had to think up on their own. The Bible itself talks about God's history of redemption in covenantal epics. And of course, the covenants have even given us the titles of the Old and the New Testaments.

Now that brings us to those words, Covenant and Testament and such. You know that the Old Testament word for Covenant is berith. Now that word is translated into Greek one of two ways. It can be translated into Greek as diatheke or it can be translated into Greek as syntheke. We will talk about the differences in those words at some point, too. And the Greek word, diatheke, is translated into Latin in one of three ways, but the most common translation is testamentum.

Now, berith in the Old Testament signifies a binding, mutual relationship with mutual obligations, a binding mutual relationship with attendant obligations. Think of the covenant relationship between Jacob and Laban. Jacob had to do certain things. Laban had to do certain things. Laban was a little dishonest to deal with. Jacob was a little dishonest to deal with. The Gibeonites and the children of Israel, in Joshua 9, entered into a covenant relationship, a binding relationship with attendant obligations. The Gibeonites got to draw water all their lives, and the Israelites didn't kill them. This was a binding relationship with mutual obligations. Diatheke in Greek is often used to describe a "Last Will and Testament." Other times, diatheke is used to describe more precisely this kind of a binding, living, personal relationship.

Covenant or Testament?

Now this is a nice little philological study because it gives us an opportunity to address a really fundamental difference between a covenant and a testament. Covenants are made between the living. Testaments are activated when someone dies. When you enter into a covenant, a covenant is, by its very definition, something between two people who are alive or two parties who are alive. Testaments are made by a party who is alive, but are not effected until the death of that person. So, remember the Greek term diatheke is rather elastic because it can

both be used to describe this binding, living relationship spoken of in the Old Testament in the berith, but it can also be used to describe a last will and testament.

And there, by the way, is one of the problems with the early understanding of what a covenant was and one reason why we lost some rich theology for a number of years in the Church. Syntheke is a Greek term, which tends to be used to translate the idea of covenant as a treaty, especially in terms of a political agreement. And as we have already mentioned, covenant is used that way in the Old Testament, for instance, in Joshua 9 and 10. In fact, some of your Bibles, some of your NIV Bibles will translate some of the passages in the Old Testament where the word berith is used, and they will translate it as treaty. And that is not necessarily a bad translation of the term—although it is nice to see the word covenant there so that you know what is behind that word, treaty.

In Latin these words were used, especially in the second, third, fourth centuries relatively interchangeably. Pactum can be used to describe a covenant. Foedus can be used to describe a testament. Now you can see in each of these Latin words the roots of English words. A pact come from pactum. From foedus comes a word that you may be aware of, federal. That is why Covenant Theology is sometimes called Federal Theology, spinning off the Latin root foedus. Federal Theology from that standpoint is identical and synonymous with Covenant Theology. Testamentum is, of course, also a Latin word which can be perfectly and naturally translated as covenant.

Although we tend to think of Old Testament and New Testament, those designations of the Scripture were first given in a context where the covenantal understanding of diatheke and berith were alive and well. And so your Scriptures bear the titles of the covenants, old and new, on the very front pieces. We just call them testaments, but more accurately, they are really covenants. So, why study the covenants? Because they structure the Scriptures.

Thirdly, why study the covenants? Because they unify the Scriptures. The covenants unify the Scriptures. The very heart of the covenant is the Immanuel principle, "I will be your God and you will be My people." This

is the very heart of the Scriptures. We could stop today and do a survey of that and you would see that theme of God being our God and of us being His people runs from Genesis to Revelation, as the very essence of God's design for us. And that principle is a covenantal principal. It pervades and unifies the history of salvation recorded in the Bible. The book of Hebrews, at the very end, in chapter 13, speaks of this everlasting covenant.

Furthermore, the Old Testament covenant forms relate to New Testament covenant realities. Let me give you an example of that. If you pick up the Last Supper narratives in any of the synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark, or Luke, and you look at Jesus' words as He is explaining the bread and the cup, those passages are undergirded by Old Testament passages, especially Isaiah 53, Exodus 24, especially verse 8, and Jeremiah 31.

Now two of those three Old Testament passages are explicitly covenant passages. And the third of them, Isaiah 53, is implicitly covenantal and we will explain how later on. But two of the three are explicitly passages talking about the covenant. And what is Jesus claiming as He explains His death at the Last Supper and at the inauguration of the Lord's Supper? What He is saying is, "I am the fulfillment of these covenant signs and forms for which we have been waiting to be fulfilled, as the people of God, for hundreds of years, for over a millennium. So, Covenant Theology is important to study because the covenants unify the Scriptures.

Fourthly, Covenant Theology is important to study because of the amount of material concerning the covenant in the Bible. The word covenant appears around 300 times in the Bible. If you pick up a large concordance, the references cover two pages of small print. Now, there are words that occur more frequently than covenant, and simple numbers of occurrence are not an argument in and of itself. But the term covenant, when it appears, is almost always at the focal point of the passage in which it appears. And thus, the vast repetition of the term covenant ought to tip you off that this is something that God is very concerned that we understand. God is a good teacher and good teachers repeat themselves so that we get it. And He tells us things over and over and over again, and nigh unto 300 times we hear from Him about the covenant in Scripture.

Around thirty times in the New Testament, around 280 or 290 times in the Old Testament. These are significant numbers of references to the covenant.

The fifth reason for studying Covenant Theology is because of the modern development and popularity of the discipline of biblical theology. Now, perhaps you're asking, "What is biblical theology?" Simply, it is a survey of the whole picture. But from what perspective? Yes, redemptive history is the key there. Biblical theology is the study of the history of redemption from the perspective of a particular theological theme traced through the eras of that history of redemption.

For instance, you might want to study the holiness of God, and ask the question, "What was revealed about the holiness of God in the Patriarchal era?" And then compare that to what was revealed about the holiness of God in the Mosaic era. And then compare that to what was revealed about the holiness of God in the Prophetic era. And what have you just done? You have just done a redemptive historical study of how God unfolded the one truth about His holiness over time. You have just done a biblical theological study. You are paying special attention to what God revealed during certain times. When you are studying biblical theology, you are picking the Bible up and you are asking, "What does the progress of redemption help me understand about this particular biblical topic?" So it is a study of special revelation from a redemptive historical perspective.

Now that type of study has been made very popular in this century by Geerhardus Vos, and John Murray, and Richard Gaffin, and we could name scads of other people who have been very interested in doing that kind of study of scriptural teaching. Even non-Reformed Christianity is beginning to utilize that kind of tool for doing doctrinal study. And so we need to be conversant with historic Covenant Theology, so that we will be able to supply useful and constructive criticism to those other schools who are now doing biblical theology, but who are doing it without the benefit of the long history of biblical theology in the Reformed tradition.

There is a real sense in which the Reformed branch of the Reformation did more work in this area earlier than any other branch. From Bullinger to Zwingli to Calvin, you will see over and over study in this whole area of

redemptive history. And we need to be conversant with our Covenant Theology and its development so that we are able to interact with these other, diverse theological traditions that have now recognized the significance of the covenants.

Many of you know, for instance, that dispensationalism has undergone radical changes, and if you pick up a book today, even by professing dispensationalists, they will tell you that there are at least three classifications of dispensationalists now. There are classic dispensationalists, there are modified dispensationalists, and there are progressive dispensationalists, and all of them have been impacted by biblical theology in the method in which they are approaching redemptive history. Liberation Theology has picked up on the theme of Covenant Theology and does a lot with the doctrine of the Covenants. There are many Roman Catholic scholars who are doing work on the covenants. For instance, the famous Protestant who converted to Roman Catholicism, Scott Hahn, is projected to be producing a volume on the covenants, which he actually plagiarized from his professor at Gordon-Conwell, Gordon Hugenberger. And so Gordon quickly printed his material on the covenants so that it would be apparent to all that that this gentleman's thesis was a plagiarized thesis.

As I said, virtually every school of biblical interpretation today has come to appreciate the significance of the covenants in their understanding of the distinctive message of Scripture. Just one example, the Lutheran German scholar, Walter Eichrodt, in his theology of the Old Testaments uses—surprise—the covenant concept as the unifying principal for his exposition for every aspect of Old Testament thought. So even those who are outside of what we would call an Orthodox Reformed tradition of theology have recognized how central the covenants are to our understanding of theology. So that is another reason why we need to study Covenant Theology.

A sixth reason why it is a good thing to study Covenant Theology is because there is a massive volume of material out there on the covenants. It is staggering. The work on covenants, of course, is most prolific in the Old Testament. But it is also quite extensive in the New Testament in church history, especially during the Reformation, also in post

Reformation historical theology, nineteenth century historical theology and, of course, in popular literature from the nineteenth century until now because of the dispensational controversies. So there is a lot of material out there, and some is incredibly bad teaching.

You need to be able to discern bad teaching. At the church we have a committee that is looking at family life education and we are using an excellent book, but the gentlemen who wrote the book, though he knows a great deal about sociology, is an evangelical Christian and is explicitly trying to come at his material from a theological base. He also comes from a dispensational background, and it is amazing that even in the issue, or we might say, especially in the issue of family life, how the covenant impinges upon how you look at things. So his distinctive eschatology and his views of the covenants come into his teaching about family relations. It is amazing how the covenant is pervasive in every area theologically. So it is important for us to be able to discern the truth as we weed through the material on the covenants.

There is a seventh reason why we ought to study Covenant Theology and that is because of the importance of Covenant Theology in the literature on the history of the development of Protestant doctrine. Covenant Theology is related directly to several hot topics. Many of you will have heard of the famous "Calvin vs. the Calvinists" approach to Reformed history. And that approach basically says that Calvin's theology was different from the Calvinists, his later followers. And there have been even two schools which have approached that question differently. One school, dominated by Karl Barth and his successors, suggests that Calvin is good and Calvinists are bad. They assert that Calvin did not believe what the Calvinists teach and the Calvinists have come with all sorts of new teachings that really distort the real genius of John Calvin's teaching. And so they would see Calvin as good and everybody after Beza up to Karl Barth as bad. And then they would say, "You see, Calvin and Barth, they were on the same team and everybody else is wrong, so just throw them out." And there is a whole market and whole industry of historical material trying to substantiate that hopelessly flawed thesis.

Now on the other hand, Perry Miller, the famous Puritan scholar from Harvard, was an atheist, but who loved the Puritans, and he knew very

little about John Calvin, except that he didn't like him and that he didn't agree with predestination. By the way, that is about what most people think of John Calvin. Perry Miller knew a lot about the Puritans and not much about Calvin, and so as he attempted to rehabilitate the Puritans in the 1930s. And you can imagine, in the 1930s in America, the Puritans wouldn't have been on the top of the charts, as they are not on the top of the charts today. They were in ill repute in academic studies, and he devoted his life to getting people to realize the brilliance of the Puritans and their impact on the culture. But one of the ways in which he attempted to do that was to say that the Puritans had actually come up with some ideas that even Calvin had not come up with.

And Miller attempted to argue that the Puritans had, in fact, attempted to do two things to Calvin's theology. They had attempted to try and tone down his predestinarian emphasis. How anybody who has read the Puritans and read Calvin and can draw that conclusion is incomprehensible, but this is what he thought. And secondly, he thought that the Puritans had figured a way to get works back into salvation by means, he says, of Covenant Theology. Now again, how anyone could understand anything about Covenant Theology and make that kind of statement, I do not know, but he did. And unfortunately many very intelligent people for many years have repeated his myth, that the Puritans invented Covenant Theology, and that no one had ever heard of Covenant Theology before the Puritans came along. So this whole issue of Covenant Theology is wrapped with some very important church historical theological debates that have been going on.

It is also related, for instance, to the issue of the doctrine of limited atonement. In fact, the reason that Karl Barth hated Covenant Theology so badly was because the Covenant Theologians, as they showed the parallel between Adam and Christ, explained that the atonement was definite and that its intent was, in fact, to purchase salvation for God's chosen. And of course, Barth hated that idea of saying that the atonement was not universal, because for Barth, the incarnation was the decisive point, and the incarnation was a universal platform because he had this view of Christ's humanity as a universal humanity. And so he hated the doctrine of limited atonement.

There has also recently been in connection with this, a big argument about the doctrine of assurance in Calvin and the Puritans. And if you have done any reading in the area of historical theology of Calvin and the Puritans, you have seen some people who have argued that the Puritans had a doctrine of assurance which actually lead people to despair, whereas Calvin had this wonderful, warm, fuzzy view of assurance and thought that assurance was the essence of everyone's faith. And the Puritans, the mean and nasty people that they were, came along and separated faith and assurance and caused all these pastoral problems amongst people. But you will find these myths out there very eloquently and elegantly presented, and so it is important for us to study Covenant Theology so that you will know firsthand what Covenant Theology says, as opposed to what some people would like to say that Covenant Theology says.

Eighth. Why study Covenant Theology? Because of the importance of Covenant Theology to your preaching, to your teaching, to your pastoring, your Christian living, your counseling, your parenting, can I go on? Covenant Theology is not just an argument for baptizing babies. And for my Baptist friends out there who think that my ultimate agenda in life in Covenant Theology is to have people get their babies wet, you misunderstand the essence of Covenant Theology. Covenant Theology is at the very heart of Christian theology. As my dear Southern Baptist friend, Dr. Mark Dever, the pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC, a former J.B. Lightfoot scholar at Cambridge University, the author of a study on the Puritan, Richard Sibbes, and his doctrine on the Covenant says, "Lig, Covenant Theology is just the Gospel." Now I assure you that Mark has no interest, whatsoever, in getting your baby baptized, but he knows that Covenant Theology is right at the heart of the doctrine of the work of Christ, of the offices of Christ, of the doctrine of salvation, of the doctrine of the church, and we could go on adding to it. It is something very, very central. Covenant Theology has a fundamental place in the Christian message and it is too important to be relegated simply as a subset of our doctrine of the sacraments. And unfortunately, that is pretty much where it has been relegated in theology.

I listened to a very interesting debate in which Donald Macleod was expounding Covenant Theology and he made the statement that Covenant Theology in Scotland today is dead, that it is absent. And he is not speaking about the liberal churches. He is speaking about the evangelical church. He says our people do not know what Covenant Theology is, they are not preaching it. It is not impacting the way they proclaim. And of course, for those of you who are going to be preachers, teachers and proclaimers, one of my agendas will be that you will catch a vision and an understanding of Covenant Theology and it will transform the way you are preaching the Gospel, because it is rich, and I believe that you present the objective truth of the Gospel in the richest way possible as you present Covenant Theology because it is the Scripture. So this is what we will study together.

What is a Covenant?

Now, what is a Covenant? What is a Covenant? We have already said that the word covenant comes from the Hebrew berith/birit, and from the Greek, diatheke, and from the Latin, pactum, foedus, or testamentum. Now the concept of covenant is not restricted to the Bible. We have numerous examples of secular Near Eastern covenants that were happening concurrently as biblical covenants, which were described to us. We have documents, we have ceremonies, we have information from other near eastern cultures that employed covenants from the second millennium BC, for instance, and those covenants come in various forms.

Sometimes covenants were agreements between families. They might be an agreement not to disagree about land rights. Do you remember when Isaac was having trouble with people fighting over the wells? So he packs up and moves away and digs new wells. Well, in that kind of situation, one of the ways in the Near East that a problem might have been worked out is that a covenant might have been made. A mutual agreement, saying, "Okay, we will work here, we'll farm here, we'll draw water here and my herdsman won't go in and draw water from your wells and yours shouldn't come over to my wells and draw water, etc." It was a legal way, a contractual way of dealing with problems in day-to-day life.

There were other forms of covenants as well. For instance, covenants were used as international treaties. Let's say a suzerain, and by a suzerain

I mean some sort of petty monarch, someone who has the power over a particular region, conquers another tribe. It was not uncommon in the ancient Near East for a suzerain to go into an area, conquer a people, and basically require them to make a covenant with him, and that covenant would go something like this: "If you will pay me a tithe of your plantings, your yield at harvest time, if you will promise to offer your sons of fighting age to me in military service in times of war; if you will promise not to rebel against me, and if you will promise to recognize my lordship over you, then I will (a) not slaughter you immediately, and (b) provide a system of justice and courts and establish order in your land and we'll get along." And in that context the relationship was rather unequal. The suzerain had all the chips and the vassal basically had the choice: I either enter into this agreement or we are wiped out.

Now that, by the way, is exactly the circumstance that we find in Joshua 9-10 with the Gibeonites. Do you remember? The Gibeonites had heard that the Israelites had crossed the Red Sea on dry land. They had heard of the power and miracles done by Moses, that Israel had wiped out two large cities, Jericho and Ai, and were heading for them. And everybody else, you remember, in Joshua 9 verses 1-2, decided they would what? They would band together in a military compact and fight together against Joshua and Israel. And from Joshua 9:3 and following, we see that the Gibeonites were the one exception. They knew that to fight against Israel was going to mean sure doom. And so they knew that their only hope was to do what? Get a covenant with the Israelites.

Now the only problem was that the Lord had told the Israelites not to make a covenant with anybody in the land. But that did not phase the Gibeonites, because they understood correctly that if they couldn't get a covenant, they were going to die, and so whatever they had to do to get a covenant, that looked like a good option. And so by hook or by crook, the Gibeonites pretended as if they did not live in the land of Canaan, as if they were a tribe from outside the land of Canaan that had heard about Israel moving into the land of Canaan, and they just wanted to snuggle up with them and be buddies and make a covenant. And so they exchanged food. What was that? A covenantal meal. We will talk about that later. And they entered into a covenant with Israel, but the elders of Israel

forgot to do what? Ask the Lord. And then, a few days later, they discover that the Gibeonites are Canaanites, they do live within the land. And what did the people want the elders of Israel and Joshua to do? Kill them all. And what does Joshua say? We cannot kill them, because we have made a covenant with them. There was the understanding that the Gibeonites had entered into a relationship with the Lord by the relationship that they had entered into with Israel with the covenant. And so that kind of treaty between suzerain and vassal is even illustrated in Scripture. So a covenant is not something that is unique to Scripture. It is a type of commitment, whether it is a personal commitment or an international treaty commitment, not unknown outside of Scripture.

But I would like to suggest to you, following Robertson's definition, that a covenant is a bond in blood sovereignly administered. And I would like to look at all three components of that definition. A covenant is a bond in blood sovereignly administered. That definition does not say everything that you need to say about the covenant, but it is a good start.

A covenant is a bond.

First of all, a covenant is a bond. That is, it is an oath-bound commitment. It is a bond. That is what I want to stress. It is a bond. A covenant is an oath-bound commitment. As we saw in Joshua 9, once the covenant is made, the relationship is solidified. It is a commitment of the highest order. And various solemnizing rituals are used in administering the covenant. For instance, you remember in Jacob and Laban's covenant agreement, there was the strange event of passing under the rod. What is that? That is a covenant sign. In Exodus 24:8, when the covenant of Moses was inaugurated formally, what did Moses do? He took the blood of a heifer and he sprinkled some of it on the altar and he sprinkled some of it on the children of Israel, doing what? Confirming that a solemn bond had been established and confirmed between God and His people.

Eating a meal can be a sign of the covenant. And you see the underlying significance of that in Near Eastern cultures, as in many other cultures, when sharing a meal with someone creates a special relationship. The idea is if I open my home up to you and we sit down and break bread together, some form of fellowship has happened that really commits me to treat you in a certain way. And so just like the ancient handshake was a

way of showing your enemy that you didn't have a weapon that you were going to pull out on him, so sitting down and eating a meal together was an indication that you had at least enough of a relationship that was formed that you were not going to attack one another or take advantage of one another.

And we have things from our cultural past that can help illustrate the significance of that sitting down and having a meal as a sign of the inauguration or of the confirmation of a bond. You will remember that in 1688, William of Orange, and Mary, his wife came to the throne of Britain, and they replaced the Stewart monarchy. The Stewarts were from Scotland and though the Stewarts were very unpopular monarchs, they were the monarchs and because many of the people in the northwest Highlands of Scotland were Catholics and the Stewarts had very definite Catholic sympathies, the Stewarts were thus very popular among those clans. When William and Mary came to the throne, first in England and then in Scotland, though they were welcomed by the vast majority of Protestants, there were many of these clans in the Highlands of Scotland that were not excited at all about them coming to the throne. And so one of the things that was done in Scotland immediately by the House of Orange was that they sent out a pledge that was to be signed by all the chiefs of the clans, basically saying, "We are not going to rebel against you as king. We recognize that you are the lawful king of Scotland and/or the king of Great Britain and we recognize you as the king." And all the clan chieftains were either required to come to Inverness or Edinburgh and sign this document and do it by a certain date. And there were several clans whose chieftains did not do that. And one of those clans was the McDonalds of Glencoe. They were a small, motley, and rather unpopular clan known for cattle thieving from their neighbors, and they lived there in the valley of Glencoe, a very beautiful place if you have ever seen it. And their clan chieftain got on his horse and made his way to Inverness and got to Inverness a day before the thing was to be signed and was told no, you are supposed to go to Edinburgh to sign yours. So, he showed up in Edinburgh several days late to sign his little pledge of loyalty. And the government in Edinburgh decided that he was going to be made an example of, and so some Campbells from Argyle were sent up with a regiment to Glencoe in the dead of winter, a month or so later, with the

assignment of slaughtering all of the McDonalds in Glencoe. And this was going to be a message sent to all of the Highland clans that if you mess with us, we're going to attack you and kill you. And so the army regiment from Argyle that was given this job of slaughtering all of the McDonalds showed up in the valley of Glencoe in the middle of a driving snowstorm and they bumped into some of the McDonalds, who promptly invited them into their home, and feasted them for three days. They slaughtered their best-fattened calves and they gave them the best food, the best wine, the best everything that they could find, never knowing that these people were sent to slaughter them. And in the middle of the night on the third day, the regiment got up and began to systematically slaughter the McDonalds. The women and children had to escape over the mountains in the middle of two or three feet of snow and make it to the next village and some of the survived to tell the tale, but most of the men were slaughtered by this regiment of soldiers. Well, as you can imagine, the outrage against this act was heard all over Scotland. In fact, until recently, if you were a Campbell, you couldn't get a bed at an inn in the Highlands. And if you go, and your last name is Campbell, say your name is Smith and you will stand a better job of getting a bed in an inn. The part of the infamy of the deed was that these people had accepted hospitality. Their feet had been under the table of the McDonalds and then they had turned against them. And it was the ultimate breach of not only honor, but of Highland hospitality, because the man whose feet had been under your table and has received your favor is not to return disfavor. And so you can see how the eating of a meal in the Near East would be a very sacred act, showing some sort of bond forming between two peoples or two tribes.

And so these sorts of signs of the covenant are given to us in the Old Testament and that is why you see the Gibeonites in Joshua 9:14 exchange bread and supplies with the Israelites. You see what is going on there? They are sharing supplies for a meal there. That is the forming of a covenant. That is a ritual aspect of the covenant.

Note also, that these signs of commitment factor into God's covenants with us. In the time of Noah in Genesis 9, the sign of the rainbow is given by God to assure Noah of the certainty of His promises. When Abram is

struggling in Genesis 17, at his massively advanced age to believe that God is really going to give him an heir, he is given the sign of circumcision, a visible, tangible sign designed to assure him of God's purposes, God's promises. In Exodus 31:13 and 17, when Israel is being set apart as different from all the other nations, the sign of the Sabbath is a sign to them as something that shows their uniqueness amongst all the tribes around them. It serves—this sign serves—not only to assure the believer, but it serves a witness function, to show the world whose you are. So a covenant is a bond, it is an oath bound commitment.

A covenant is a bond in blood.

The second thing that we need to see about a covenant is that it is a bond in blood. That is, it is a life and death relationship. There is a life and death obligation involved in the bond of the covenant. It is a bond in blood.

Two examples of this. Turn with me to Genesis. We will look at Genesis in greater detail later, but I want you to see what happens here. You remember in a suzerain-vassal treaty, we talked about the overlord coming in and conquering a tribe and the tribe has to make promises to the overlord that they will not rebel and that they will provide military service and they will pay their tithe, etc. And then the lord declares that He won't kill them, etc.

Let me tell you how that was normally made. In the Near East, very frequently, the way that covenant would have been solemnized is that animals would have been slaughtered and the animals would have been parted and the leaders of the conquered people would have been asked as vassals, as servants, as those who had been conquered, to walk between the pieces. By walking between the pieces, they were taking what is known as a self-maledictory oath. Now a malediction of course is just a bad word. So a self-maledictory oath is a self-curse. In other words, "Be it done to us, as we have done to these animals if we are not faithful to our commitments that we have made to you in the covenant. Slaughter us, overlord, just like we have slaughtered these animals, if we break our commitments that we have made in the covenant."

Now in Genesis, 15, we see something very interesting. Abram asks a

question of the Lord. In verse 8 of Genesis 15, Abram says, "Oh Lord God, how may I know that I shall possess it," and he is talking about the land of Canaan. "How may I know that I may possess it?" And the Lord says to him in verse 9, "'Bring me a three year old heifer and a three year old female goat and a three year old ram and a turtle dove and a young pigeon'. Then he brought all of these to him and cut them in two and lay each half opposite the other, but he did not cut the birds, and the birds of prey came down upon the carcasses and Abram drove them away, and now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him. And God said to Abram, 'know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs where they will be enslaved and oppressed 400 years. But I will judge the nation whom they will serve and afterwards, they will come out with many possessions. And as for you, you will go to your fathers in peace, and you shall be buried at a good old age. Then in the fourth generation, they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete'. And when it came about when the sun had set, it became very dark and behold, there appeared a smoking oven and flaming torch which passed between these pieces."

Now that bizarre scene in response to the simple question, "How am I going to know that I am going to have the land, Lord?" is simply a covenant-making ceremony, where animals are slaughtered and the vassal of the covenant walks between the pieces, right? Wrong. The vassal in that covenant didn't walk between the pieces. The suzerain, the sovereign, walked between the pieces. And therefore, he was saying to Abram, "Abram, if I do not give you the land, be it done to me as we have done to these animals." Now anybody in the Near Eastern world, who picked that up and was familiar with how covenants ought to be made, would be on the floor having read that passage, because there is no example in any other world religion of either, (a) a God who enters into covenant with His people, or, (b) a God who takes upon Himself the self-malediction for the fulfillment of the promises of the covenant.

Now we will speak more of that when we get to Genesis 15. But you see here this relationship is a life-and-death relationship. It is of the utmost seriousness. When God calls down curses upon Himself, it is serious. This

is not the only place, by the way, where this occurs. If you would turn to Jeremiah 34, and the interesting thing about this is that this event with Abram is occurring circa 2000 BC, and Jeremiah 34 is going to be occurring about 600 B.C. And at the beginning of the end of the history of the Abrahamic line as a nation, we have proof that the children of Israel still understood the significance of that covenant-making ceremony. Here in Genesis 15 there is the covenant-making ceremony (2000 BC), and now we have the same ceremony in Jeremiah 34. Do you remember what happens? Do you remember what was going on? Jeremiah had told the people, "Look, you are breaking God's law, you are taking Hebrews as slaves. You are not following the laws of Leviticus. God is going to curse you. He is going to send you into exile. He is going to capture you. He is going to destroy you. He is going to bring in the Babylonians. They are going to pillage and plunder you." And suddenly, everybody got religion. And they suddenly say, "Oh we'll do everything that the Lord has said." And they freed their slaves and they started walking right. They sort of turned over a new leaf, had a sawdust trail conversion, and they actually walked between pieces. We are told here in Jeremiah 34 that the leaders of Israel walked between the pieces. Look at the passage there. "The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, after King Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people who were in Jerusalem to proclaim release to them." And then you see Jeremiah's condemnation of the fact that the children of Israel had made this covenant and then backed off on it.

Now look at what he says in verse 18: "And I will give the men who have transgressed My covenant, who have not fulfilled the words of the covenant which they made before Me, when they cut the calf in two and passed between its parts, the officials of Judah, and the officials of Jerusalem, the court officers, and the priests, and all the people of the land, who passed between the parts of the calf, and I will give them into the hand of their enemies and into the hand of those who seek their life. And their dead bodies shall be food for the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth. And Zedekiah king of Judah and his officials I will give into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of those who seek their life, and into the hand of the army of the king of Babylon which has gone away from you. 'Behold, I am going to command,' declares the LORD, 'and I will bring them back to this city; and they shall fight against it and take it

and burn it with fire; and I will make the cities of Judah a desolation without inhabitant."

Now you know what had happened. They tried their reform for a while, they didn't like it, they decided to break God's law again, and to take back their slaves. And the Lord said, "You can't do that to Me. You renewed the covenant, you parted the calf. You walked between the pieces. You recommitted yourself to being faithful to the vows that you took all the way back at Sinai so long ago and then you reneged on it and therefore, I am going to bring judgment against you."

It is very, very graphic, isn't it, what He says there in verses 18, 19, 20. Understand the picture that is being given there, when he talks about their bodies being food for the birds of the skies. He is saying, "I am so going to cut you off. There is not going to be anyone left to bury you." The ultimate curse of the covenant is to be cut off from your people. There isn't going to be anyone left to bury you. The birds of the sky are going to pick at you like carrion in the road. That is the kind of curse I am going to bring against you. Why? Because you walked between the pieces and you didn't fulfill your vow. So a covenant is not just a bond. It is a bond in blood.

A covenant is sovereignly administered.

And finally, it is sovereignly administered. A covenant is a bond in blood and it is sovereignly administered. In the biblical covenants, God does not bargain with us. He doesn't say, "Well if you will think about doing this and get back with Me tomorrow, I'll think about doing that." In Genesis 2, when He lays down the ordinances for Adam in the Garden, Adam does not have input into whether he will keep those ordinances or not. In Exodus 20, when Moses comes down from Sinai with the Ten Commandments, there is no Israeli mediation team to discuss which of the Ten Commandments are going to be kept and which are going to be bargained away. They are sovereignly administered by the suzerain, the Lord. The Overlord comes in and declares what the nature of the relationship will be. So the relationship is unequal at some levels in the sense that it is the sovereign who determines the nature of the relationship. But in our case, that relationship is established on a gracious basis.

God's covenant has conditions

Now that in and of itself raises the issue of whether a covenant is unilateral or bilateral. Now this is going to be hard, so hang with me here for a second. This is a big discussion. Is a covenant unilateral or bilateral? That is, is it one-sided or is it two-sided? Is a covenant wholly promissory or is there mutuality? Are there mutual responsibilities and obligations and requirements in the covenant? That is a big debate. The Barthians, in particular, have attempted to argue strenuously that the covenant is wholly one-sided. It is not a mutual compact. They hate the word contract and they will attempt to argue, "No, the Old Testament word, berith, does not mean contract. It means a one-sided promissory testament of God with His people."

But is that the case? Is a covenant one sided or two sided? I remember that question being asked of Palmer Robertson in our Biblical Theology class. A student said, "Dr. Robertson, is a covenant unilateral or bilateral?" And Dr. Robertson responded, "Yes." And, that is the right answer. But you have got to say more, if that is your answer. So here is a beginning of an answer to that question. The covenant is both unilateral and bilateral. It is both sovereign and mutual. It is both conditional and unconditional. Or to use another word, and you will see this word show up when you read Heppel, and I would encourage all of you, even if you don't have to read Heppel, to read Heppel because it is relatively brief and you will have a mound of historical terms at your fingertips after you have read Heppel. But you will see the terms, monopluron and dipluron used over and over in Heppel. Those words are basically words speaking of the covenant being monergistic or synergistic. Do we cooperate in the covenant (synergistic) or is it one sided: only the power of God is involved (monergistic)? Well, you will see these terms in Heppel. Let's give an answer.

A covenant by definition has conditions. There is no such thing as a wholly unconditional covenant. Don't ever let anybody sell you a bill of goods that there is such a thing as an unconditional covenant. Why? Because you have to have two sides before you have a covenant. And if you have two sides, then you've got requirements. So a covenant by definition has conditions. And so the covenant of grace is both unilateral

and bilateral. It is conditional and unconditional. It is monergistic and synergistic. You can pile up all those words that we are paralleling and stick them in there. There are aspects in the covenant of grace connected with both those elements. Let's talk about them.

First, God's covenant of grace is sovereignly established. God is not obligated to come into covenant with us. He does not have to. He chooses to because of His love. He chooses to enter into a relationship with us because of His own determinate counsel. And He enters into this relationship by a sheer act of grace. He chooses man, and not man Him. In that sense, the covenant is unilateral. It is initiated by God. But even in that sense, it is bilateral, because it is a relationship and there is no such thing as a relationship that is not mutual. The minute you say the word relationship, you have just said the word bilateral, because there are two sides to it. It goes both ways. The minute you say the word relationship, there can be no covenant in solitude. And that is why there is no such thing as a unilateral covenant, a wholly unequivocally unilateral covenant. There can't be a covenant in solitude. You have to have two to have a covenant. The minute you say relationship, you are saying mutual.

Secondly, God sovereignly administers the covenant. Man does not bargain with God. He does not choose his own terms. God is, as it were, the sovereign, the overlord, and man is the vassal. God declares the nature of the relationship, He declares its obligations, and in that sense the covenant is unilateral. It is divinely initiated in its administration. But it is still bilateral because there are two parties to the covenant. And it is conditional, in that sense, because there are specified conditions to be filled by the parties. And that is just as true as the covenant of Abraham as it is in the covenant of Moses. We will see that in detail.

We can also say, thirdly, that God sovereignly fulfills the conditions of the covenant. Man, because of his sinfulness, cannot fulfill the conditions of the covenant relationship, and so God, in His grace, sovereignly elects to fulfill not only His own conditions, but also His people's conditions. So you see that is the grace part of the covenant of grace. And so in the covenant of grace, God allows the curse of the covenant to fall upon His own Son. The condition is fulfilled, though it is not fulfilled against us, but for us, on our behalf by the Lord in our place. So in the covenant of

grace, we see God acting unilaterally. He freely chooses, neither under compulsion or obligation to save us. It is bilateral in the sense that there is a mutual relationship there. It is conditional in the sense that God does not forgive us without justice being done.

This is what gets Paul excited in Romans 1 and 2. Don't misunderstand Paul. Paul is not excited that God is merciful. Paul knows his God is merciful. That doesn't surprise Paul. What blows Paul away? In Romans 1 and 2, He has shown us His mercy in a way that does not sacrifice His justice. That is what he is talking about in Romans 1 and 2, when he says that "He showed Himself to be just and the justifier" in the propitiation of Jesus Christ. At the cross, we see both God's justice and His mercy at work, because the cross is simultaneously the vehicle of His justice, or the expression of His justice and the vehicle of His mercy. And of course, that covenant of grace is unconditional in the sense that God chooses to fulfill our conditions on our behalf.

Covenants are conditional.

Now, I could go on, but all I want to stress to you is that you cannot simply talk about covenants as conditional or unconditional. It is not that simple, theologically. There is no such thing as a completely unconditional covenant. Covenants by definition are contracts. But the beauty of the covenant of grace is that God comes in and He Himself provides the basis of our part of the relationship. Propitiation in Christ and then by His grace, He enables us to believe and appropriate the benefits of the covenant.

Now, when you start to get to that point, you are beginning to see why Covenant Theology is so close to the heart of the Gospel. Because the Gospel is about how God provides for salvation, in spite of ourselves and draws us back into saving relationship with Him.

What therefore is Covenant Theology?

Covenant Theology is a blend of biblical and systematic theology. Let me go back again. We discussed biblical theology before. If Biblical Theology is the study of Scripture from the perspective of redemptive history, then we could call Covenant Theology Biblical Theology. What do I mean by

that? I mean that the Bible structures itself covenantally. When Paul wants to structure creation and redemption, he parallels Adam as covenant head with Christ as covenantal head. And he speaks of Adam's responsibility and failure in the world of the fall comparing that with Christ and so he gives us a two-point outline of redemptive history. Creation, separation by fall, and redemption. When the author of Hebrews wants to talk about the progress of God in redemptive history, what does he do? He compares the Old Covenant and New Covenant. Primarily, he has in focus, the contrast of the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant established in Christ. But what is the tool he uses when he wants to give a panoramic overview of Old Testament and New Testament relations? The covenant. When the author of Psalm 89 wants to recount the history of God's dealings with Israel, what does he use to structure his story? The covenants.

So Covenant Theology is not merely an inspired inference from the weight of Scripture. It is explicitly the way the Bible structures redemptive history. Now that does not mean that it is illegitimate to say I am going to do a biblical theological study of the holiness of God in history and I am going to show the difference between Old Covenant and New Covenant as to what we find about what God reveals about His holiness in the Mosaic period, the Davidic period, the Prophetic period, and then in the New Covenant under Christ and the Apostles. There is nothing illegitimate about that. But that is not how God in the Scriptures structures redemptive history, He uses covenants to do that. And so there is a sense in which Covenant Theology is Biblical Theology.

Covenant Theology needs to be Systematic

But Covenant Theology is more than Biblical Theology. The one great shortcoming of Biblical Theology is that it can only be thematic, it cannot be ultimately systematic. You have to have Systematic Theology. Now I am not just saying that because I am a systematic theologian, although it helps. Systematic Theology does not simply look at exegesis, which draws out of the text what the text is teaching. Systematic Theology just does not simply look at the history of redemption and themes in the history of redemption. Systematic Theology integrates everything we know from the history of redemption, from the study of Biblical Theology, from the

study of exegetical theology, from the study of Historical Theology and Pastoral Theology and everything. And it brings it all to bear and gives a well-rounded, biblical, synthesized presentation of truth.

So Covenant Theology is not only Biblical Theology, it is Systematic Theology, too. Because Covenant Theology shows us how to relate the truth about Adam and Christ, and parallels the federal headships of Adam and Christ. It shows us how to relate that to the doctrine of the person and work of Christ. And it shows us how to relate that to the doctrine of the church, it shows us how that relates to the doctrine of the sacraments, and it shows us how that relates to the doctrine of salvation. It connects a whole host of biblical truths and synthesizes it in a digestible form and even more importantly than that, it gives it a shape in which it can be presented for the sake of expressing the Gospel. If you learn Covenant Theology, you will learn more deeply what the atonement was and did, and how it ought to be proclaimed for the sake of building up Christians and drawing unbelievers to Christ. So Covenant Theology is both Biblical and Systematic Theology. We might call it biblical Biblical Theology, but it is also a form a Systematic Theology because it integrates a whole set of other themes which are related to the idea of covenant, in both Old Testament and New Testament.

And what we are going to be doing in this study is attempting to unpack what the Scriptures say about the covenant. We will do it progressively and chronologically and we will try and integrate that with what we know about the doctrines of the covenants in history and we will try and synthesize that in the work of Systematic Theology. And we will try and do it in such a form that it will be digestible enough that you can then articulate it yourself, whether you are teaching third grade Sunday School or whether you are teaching grad students at Vanderbilt, or whether you are teaching farmers from Morton, so that you can proclaim the Gospel with covenantal eyes. Because that is the framework by which our Lord Jesus on the last night of His public ministry before the crucifixion, that is the framework by which He determined to explain the meaning of His life and death to His closest disciples. Let's look to the Lord in prayer.

History and Overview of Covenants

If you have your Bibles, please open to Genesis 1:24 as we read God's word.

Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth after their kind"; and it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth after their kind, and the cattle after their kind, and everything that creeps on the ground after its kind; and God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." Then God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you; and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life, *I have given* every green plant for food"; and it was so. And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Thus ends this reading of God's Holy Word. May He add His blessing to it. Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for bringing us back together again to study your Word. We thank You for faithful men in the past who have taught us about the truth of Scripture. We pray that as we learn from them and that as we learn from your Word, our spiritual lives would be shaped and molded by the truth, that our ability to minister to the people that You have called us to serve would be enhanced by our knowledge of the truth and that we would have an experiential grasp of this truth. That we would not only be amazed by it intellectually, but we would be

transformed by it personally. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Historical Overview

What I want to begin with today is to give you a little bit of a historical overview of Covenant Theology. And it may be helpful for you as we do this, to pull out the Macleod article that you read. And I am sure that you poured over it in great detail, but you might want to pull it out anyway and put it next to your sheet as we go through, it will help you perhaps with some of the names and some of the concepts. I want to give you a little historical background on Covenant Theology before we get going, so that we're confident about development, and so that we are confident about certain terms and aspects of Covenant Theology as we study this straight out of the Scriptures. Maybe we will even get to some of the original covenant material from the Scripture in the second half of class today.

As we said last time, Covenant Theology is a blending of both Biblical and Systematic Theology. If I could grossly oversimplify and give very short definitions, again, Biblical Theology is the study of the Bible from the perspective of redemptive history. It is looking at the Scriptures in terms of the eras in which God unfolded His plan of redemption and it is asking perhaps about specific themes. What do we learn about this particular theme in this particular era of redemptive history? And then, what do we learn about it in the next era of redemptive history and how does God unfold that particular theme as revelation progresses?

A classic example, by the way, of that type of study of Biblical Theology would be a study of the doctrine of sin from a historical perspective. We have no listing of the Law of God prior to Exodus 20. And because John has told us that sin is lawlessness, and Paul has told us in Romans 2 that where there is no law, there is no sin, we know that you have to have law to have sin. And as we know from the Apostle Paul's comments in Romans 2, there was sin prior to the giving of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20.

So the way God unfolds and tells you about the doctrine of sin prior to Exodus 20 is different than the way that you learn about it after Exodus

20 and all the ceremonial law and all the judicial law and all the moral law in its various ordinances and statutes.

Now, to be sure, the book of Genesis has a very clear doctrine of sin. You may remember the liberals tell us that there are multiple authors of the Pentateuch, and in particular, there are multiple authors of the book of Genesis. There was one who was in the tradition that used the term Yahweh to describe God, and one was in a tradition who used *Elohim* to describe God, and one was in the deuteronomic tradition, and one was in the priestly tradition and there are all sorts of variations of that particular JEDP scheme. But even the liberals admit that the aim of the author/authors in the first eleven chapters of Scripture is to give you a very clear concept of the doctrine of sin. I mean you can't get out of Genesis 3 without noticing that something is awry. And you can't get out of Genesis 4 without noticing that something is awry. And then Genesis 5 and 6, and 10 especially, there is a tremendous emphasis on sin even though there is no first command, second command, third command, fourth command given to you in those chapters.

You know in Genesis 4, that when Cain murders Abel, that he should not have done that. You don't need Exodus 20 written prior to that time to know that. But let me tell you what, no matter how strong a doctrine of sin you have, coming out of that patriarchal era, when you get to the book of Leviticus, believe me, your doctrine of sin, your understanding of sin is enhanced, because in the unfolding of God's revelation He teaches you things about sin that you would have never dreamt about, no matter how well you had taken in those truths earlier recorded from an earlier time in His plan of redemption in the book of Genesis. He teaches you things that you would have never dreamt about by the time you get to Moses' exposition of the law. So when you read Leviticus, and when you read Deuteronomy, and you reflect upon that commands that have been given in the Book of the Covenant, you are overwhelmed by how pervasive sin is in your experience and in the experience of the community. And so by watching progressively, God unfolds this theme. You learn something about that doctrine itself. *That is Biblical Theology.*

Covenant Theology is Biblical Theology

Now Covenant Theology is Biblical Theology. But it is *biblical* Biblical Theology. You remember we said that it is looking at God's unfolding of His plan of redemption historically from a covenant perspective, because that is the way the Scriptures themselves look at that unfolding. When the Scriptures give us a structure, whereby to understand how God's plan is unfolding, that structure is covenant. That is the case in the Old Testament. Think of Exodus 2, when the cries of the children of Israel in Egypt go up, and God responds to those cries. Do you remember God's response? Moses tells you that when the cries of the children of Israel went up, God did what? He remembered the covenant He had made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So even the structuring of the peoples' minds at that point in redemptive history was being impacted by the covenant and they saw the eras of their history marked out in terms of the covenants that God made. They could remember back through the oral history passed down to the time of the covenant made with Noah. And they could remember back to the covenant that God made with Abraham and then they are being told in Exodus 2 that God's actions on their behalf in the Exodus, in bringing them out of Egypt and bringing them into the Promised Land, are directly related to that covenant relationship that God had established with Abraham and therefore, that covenant relationship is used to characterize a whole era. That is the era in which God inaugurated His covenant relationship with Abraham and then thinking back before that, that is the era in which God inaugurated His covenant relationship with Noah. So already by the time you get to the Exodus, the people of God are beginning to have a memory that is structured by the events of the covenant.

Now every people has markers in its histories like that by which it remembers certain great things. In the South, we sort of mark everything by something known as The War. We are not talking about the First World War or the Second World War. We are talking about *The War*, that is, The War Between The States. And so we even talk about Antebellum, and Postbellum. It is a huge marker in our history. It doesn't matter what side you are on or anything else. You know that is a marker in the corporate minds of the people. Every people has events like that, that mark out their corporate mind in the way they view their past and the way they chop it up and explain it and express it.

The people of God, already by the time of Exodus, are thinking in terms of these covenant relationships as epic marking events. This is an incredible event, when God comes and enters into relationship with Abraham, because at that time, Abraham was a what? A pagan, living in Ur of the Chaldees. The father of Israel. He is the first Hebrew. What a tremendous marker in the history of Israel and so it marks off events.

So Covenant Theology is Biblical Theology, but it is also Systematic Theology we said. That is, Systematic Theology takes the fruits that Exegetical Theology attempts to draw out of the text the intent of the divine and human authors in combination. It attempts to draw out of the text the emphasis and the teaching which they are attempting to convey in that text, so it takes the fruits of Exegetical Theology, it takes the fruits of Biblical Theology.

Biblical Theology can't stand on its own. If you only have Biblical Theology and you don't have Systematic Theology, you will end up with a Thematic Theology which will be kind of like holding a bunch of wet spaghetti noodles in your hand. There will be all these nice themes that will be really fun to learn about, but there is no way that you can figure out how to interrelate them. You have to have Systematic Theology before you can interrelate all those themes.

Most modern theologians, even the ones who call themselves Systematic Theologians, are not Systematic Theologians. They are Thematic Theologians. They get all fired up about one or two themes and they want to run with the implications of that particular theme, but they do not integrate it with the rest of biblical truth, and what happens? They become heretics. Because imbalanced truth becomes untruth because it refuses to pay attention to the balance of truth that God has given in His Word.

So Systematic Theology takes the fruits of Exegetical Theology, it takes the fruits of Biblical Theology and those wonderful themes that are developed in the history of redemption. It takes the fruits of Historical Theology because we cannot ignore the understanding of Scripture which has been gradually accrued in the history of 2000 years of the church. Protestants don't have a problem with tradition, we have a problem with

tradition which presumes to be on the same par with the sole authority of faith which is Scripture. We don't have a problem with tradition, we just have a problem with tradition which refuses to be tested according to the standard of Scripture. So there is much which we glean from the past. In fact, we can have no appreciation for the depth of Scripture if we skip over the teaching that has been learned by the church over the last two millennium in the East and West, beyond the western culture and to the various cultures of the world, etc. The wonderful thing about the deposit of Christian truth that we have learned over that time is that it is not fixed within one cultural framework.

A lot of times modern, specifically evangelical and Reformed Theology, is accused by people of being peculiarly Western and even specifically American as opposed to being a world theology. There is legitimacy to that critique. But, a theology that is well-grounded in historical theology has its roots in a past which predates the Western and American and European rise and gives a balance and an understanding, an appreciation for that truth which we wouldn't have otherwise. So the attitude which says, "It is just me and my Bible and don't confuse me with all that history and all that other stuff," is sure to lead you into problems, because you are cutting yourself off from the communion of saints.

Now see, you cannot be an orthodox Christian and say, for instance, "Well, I am going to have to sit down and rethink this doctrine of the Trinity thing." I am sorry. That is not up for grabs. You can't sit down and be an orthodox Christian and say, "You know, I am going to really rethink this whole virgin birth thing." No. The Church has already decided its position on that and it is not up for you or for me to determine or to rethink that. If you rethink it and decide that it is wrong, that is fine. You are just not a Christian. And if you rethink it and find out that it is right, well, you have just reinvented the wheel. We already had it; we didn't need your help. I am not being facetious. I am showing how a lot of people will come along and think of themselves much more highly of themselves than they ought to. And they will do it in the name, well, I am being scriptural and I'm really going to think this thing from the ground floor up. There is a reason why Jesus said to the apostles that they were going to be the foundation, the bedrock of the Church which He built.

And you don't lay the foundation again, folks. You lay foundation once. You get it right the first time and you don't lay it when you are already nineteen floors up.

Our job as Christians in the almost twenty-first century is not to lay the foundation again. Our job is to continue building on the foundation that has already been laid upon the apostles and the prophets. And that does not mean reinventing the wheel at every point. Does that mean that there is no development in Christian Theology? No. Of course there is development in Christian Theology. There are many areas where we still need to work things out. We have been going through an era in the West in particular where the doctrine of the Holy Spirit has been worked on intensively for the last fifty years. You may expect it to be worked on for the next hundred. We have gotten a lot more questions in the last fifty years than we have settled with regard to answers.

You may be sure that the doctrine of creation is something that is going to be worked on for another good hundred years. We have got more questions right now than we have answers on that particular issue. So every era has its own distinctive contribution to the building of the deposit and understanding of Theology. But we don't rethink the Trinity; we don't rethink the virgin birth. That is complete. For the church has already said, "You don't believe that Christ is an incarnate person, divine and human nature in one person, that is fine. You are not a Christian." That is not up for rethinking. "You don't believe in the Trinity, that is fine. You are not a Christian." That is Christian doctrine. So we have some set points that we learn from Historical Theology that keep us from going awry even in our work with Scripture.

So Systematic Theology takes the fruits of Biblical Theology, Exegetical Theology, Historical Theology and it integrates them and it attempts to make as definitive a statement as can be made about a particular topic, pulling together all that is said about that topic from the whole of Scripture.

Covenant Theology is both Biblical and Systematic Theology.

That is, it gives us an organizing principle for our Biblical Theology. But it also provides us a very important category or what the older

theologians would have called a *locus*, literally, a *place*. It gives us a very important category or place in our Systematic Theology. It is the organizing principle of Biblical Theology in the sense that anyone who is going to do justice to God's unfolding plan of redemption has to talk in terms of covenants. It is the dominant theme featured in the whole issue of God's unfolding plan of redemption in history. So you have to talk in terms of the covenants, if you are going to be scriptural when you are talking about **Biblical Theology**.

But if you are going to do **Systematic Theology**, you are going to also have a section in your Systematic Theology where you talk about the covenant of works **and** the covenant of grace **and** the covenant of redemption **and** their relationship to doctrines like the imputation of Adam's sin.

If you are sitting down to write your Systematic Theology, and it is going to be a bestseller right up there with Berkhof and Reymond and the rest of them, you are not going to leave out the doctrine of imputation of Adam's sin, I mean that is an important doctrine. It has been discussed and argued about since the fifth century, so you are not going to leave that one out.

But in order to talk about the imputation of Adam's sin, you have to talk about Covenant Theology, because Covenant Theology tells us about the federal headship of Adam and Christ. And you are not going to get very far in your understanding of the imputation of Adam's sin if you don't talk in covenant terms.

That is why Augustine, with as good as an answer as he gave to Pelagius, didn't quite solve all the issues related to original sin because Augustine did not have a fully worked out Covenant Theology. Augustine was a realist in his view instead of a federalist in his view of the imputation of Adam's sin, and so Augustine got up to a certain point and he was stymied. Some of the errors in his theology are related to that distinction with regard to the imputation of Adam's sin. So Covenant Theology is both Biblical Theology and both Systematic Theology, and in Systematic Theology it has a locus or a place or a heading in which it has to be discussed.

And you remember we said last time when we were together, that it is the bridge between Anthropology (the doctrine of man, and especially the doctrine of fallen man, the doctrine of man in sin, that locus and that heading, in Systematic Theology) and the doctrine of salvation or Soteriology. It is the linking point that gets you from the doctrine of man in sin and deserving of judgment to the doctrine of man in the state of grace. The covenant is the vehicle by which God extracts man from that situation of sin and gets him into a state of grace.

Covenant Theology in the History of the Church

Covenant Theology uses the covenant concept as an organizing principle for theology in both the sphere of Biblical and Systematic Theology. By the way, that doesn't mean that you have to write a Systematic Theology text where all the chapter headings are labeled, "Covenant this" or "Covenant that," or "Covenant the other." You don't have to have labeling to have Covenant Theology. You can go back and you can read Covenant theologians who didn't organize their information, for instance, Berkhof. You can pick up a copy of Berkhof and you will note that "Covenant" is not in the heading of every section of his Systematic Theology. There is a distinct section on the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace and discussion of the Covenant of Redemption. That doesn't mean that Berkhof was not a Covenant Theologian. Just because you don't use it as the organizing principle for everything in Systematic Theology doesn't mean that you're a Covenant Theologian or not a Covenant Theologian.

But, *the covenant* is going to play a very significant role in organizing even your Systematic Theology. This is not a new thing. From the very earliest Christian theologians, the covenant concept was very significant in their theology. For instance, in the second century, among the anti-Gnostic fathers—that is, the orthodox Christian theologians who were responding to the Gnostic heretics, who were denying a number of biblical teaching. For example, you remember the Gnostics had a tendency to deny the fleshly humanity of Christ. They argued that Jesus only appeared to be human, and that He really didn't die on the cross as a man. It only appeared as if He has died on the cross as a man. The Gnostics taught that the God of the Old Testament was not the same God as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And I am not going to go

through a whole listing of Gnostic teachings, but I want you to understand the Gnostic threat was very pervasive in early Christianity. The Gnostic teaching was the greatest threat to the existence of Christianity since the apostle Paul was still Saul.

And over against the Gnostics, theologians like Melito of Sardis, Irenaeus of Leon, Tertullian, and others mounted a massive theological offensive. And what instrument did they use against the Gnostics and also against those Jews who were still very prominent in the Mediterranean world at that time and who denied that the Christians were legitimately interpreting and claiming the Old Testament Scriptures? What instrument, what vehicle did they use? They used the covenant. They used it in three areas.

First of all, against the Gnostics who denied that the God of the Old Testament was the same as the God of our Lord Jesus Christ in the New Testament, they used the covenant to show the continuity of the Old Testament and the New Testament. Irenaeus, if you wanted to pronounce it strictly in Latin, it would be something like 'Urenaeus.' But Irenaeus is what you will hear most frequently. Irenaeus, the great second century father from Gall (modern day south of France), wrote a book called *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, in which he showed that God's redemptive plan had been unfolded in covenants with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, the New Covenant, and Christ. He was Palmer Robertson, 1800 years ahead of his time.

One of the ways which he showed the covenant continuity of the Old Testament and the New Testament Scriptures was in this brilliant way. For a number of years, in fact from the time that the Gospels were written, what was the favorite tool of Christians in showing to Jewish believers or Jewish followers, Jewish people of the Jewish religion, what was the favorite way for Christians to show them that Jesus was the Messiah, promised of old? To go to Old Testament passages and show the prophecies about the Messiah and then to bring them over into the events of the life of Christ and the work of the Apostles and show how they were fulfilled. And you get a lot of this in the New Testament. It is in the Gospel of Matthew, it is in the Gospel of Mark, it is in the Gospel of Luke, it is in John and it is in Paul. There are very few books in the New

Testament which do not use that technique and it makes perfect sense, doesn't it? You are writing to an initially Jewish audience. You are trying to convince them that this is not a rejection of the traditions of old. It is the fulfillment of the traditions of old, and that Jesus Christ is in fact fulfilling the prophecies made about Him by the Old Testament prophets and therefore He ought to be believed in as the Messiah.

Well, Irenaeus and before him, Justin Martyr, had taken that argument and turned it against the Gnostics and here is how they did it. They said, "We Christians all know that Christ as Messiah fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament prophets. Now by what God did those Old Testament prophecy?" You see, what they are leading? They are saying, "If Jesus fulfilled the Scriptures of the Old Testament, then the God of the Old Testament who revealed those prophecies to the those Old Testament prophets must be the same God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." They showed, by a reversing of the argument, that if Jesus fulfilled those prophecies then the Old Testament itself must be in unity and continuity with the New Testament. Because if the God of the Old Testament and the God of the Old Testament prophets was utterly unrelated to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, why would Jesus be fulfilling those prophecies? So they turned the argument, which had originally been aimed toward the Jews and they covenantally angled it at the Gnostics. And they said this shows that the Old and the New Testament are in continuity not in opposition. So they used covenant arguments.

They also used the covenant concept to argue against the Jews who denied that Christians were the legitimate heirs of the Abrahamic promises. They used the covenant concept, and of course, they picked up on a theme which Paul expounds in I Corinthians 10, the disobedience of Israel to the covenant promises. Remember Paul in I Corinthians 10 warns Christians not to do the same thing that the disobedient, unbelieving children of Israel did in the wilderness. They doubted God. They tempted Him. They refused to have faith and trust in His promises that He would bring them through and provide for them while they were in the wilderness. And the Apostle Paul in I Corinthians 10 basically says to Christians, don't you do that.

Well, using the covenants, these first and second and third century theologians mounted that same argument against the children of Israel, accept they applied it to the time of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now again this was not original to them. Peter has done this in the Book of Acts. You remember Peter's first sermon in the Book of Acts, I mean, it was a scorcher. Basically, the thrust of the concluding point is, "Men of Israel, this man who has been attested to you to be the Messiah, the Son of the living God, you have put to death by the hands of sinful men." And so after, Peter has amassed Scripture passage after Scripture passage, confirming that Jesus was Messiah and confirming that the events of Pentecost were the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies especially given by Joel, then he says, "And gentlemen, you killed Him, your own Messiah. You killed Him." That argument is reduplicated and you pick up, you cannot miss this when you pick up Melito of Sardis, and read his *Peri Pascha*, his homily on the Passover. Here you see him using that same argumentation, that covenantally yes, Christians are simply Jews and Gentiles who have been embraced by the Abrahamic promises according to the promises of God of old Abraham to bless him and to be a blessing to the nations and to bring the Gentiles, and they can go to Amos and Jeremiah and all sorts of other places to prove that. So they use the covenant concept in both their arguments against the Gnostics and against the Jews, and, as I mentioned before with Irenaeus, they use it to structure their redemptive history. You can find this in Irenaeus, you can find this before Irenaeus, in Justin Martyr, you can find this in Tertullian, you can find this in Lactantius, you can find it in Clement of Alexandria, you can eventually find it in Augustine, who learned his theology of the covenants primarily from Irenaeus and his contemporaries.

So the idea of the covenant concept being a structuring principle for Christian theology is not a sixteenth century phenomenon. Rather, it is a patristic phenomenon, occurring as early as the first century of the Christian church. If you look at the apostolic fathers, that collection of writings that contains writings by Ignatius of Antioch— it contains writings by Polycarp, it contains a little book called the *Epistle to the Corinthians*, it contains a book called the *Shepherd of Hermas*—that collection of writings which was probably completed by 115. In that collection of books already, in, say the book of *Corinthians*, in that *Epistle*

to the Corinthians, already by that time, A.D. 115, you can see the covenant concept being used just like it was used in the Old Testament, that is for moral exhortation to believers. Okay. So, the covenant concept was of long standing in the Christian tradition as an organizing principle and a significant theological locus.

Now not surprisingly, as the knowledge of Hebrew fades and as Latin becomes the *lingua franca* of the Christian church, especially of the western Christian church, the covenant concept fades into the background theologically. Now, there is no expert in the covenant concept in the medieval, but we need one. But we do know that prior to the Reformation, even in the time of late medieval nominalism, (from which Luther came, the tradition that began to dabble a little bit and rearticulate the Catholic church doctrine of justification, and Luther eventually came out with a full-blown reworking of the Catholic doctrine of justification according to the Apostle Paul), well, in the nominalist tradition the covenant idea was again prominent. So we know that over long periods of the church's history, the covenant idea occupied a very significant place in the church's theologizing.

Now, generally we think of Covenant Theology as a subset of Calvinism. We see it as something that is a peculiar mark of the Reformed Branch of the Reformation. That is true and not true. I mean, obviously, all Orthodox Christianity of any form believes in both unity and continuity from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant, from Old Testament to New Testament. It believes that, though we have two testaments, we have one Bible and it has a unified message and is integrated, and that the New Testament gives us both an interpretation of the Old Testament, it gives us both a hermeneutical map to the Old Testament and gives us also a fulfillment of the Old Testament. All Orthodox Christian Theology accepts that, and to that extent it is Covenant Theology.

But Covenant Theology in a stricter sense of the term is indeed something that has been uniquely related to the Reformed tradition. Because it was during the Renaissance and Reformation and especially the rediscovery and the reapplication of the church's teachers to the original languages of Scripture that the covenant concept again became

important, even dominant, in Christian theological thinking and writing. You remember we said last time that the Latin term *testamentum* is what we get our modern terms Old Testament and New Testament, and it's is very easy if you're operating out of a Latin framework to see how you can miss all that rich Hebrew and Near Eastern background information that helps you understand what a covenant is in the first place. And it is easy to see how you can miss the clear hints that were there in the Greek New Testament, unless you understand that the basic vocabulary of New Testament Greek is not determined by classical Greek, but is determined by Hebrew.

In other words, for building your theological vocabulary of New Testament Greek, it is more important that you pay attention to Hebrew terms and concepts than it is for you to pay attention to classical Greek terms and contexts. That is why Hebrew is so important, because behind those Greek concepts are most often very directly and genetically Hebrew concepts, and not just Septuagint concepts that come from the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament.

Now, as the Reformers went back to the original sources, you remember one of the mottos of the humanist Reform that began in the 1500's, maybe a little before that and lead to the Renaissance and Reformation was *ad fontes*, or back to the fountain, back to the source. The idea was go back and read the Greek directly. Don't read a Latin translation of Homer; go back and read the Greek. Don't read a Latin translation of Ecclesiastes; go back and read the Hebrew. Go back to the original sources. So there was a tremendous amount of work done in recovering old documents and such.

And out of that it is not surprising that a renewed interest in the covenant developed. And it developed in a number of places in the Reformed tradition in the 1500's. Perhaps you have heard that Ulrich Zwingli, 1484-1531, the Reformer in Zurich, made much of the covenant concept in his writing. He used the idea of the covenant to refute the Anabaptists on the issue of infant baptism. Zwingli taught that God had made a covenant with Adam, though he doesn't specify whether that is a prefall or a postfall covenant, but Zwingli was significant in the development of the use of the covenant concept.

Again, Heinrich Bullinger, who succeeded him, 1504–1575, wrote a very important book called *Of the One and Eternal Testament or Covenant of God*. He argued that the various covenants of Scripture are organically related, and that the New Covenant was a fulfillment of all the previous covenants. Bullinger is more explicit in his use of the covenant in the structuring of his total theology than either Zwingli or Calvin. Calvin, of course, has those very important sections in the Institutes on the covenant, especially as it relates to the Scripture interpretation. But he doesn't use it as the organizing principle of his book as did Bullinger.

John Calvin, 1509–1564, taught the unity of the covenants. Calvin very highly developed his doctrine of the sacraments in light of the covenant. This was especially crucial in illustrating the Reformed view of the Lord's Supper. If you don't have an adequate understanding of Covenant Theology you are weaponless against a Roman Catholic exposition of Old Testament and New Testament language about the sacraments. If you do not have an adequate covenantal framework for your doctrine of the sacraments, you have no chance against a Roman Catholic who sits down with you and says, "Well, what does Peter mean when he says, 'Consequently baptism now saves you.'"? See, if you do not have a covenant understanding of that realistic language, you are duck soup.

And Calvin gives a covenant framework of how we understand the sacraments. He goes back, for instance, and he says, "What is the tree of life and what is the Garden?" And his answer is, "Well it is a sacrament." Calvin's argument is that where there is a sacrament, there must be a covenant. Why? Because a sacrament is a covenant sign. So did the tree of life, mystically, magically convey eternal life? Calvin says, "No, it was a sign and a seal of a covenant promise." And by the way, Calvin is telling you through the back door, isn't he, that he believes that there exists a covenant prior to the fall of God and Adam, because if there is a sign of a covenant prior to the fall, then there must be a covenant prior to the fall. So he expounds the covenant signs of Noah and of Abraham and of the time of Moses.

Caspar Olevianus is another sixteenth century Reformer who

contributed substantively to our understanding of the covenant. He, a little bit younger than these other guys, lived from 1536 - 1587. He was a theologian in Heidelberg and he and Ursinus wrote the *Heidelberg Catechism* that begins with that gorgeous question, “What is your only hope in life and in death?” Caspar Olevianus and Ursinus are the authors of that *Heidelberg Catechism*. And they worked out the doctrine of the covenant of grace.

One of the things that we are going to see especially in our study of Covenant Theology is that determining who the parties of the covenant of grace are can be a little bit tricky. Is the Covenant of Grace made between God and the elect or is it made between God and Christ? And then we are the beneficiaries of the covenant of grace made between God and Christ. Reformed Theologians worked around that in different way for a long time before they came up with what they were satisfied was a satisfactory answer. And Olevianus argued that the covenant of grace was made between God and Christ, and that for the elect, Christ is their representative. Olevianus also explicitly wrote about the eternal intertrinitarian Covenant of Redemption and the prefall covenant of works. And those three covenants, the covenant of redemption in eternity past, the prefall Covenant of Works, and the covenant of grace, were the foundational covenants for seventeenth century Covenant Theology. When Scots like Robert Rollock take the concept, those three covenants are in place.

Now, finally we get to a point where we get to Macleod and he can give some help.

The next major figure in the development of Covenant Theology is Robert Rollock of the University of Edinburgh, 1555–1598. You will see Rollock’s name there in the Macleod article. Rollock wrote a book called *Questions and Answers Regarding the Covenant of God*.

Now Rollock did a lot of work on the matter of the Covenant of Works. He taught that the condition of the Covenant of Works was complete obedience to the moral law of God as summarized in the Ten Commandments. You heard me right. The argumentation being that the moral law, based again on the exposition of Romans 2, was not first given

at Mt. Sinai. The moral law originated in the Garden and was written on Adam's heart. So even though it wasn't written down on tablets of stone until Exodus 20, the moral law was in place from the beginning of man's creation. This is one of the great contributions of Rollock to the development of the Doctrine of Works. This covenant, Rollock has said, was manifest to a certain extent in the conditions of the Mosaic covenant.

And let me say again that that issue, just like the issue of, "Who are the parties in the Covenant of Grace, the elect or Christ?", the issue of "What is the Mosaic Covenant? — is it a Covenant of Grace or is it the covenant revisited?" has been significantly debated in the Reformed history of Covenant Theology.

Now where does the Covenant of Moses fit? Oftentimes it is spoken of by Paul in an almost negative light and juxtaposed to the Covenant of Abraham. In the book of Hebrews, when the author of Hebrews speaks of the first covenant of the Old Testament, oftentimes he has in mind the Covenant of Moses, the Mosaic Covenant, as opposed to the New Covenant. So is the Mosaic Covenant some sort of a remanifestation of the Covenant of Works or not? That debate is with us until this day. You will find this in the wrings of Meredith Kline, as opposed to people like John Murray, or other contemporary Reformed scholars. At any rate, Rollock also developed the relationship between the covenants and the sacraments so those are your sixteenth century men who worked on Covenant Theology and its development. Now, into the seventeenth century.

In the seventeenth century, English Calvinism was very much influenced by the use of the covenant concept. You have heard of the Cambridge Theologians, like William Perkins and William Ames. Perkins and Ames both were Covenant, or Federal Theologians and made much use of the covenant concept. Ames, of course, was a major influence on New England Calvinism. And John Preston also discusses the covenant concept in his book, *The New Covenant, or the Saints Portion*, written in 1629. John Ball, another Cambridge Calvinist wrote a book called *The Treatise on the Covenant of Grace*, in 1645 and this again was another classic statement on Covenant Theology.

One theme that you will hear from time to time in terms of the history of Covenant Theology is that Covenant Theology was a reaction against high Calvinism, and that Theodore Beza, good old Teddy Beza, is always the bad guy. And whoever is against Beza, whether it is Arminius or whoever else is always the good guy wearing the white hat. And the argument will be, well, Covenant Theology came along to kind of modify Beza and scholastic Calvinism. And this is particularly a theory when you hear people say, "Johannes Cocceius was the inventor of Covenant Theology," they will say, "you see he came along to give a warmer more biblical exegetical warm fuzzy view of theology than nasty old mean Theodore Beza." But Beza was just as much a Covenant Theologian and more of one than was Johan Cocceius. So the idea of Covenant Theology was designed to mollify the harsher characteristics of predestinarianism in Calvinism is just utter rubbish. And John Ball is one to prove it. Because Ball, here he is writing a treatise on the Covenant of Grace and he drinks at the fount of Theodore Beza all the time. So you don't see a dichotomy between these two things.

Now back to the continent for a minute in, still the seventeenth century, two important names to remember are Francis Gomoris, and Francis Turretin. Turretin was of course teaching in the Academy of Geneva. And Turretin is especially important for his Covenant Theology. Why? Because who taught Turretin's Systematic Theology textbook and taught about two thousand Reformed ministers last century? Charles Hodge. Charles Hodge's Systematic Theology textbook was Francis Turretin's *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, and Dabney taught out of Turretin. So both in the north and the south in the nineteenth century, Turretin was the basic Systematic Theology textbook. So his Covenant Theology is very important, not only for his own time, but for our time, because it was transmitted through those classes.

Active in Britain and Ireland at this time was a gentleman named James Ussher, spelled with two s's., in fact, Archbishop Ussher, to be exact. Archbishop Ussher was the author of *The Irish Articles*, a confessional statement used for the Episcopal Church in Ireland. And both his Irish articles, which were written in 1615, and his Systematic Theology, called a *Body of Divinity*, were influential in the language and

the theology of a little-known confession known as *The Westminster Confession*. In fact, Ussher was voted to be a delegate to The Westminster Assembly, although he did not participate, but his theology was very influential on *The Westminster Confession* and *Catechisms*. *The Westminster Confession* and *Catechisms* are built on a Covenant Theology model. There is an entire section of the *Confession* devoted to the covenant concept, chapter seven. The view of the offices of Christ in chapter eight is impacted by a covenant outlook on the work of Christ. The doctrine of the church, the doctrine of the sacraments, the doctrine of the law, the doctrine of Christian liberty, we could go on and on and on how the covenant concept impacts *The Westminster Confession*. Covenant Theology is part of the warp and woof of *The Westminster Confession*. Many of you will have the edition of *The Confession* that was published by the Free Presbyterian Church in Scotland, and in this edition of *The Confession*, they actually have included in the back a little document called *The Sum of Saving Knowledge*. And that *Sum of Saving Knowledge*, and by the way that document was written by two Scottish theologians, James Durham, and David Dixon, was an explicitly covenantal document designed to show how the Gospel might be presented in Covenant terms. It was written in 1650 and became so popular that it was often bound with copies of *The Confession*.

Now also in the seventeenth century back on the continent we come back to Johan Cocceius who is often wrongly credited with being the inventor of Covenant Theology. He was born in Bremen in Germany and he studied under William Ames in Holland at the University of France and eventually taught there himself as well as teaching at Lyden. He specialized in Hebrew, Rabbinics, Philology and Typology, and wrote a book called *The Doctrine of the Covenants and Testaments of God* in 1648. His counterpart, his more Orthodox counterpart on the continent on the seventeenth century, was a man named Herman Witsius, a Dutchman we have already mentioned, who wrote a book called *The Economy of the Covenants*, which was translated from Latin into English. And because it was written in Latin, as most theological books at this time and prior, and because John Cocceius' work was written in Latin but was never translated into English, it never had the impact that Witsius' work did. But Witsius' work was translated into English and

eventually became very popular in both Britain and America.

Now, in the eighteenth century, Covenant Theology continued to be very significant. John Cotton and Jonathan Edwards were both Covenant Theologians, Federal Calvinists. Charles Hodge in the nineteenth century carried on the covenant tradition, being influenced most by *Westminster* and Turretin. In the twentieth century, Louis Berkhof's *Systematic Theology* again continues in the Federal tradition, and it has been a seminary textbook for thousands. You should also know that back in England in the seventeenth century, you have the English Particular Baptists, that is, Baptists who believed in particular redemption. You remember there are two classes of Baptists in Britain at this time: the General Baptists and the Particular Baptists. The General Baptists were named so because they basically held to a universal atonement position, while the Particular Baptists held to a limited atonement position, holding all five points of Calvinism. The Particular Baptists, after 1688, became more and more explicitly covenantal and Federal in their own theology. And John Gill, for instance in his *Body of Divinity*, will give numerous covenant arguments. A. W. Pink continued that tradition in the twentieth century with his little book on *The Divine Covenants*.

Now I need to mention at least one more historic name and that name is again an eighteenth century Scottish Calvinist name, Thomas Boston. Boston was a very important Federal Theologian whose collective writings fill about 12 volumes and were recently reprinted by Richard Owen Roberts, who prints a lot of the revival literature and such. And they are well worth laying your hands on if you can get them. But in those 12 volumes, he has among other things, an exposition of *The Westminster Confession* and *Catechisms*. But he also has a series of sermons that he preached at his tiny little church down in Ettrick. One called "A View of the Covenant of Works," and another was "A View of the Covenant of Grace". But if you know Boston at all, the book that you have heard about most is his book, *Human Nature in its Four-Fold State*, oftentimes simply called *The Four-Fold State*. All of those books are written from a covenantal perspective, looking at the work of Christ, the progress of redemption, from a covenant perspective. So he is a name that you need to know.

And if I could throw out one more nineteenth century Scottish Calvinist name, I would throw out the name, Hugh Martin. Hugh Martin wrote a set of essays on the Covenant, on the priestly work of our Lord, on the intercession and the mediation of our Lord, which were collected and put into a book that was titled *The Atonement*. Hugh Martin was one of the masters of Covenant Theology in the Nineteenth Century in Scotland. And his book, *The Atonement*, and its relation to the covenant, the priesthood, and the intercession of our Lord, again is in print. That book is another good example of Covenant Theology now.

The Three Covenants

Covenant Theology, or Federal Theology, organizes itself around three great covenants. The first is the Covenant of Works. Now the Covenant of Works is called different things by different Covenant Theologians. For instance, in *The Westminster Confession*, the Covenant of Works, or in *The Catechisms*, the Covenant of Works is referred to once as the Covenant of Life, but it is also sometimes referred to as the Covenant of Nature. So you get different titles for this thing. Now Robertson calls the Covenant of Works, what? The Covenant of Creation. And we will talk about why later. But just bear that in mind. Just because you see a different term does not necessarily mean that it is talking about something different. You have to be careful with some of these terms because sometimes, when they are used, the same phrase is used to describe something different.

1. The Covenant of Works

So the Covenant of Works refers to a pre-fall covenant relationship with Adam. The Covenant of Works is a pre-fall Covenant relationship with Adam. In other words, it is a binding and gracious relationship or a binding and blessed relationship initiated by God, in which he enters into fellowship with Adam, prior to the fall. The Covenant of Works is a pre-fall covenant relationship between God and Adam. This Covenant is asymmetrical. You remember we talked about unilateral and bilateral and conditional and unconditional and monopluric and dipluric and all those confusing terms last time. This is not the only time we will talk about them. I will try and get you even more confused later. Just keep it in the background. This is an asymmetrical covenant in the sense that there are

not two equal parties entering into a relationship. This is God, out of His goodness, entering into fellowship with Adam, promising certain blessings and requiring certain responsibilities. God sovereignly imposes those conditions on Adam. And we saw an example of that as we read Genesis 1:24 through the end of the chapter today. In the ordinances given by God to Adam, Adam was not given the option to say, “Well Lord, I really like that procreation ordinance, but the labor ordinance, I am really going to have to think about that one.” There is no bargaining on Adam’s side in the relationship. So the elements of a covenant are there, according to Covenant Theologians, even though the term *covenant* is not used in Genesis 1 and 2. There are two partners, God and Adam, with Adam serving as the representative. There are responsibilities, there are stipulations and there are blessings.

Now Covenant Theology makes it clear that Adam is not a private individual. He is a public person. When he acts as covenant head he acts representatively for the entire race. Where do Covenant Theologians get this from? Not simply from what are clearly the implications of Adam’s sin in Genesis 4 and 5, but explicitly from Paul’s teaching in Romans 5, where he parallels Adam and Christ and says, “By one man’s unrighteousness sin came into the world, so also by one man’s righteousness all are justified.” So this Adam-Christ parallel from Paul, in combination with what are clearly the elements of a covenant relationship with Adam as seen in Genesis 1 and 2, combined in Covenant Theology give you the framework for a doctrine of the Covenant of Works. Now this isn’t all we will do on it. We are coming back to this. I just wanted to do the overview first. Then we will get into the exegesis. I want us to understand what we are talking about though.

The Passing of the Covenant of Works

Now according to Federal Theology, according to Covenant Theology, the Covenant of Works no longer continues in its ability to bless. The stipulations of the Covenant of Works are still incumbent upon us, but it no longer continues in its ability to bless since the fall. Why? Because in the Covenant of Works, as formed in the garden between God and Adam, there is no stipulation for blessing in spite of demerit. There is no stipulation for forgiveness in the Covenant of Works, and we have already

sinned. So the Covenant of Works can't bless you if you have sinned. The condition of the Covenant of Works is perfect and personal obedience. So it remains in force as a binding obligation, but we are incapable of fulfilling it. We are born in sin, the Apostle Paul says, and are by nature children of wrath. But the fact that it is still in force explains why both Jesus and Paul argue against legalism, not by saying that it is wrong in principle for someone to think that they can earn their salvation.

Now, notice how Jesus and Paul will use the same polemic. When the Judaizers come to Paul and say you have got to get it by your works, Paul doesn't say no, you can't do it, you've got to do it by grace. That is not what Paul says. Paul's response is always, "He who shall live by it shall do it." In other words, he says, "do this and live." He is saying, "Okay, you think you can stand before God righteously in your own merit. Fine. If you can, He will welcome you into the kingdom of heaven. Go ahead and do it." The apostle Paul's argument is not that it is illegitimate to think that perfect obedience is acceptable to God. The Apostle Paul's argument is that you can't do personal obedience. You cannot do perfect and personal obedience. You are fallen. You sin in thought and word and deed everyday. So if you think you are going to stand before God in righteousness that way, fine. Do it. That is Paul's argument, and that is Jesus' argument against legalism. So the Covenant of Works stays in force in the sense that both Paul and Jesus can use that argument. Yeah, you can be perfect. You can stand before God and be accepted in heaven. That's all you have to do: be perfect. "If anyone," Macleod says, you will see at the bottom of page 215, "If anyone could present himself at the bar of God and prove that he was free from sin, personal or imputed, actual or original, he would be acquitted." That is all you have to do. I am free from sin, let me in Lord. Because the principle, "The soul that sins shall die" is still valid. So the opposite of that is also valid. The soul that does not sin, shall not die. So if you have not sinned, you are doing great.

Why is salvation by works impossible? Not because it is inconceivable but because we are morally corrupted and totally depraved. Salvation by works is not a metaphysical impossibility. It is a moral impossibility. We are rebellious human beings fallen in Adam. And we have no hope for moral capacity to obey fully the law of God.

The Condition of the Covenant of Works

Why is it called the Covenant of Works? Because the condition of the covenant is the obedience of Adam.

2. The Covenant of Redemption.

The phrase, *The Covenant of Redemption* (and I am not speaking of Robertson's Covenant of Redemption, no), historically in the Reformed tradition refers to the intertrinitarian covenant, especially the covenant between the Father and the Son before the foundation of the world. It took place in eternity and is the plan by which election would be elective. Berkhof defines it this way, "the Covenant of Redemption is the agreement between the Father giving the Son as head and redeemer of all the elect and the Son voluntarily taking the place of those whom the Father has given Him." And so the Father, foreseeing the fall, in His grace effects a covenant with the Son in which He gives all the elect to the Son and the Son says I will take their place. Now where in the world did the Covenant Theologians get this? Well, we are going to look at this very closely later on. But let's look at some of the outline.

First of all, they found it in the Messianic Psalms—Psalm 2:7-9—where we have a picture of God speaking to the king: "I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, 'Thou art My Son, Today I have begotten Thee. Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Thine inheritance, And the *very* ends of the earth as Thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron, Thou shalt shatter them like earthenware.'"

Now in that Messianic Psalm (and by the way, that is a Psalm and that is a passage in that Psalm that is directly identified as messianic in the New Testament; we're not doing this by implication; it is directly quoted as a Messianic Psalm in reference to Christ, so there is no speculation involved here), the Covenant Theologians say, "What is happening there?" God the Father is giving to the Son the nations as His inheritance and is appointing the Son in that phrase, "Thou art My Son, this day I have begotten Thee." That doesn't mean that Christ is coming into being that day. That is the language of the royal enthronement. "Thou art the Son, today I have begotten Thee." It is as if the king of Israel has just ascended the throne now. And the Father is saying I have appointed you now as the monarch over all your inheritance, all the chosen people. And

so the Son takes the role of Mediator and of head. You see this also in Psalm 40:7-9 which is another royal Psalm. You see it in Psalm 89:3 and again it is picked up in Hebrews 10:5-7 and elsewhere, applied to Christ.

The Covenant Theologians also noticed that in the Gospels Christ emphasizes that the Father had given Him work to do. The language in John 5:36 is interesting, isn't it? The Father gave Me a work to do. And so elsewhere in the Gospels, Matthew and Mark, you will find Jesus saying things like, "It is my food to do the will of Him who sent Me." Over and over we see the Son openly subordinating His will to the Father's will. A classic example is in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Nevertheless, not My will, but Thy will be done." And the Covenant Theologian basically pulls back from that and says, "Wait a second, we're Orthodox Trinitarian Christians, we believe that the Son is very God, a very God. He is equal in power and glory with God the Father. What is the Son doing saying, 'nevertheless not My will, but Thy will be done?'" He is referring to the obligations of the covenant which He voluntarily took on Himself in order to save His people. And the Father said, "Son, if you are going to be the surety of Your people, this is what You must do." And the Son says to the Father, "That is what I want to do, Father, so that You will be glorified and that they will be saved." Now we will build a foundation for this as we go through it.

Theologians have quibbled over whether to call this a covenant. Okay. All Reformed Theologians believe in a decree. They believe that there is a plan that God has instituted from eternity for the saving of His people. Covenant Theologians simply say, "You really can't understand that decree, especially as it regards to our redemption, until you understand the covenant aspect of it." And the covenant aspect is the Covenant of Redemption. It is that eternal covenant--that covenant which is prior to time, in which the Son undertakes to be our surety and our mediator and the Father undertakes to give to the Son all the elect because of the Son's perfect obedience.

Hear that clearly. In the Covenant of Redemption, the Son buys you by right. You hear that? Last week we said the whole function of Covenant Theology is to do what? Build the assurance of God's people in His promises. Now the Covenant of Redemption tells you that when

Christ dies for you, it makes your salvation absolutely certain. Why? **Because the Father has promised the Son, “If you will take that man’s place, I will give him to You.”** The whole point is that the Father cannot renege. He has promised the Son in the Covenant. So there we have the Covenant of Works and The Covenant of Redemption.

3. The Covenant of Grace

The Covenant of Grace is the overflowing of the Covenant of Redemption in time after the fall. Adam miserably failed as the federal head in Genesis 3 and so God acts for the first time in a manner of grace towards humanity. And it is so important for you to understand that strictly speaking here, that grace does not exist where there is no sin. Hear me very clearly. We are going to hammer this one home over and over. There is no such thing as grace where there is no sin. Sin is always prior to grace. We may say that God was loving and that He was good in His entering into the covenant relationship with Adam in the Garden, and we would not be understating ourselves. But strictly speaking, Adam was not related to on the basis of grace, because grace entails God’s blessing despite demerit. And there was no demerit in Adam. There was no demerit to overcome. There was no gulf of sin between God and Adam as he was originally created. Grace comes in where demerit has entered into the scene.

Question: “On the Covenant of Works, you called it a relationship initiated by God?”

Thank you. You caught me and I was trying to keep from using that word. Let me say that people will argue, “Can you say that the Covenant of Works is gracious?” As long as you understand that strictly speaking, grace does not exist prior to the fall in terms of God’s relationship with man. If you are using *gracious* in a less technical sense to express God’s goodness and His love and the unmerited aspect of that relationship too, I have no quibble with it.

But it is so important for us to recognize that grace is not operative in that first relationship, because God does not give us to Jesus as our Mediator by the vehicle of grace. Jesus earns us. The whole vocabulary of redemption, is the vocabulary of the marketplace. When you say the

phrase, “Jesus *redeemed* me,” we could translate that, “Jesus went to the market and *bought* me.” Now that puts a whole different spin on it. Christ isn’t given you by grace. The Father does not give you to the Son by grace. He gives you to the Son because *the Son has earned you. He has bought you. He has purchased you.* You see the whole purpose of that language there is to make you understand how absolutely secure your salvation is. The very justice of God would have to be violated for your salvation to be lost once you are in Christ.

Now, the Covenant of Grace is that covenant between God and the elect as they are in Christ. It is the overflowing of the Covenant of Redemption into our human history after the fall. It is inaugurated in Genesis 3 with Adam, and especially in the word of curse against the serpent in Genesis 3:15, and it is expanded in the covenant with Noah. It is most clearly set forth in the Old Testament in the Covenant of Abraham. But it is continued in the covenants with Moses and with David. It is prophesied of in its fullest form in Jeremiah in the New Covenant and, of course, it comes to realization in the New Covenant itself inaugurated by Jesus Christ.

Now the Covenant of Grace, Robertson calls this what? Let’s not get these things confused. Robertson calls it the Covenant of Redemption. And he is not talking about this covenant. In fact, Robertson stays away from talking about that intertrinitarian covenant at all. Okay. So Robertson will use the word **Covenant of Redemption** when he is actually talking about this end time covenant, the **Covenant of Grace**. And he will use the phrase, **Covenant of Creation** when he is talking about the **Covenant of Works**. *The Confession* will use Covenant of Works, Covenant of Grace, or Covenant of Life, Covenant of Grace. Robertson uses Covenant of Creation and Covenant of Redemption. Those are Meredith Kline’s terms. Robertson is following Meredith Kline’s terminology there, for those of you who care about that particular discussion.

Question: “Robertson is arguing that a covenant is something in blood.”

Right. Yes. I suspect, having taken Robertson for Biblical Theology, I suspect that his biggest hang up about talking about the Covenant of

Redemption is in the issue of covenants being asymmetrical. He sees biblical covenants as always entailing a greater and lesser party with regards to God's involvements. And I would not quibble with His specific examples of that. God and Adam, God and Noah, God and Abraham, God and David. Obviously, if you have got God and man in a covenant arrangement, it is going to be asymmetrical. God is going to be sovereignly in charge.

And so he is saying, "How can you talk about an arrangement like that that as intertrinitarian, between equal persons of the Trinity?" Well, it is because all covenants are not asymmetrical and you have got biblical examples of non-asymmetrical covenants, so I think you also have to add into that the voluntary subordination of the Son. You know, there is a legitimate kind of subordinationism. It is not ontological subordination. It is economical subordination. And economic subordination in a covenant. I think that is his biggest hang up about the issue of using covenant terminology about the intertrinitarian arrangement. But there are lots of covenants between two equal parties. You know, Abraham and Abimelech. David and Jonathan. Jacob and Laban. So with the blood aspect of the covenant, there is clearly still a life and death thing going on there. It is not dissimilar to what happens in Genesis 15, when God walks between the pieces in the form of a smoking oven and the flaming torch. You have got a situation there where God Himself is calling down self-malediction. So I think you could satisfy him at the level of blood. I think it is just that subordination issue that he is wrestling with, and I think there is a biblical answer to that, that is in fact, absolutely essential.

You know what I mean when I say ontological subordination and economic subordination? *Ontological subordination* would say that the Son is in His essence, in His being, in some sense, less than or derivative than the Father. There are some people who believe in the doctrine of the Trinity but sort of see the Trinity as sort of a hierarchy. You know, you have either got the Father, the Son or the Holy Spirit, and the Son is a little less than the Father, and the Father is the original fountain, and then the Spirit is something else. Or some people see the Trinity, "Well you know you have got three thrones, and the Father's is the biggest, and you know then you have the Son's out there, and then you have got the

Spirit's over there. And they all sit on their thrones, but the Father's throne is the biggest throne." And that would be a form of subordinationism, to see the Son and the Spirit as somehow less in substance or essence than the Father.

But *economic subordinationism* speaks of that voluntary willingness to be made nothing, to take on the form of a servant, to be the covenant mediator, which is spoken about all through the New Testament. And it is not an emptying of His essence. In fact, Paul makes that so beautifully clear in Phillipians 2 when he says, that "He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant." You see it is not an emptying of essence that is involved in Phillipians 2. It is the taking on of humanity and, specifically, taking on the role of mediator for humanity which is the subordination that the Son undertakes for us. And He talks about it all the time. This is one of the reasons why many heretics go to the New Testament, to the Gospels, and to Acts, and to the Epistles, and end up saying, "Well Jesus can't really be fully God in the way that God the Father is because look at this language. You know, look at this language, 'not My will, but Thy will.' You see, Jesus clearly thinks the Father is greater than He is." And a Covenant Theologian comes along and says, "No, no, you totally misunderstand. Jesus is speaking covenantally there. He is saying, 'Brethren, before the foundation of the world, I loved you with my heart and therefore, I said to the Father, 'I want to take that man's place. And I will submit My will to Your will to effect the redemption by covenant of that people.'"

And so all that language of subordination in the New Testament suddenly becomes intelligible from the standpoint of the covenant. And it is not because the Son ontologically, in His essence, in his being is less than the Father. It is because the Son has voluntarily said, "I want to take that man's place." And Paul's language helps us so much there. Over and over, "in our place," "for us," "on our behalf," all those wonderful little phrases. Over and over, and what is that language? That is the language of covenant mediation.

Question: "Where did Systematic Theology get its origins?"

Historically, Systematic Theology was being done by the late second

century, early third century. Typically we say that Origen's *First Principles* was the first attempt at a Systematic Theology that still stands. But I would argue that even before that you would have at least attempts by early writers at systematizing particular doctrines. So in terms of Christian history, you see it very early on, especially for the purpose of catechizing, of teaching those who are coming to the church to join as catechumens. And it is argued by New Testament scholars who would know better than I would, that some of the Gospels, and in particular Matthew itself, are organized for the purpose of memorizing, for the sake of instructing the catechumens.

The Covenant of Works

If you have your Bibles, I would invite you to open with me to Genesis 1. We read the passage last week, and we will look at it again. In Genesis 1 we will focus on verse 24 and following.

Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth after their kind"; and it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth after their kind, and the cattle after their kind, and everything that creeps on the ground after its kind; and God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." Then God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you; and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that

moves on the earth which has life, *I have given* every green plant for food”; and it was so. And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. And by the seventh day God completed His work which He had done; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

Thus ends this reading of God’s holy and inspired Word, may He add His blessing to it. Let’s look to Him now in prayer.

Our Father we thank You for this Word, and as we begin to study it, concentrating on the truth of the covenant contained therein, we pray that our eyes would be opened that we would have a clear understanding of the truth of Your Word, that we would be captivated by the glory of that truth and that we would be better enabled to communicate that truth to others. We ask these things in Jesus’ name. Amen.

The Exegetical Basis of the Covenant of Works

I want to begin today looking with you at the exegetical basis of the Covenant of Works. And that means of course, concentrating closely on Genesis 1 and 2. There is a sense in which Genesis 1:1 through Genesis 2:3 serves as a preface for the covenantal formulation of Genesis 2:4 – Genesis 2:17 or 24, however you want to divide it. Liberals used to make much about these supposedly two alternative and contradictory creational accounts. I trust that all of us understand that nobody could possibly be so bad an editor, to accidentally, unwittingly put two creational accounts which were in fact alternative and contradictory side by side and leave them in the book that he had edited. And certainly no one as talented as the person who edited Genesis clearly is. So understand that there is a theological, as well as a literary agenda, for placing these two accounts side by side.

And as you see the first so-called account of creation from Genesis 1:1 running to Genesis 2:3, it is clear that the focus is to put man in context in God’s original created order. And then beginning in Genesis 2:4 there

will be significantly more concentration on the nature of the relationship between God and man. In fact, themes that are introduced in Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 will be taken up again in Genesis 2:4 and following and amplified. So there is every sign of literary and theological connection between these two accounts. They are not placed here in a haphazard way. They are not placed here in an irresponsible way theologically. They logically and theologically build on one another.

Now having said that as we look at the creation account itself, it is very apparent that the culmination of this account is in the sixth day. And that is not just because the sixth day is the last of the creative days. It is because in that day, the announcement of the creation of man in the image of God is made and we read enough of that sixth day account beginning in verse 24 to give you the literary feel for the language that has already been used. Notice what God stresses in verse 24, “let the earth bring forth creatures after their kind.” So it is stressed that creatures after their kind, after their genus, after their species are from henceforth and forever going to be brought forth. It is stressed that cattle and creeping things and beasts all will be produced. How? After their kind. In the likeness of the genus in which they were originally created and then it is stressed again in verse 25: God made the beasts of the earth after their kind. The cattle after their kind. Everything that creeps on the ground after its kind and God saw that it was good. And so His original creation is good but He is making things according to their kind.

And then there comes this monumental announcement in verse 26, and that announcement is what? “Then God said, let us make man in Our image” and you see immediately the contrast between the beasts being made after their kind and man being made after God’s image. And so we can remember, some of us, who heard Nigel Cameron preach back in the spring at First Presbyterian Church, tremblingly he said, “We may say reverently that whereas the beasts of the earth are made after their kind, man is of the genus of God.” Now, that is a shocking way of putting it and we don’t want to stress that in some sort of a Kenneth Hagan way—we are “little gods” theologically—but recognize what is being said about man here. Man is of an altogether different order and you see immediately a fundamental and unresolvable clash between a biblical anthropology and

a secular evolutionary anthropology which says we are of the same basic stuff as the animal world. We are simply a more highly evolved animal. And in bold and in direct refutation and confrontation with that kind of view, the Bible says “No, human beings are not of the same kind, or species or genus as the animal creation. They are a unique creation of God, uniquely created by Him to bear His image.” And so you can see even looking at verses 24 and 25 and 26, this chasm that is being put between man and the animal creation by the Lord in His Word, and the exalted position. So everything has been building to this moment to explain to man the place that he has in the universe. And so as we look at this passage together, especially from verse 26 on down, I want to make clear what it means for man to be made in the image of God. And then we will move on to explain a little bit in detail about the nature of the relationship that man has with God. We will get into a little of that as we look at this passage, but it will be expanded when we look at Genesis 2:4 and following.

First of all, notice as we have already mentioned, that *man is distinct from the animal creation*. Five times it is said that the animals are made after their kind, in verses 24 and 25. But in verse 26 it is explicitly said that man is “in Our image according to Our likeness” and this is the Lord speaking. This is the triune God speaking, saying, “I am creating humankind in My image, in My likeness.” Man is unique. It is not that he is simply smarter than the animals. It is not because he is simply more highly evolved than the animals. He is of an altogether different genus.

Now I know of no better place in a postmodern world for you to begin an apologetic encounter witnessing to the truth of the Gospel than that, because human beings feel less significant today than ever before. Now they are puffed up with pride, but deep down inside they feel an incredible lack of significance because of the worldview that they have by and large adopted. It is a worldview that has reduced them to the status of some sort of an evolved being in a universe that does not care about them, because that universe is non-personal. And I know no better place to engage this culture than right at that point and to say, as far as Christianity is concerned, we are not a human animal as some anthropologists like to put it. We are not a human animal. We are

uniquely endowed with certain divine attributes by the Lord Himself. And you know, if the Lord Himself hadn't said it, you would find it hard to believe. You really would. You would wonder if it wasn't just a little bit blasphemous if the Lord Himself hadn't said it.

But again, do you not see the incredible goodness of God in creation in that very thing? He didn't have to do that. Just this lavish goodness of God, saying, I am going to take this creation that I have made out of the dust and I am going to exalt this creation. And I am going to make this creation vice-ruler of the world, and I am going to endow this creation with My own attributes so that he is like Me. Unbelievable.

Notice also, that we see in verses 26 and in 28 that *man is endowed with a capacity for, and a responsibility for, dominion or rule*. Man is endowed with a capacity for, and a responsibility for, dominion or rule. You again see that language in verse 26: "Let them rule." And then again in verse 28: "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth, subdue it and rule." So there is a stress or an activity of government and ordering that implies that the man has both rationality and righteousness because, in God's world, the function of ordering isn't just the job for a good administrator; it is a job for someone who has rational capacities which bear and reflect the image of God and is righteous. It is a moral function here. Ordering the earth is a moral issue. You can't order the earth from an immoral base.

And so the very fact that man is being called to rule reminds one of the rational and the righteous aspects in which he bears God's image. This aspect of God's image, this aspect of rule or dominion is stressed in the divine command of Genesis 1:28, "subdue it and rule." And it is also stressed in the declaration of verses 29 and 30. If you look down at those passages, the implication of this particular command is clearly set forth there with regard to the sphere of their responsibility and dominion. By the way, we are going to stress this when we look at the life of Noah, but if you flip over to Genesis 9:2-3, this same rule is reiterated in Genesis 9 to Noah. "The fear of you and the terror of you shall be on every beast of the earth and on every bird of the sky with everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea into your hand, they are given. Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you. I give all to you as I gave

the green plant.” Again the same order is obtained in redemption that had been established in creation. When God sets forth His redemptive covenant in the life of Noah, He restores the order and ordinances that He has originally given in the Garden before Adam fell. Now by the way, this is precisely the thing that is celebrated in Psalm 8:4 and following, “What is man, that Thou dost take thought of him? And the son of man, that Thou dost care for him? Yet Thou hast made him a little lower than God, And dost crown him with glory and majesty! Thou dost make him to rule over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things under his feet, All sheep and oxen, And also the beasts of the field, The birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, Whatever passes through the paths of the seas.”

It is telling, isn't it, that the author of Psalm 8 begins with a reflection on the heavens and he has got to have Genesis 1 either before him or very much in his mind as he does this. Because in Genesis 1 what you are overwhelmed by is this God who is so massive as to speak the heavens into being. And you go on for a couple of verses there in Genesis 1 about God making the sun and the moon, and then in that little throw-off phrase in verse 16, you get “He made the stars also.” He made the stars also. How many billions of stars are there? Yet He so awesome, so powerful, so mighty, that in a little phrase, two or three words in Hebrew, He made the stars also. And anybody in their right mind as a human is overwhelmed by that spectacle. You are looking up there at the night sky. If you are out deep into the dark woods, maybe you can see 1500 or more stars with the naked eye on a clear night. And it is overwhelming, and you feel small and that is exactly how the Psalmist felt in Psalm 8. What is man that you have crowned him with power and glory and given him dominion and rule? That is exactly the response that Genesis 1 is designed to evoke, but the fact of the matter is that Psalm 8 acknowledges exactly what Genesis 1 says, that yes, you tiny little human being, you are made in the image of God and you are made to rule that world. It is mind-boggling. That is what it means to be in the image of God: to be distinct from the animal creation and to be endowed with the capacity for rule and that involves ordering in a rational and a righteous way.

Thirdly, however, *it also means being a bearer of certain of God's*

attributes. To be made in the image of God, not only means to be distinct from the animal creation, it not only means to be endowed with the capacity for responsibility for rule, but it means to be a bearer of certain of God's attributes. And this is made clear by the analogy of Genesis 5 verses 1-3. If you would turn to that passage, notice the rehearsal of this in the genealogy of Adam in the book of Adam. Genesis 5. "This is the book of the generations of Adam in the day when God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. He created them, male and female and He blessed them and named them man in the day they were created. When Adam had lived 130 years, he became the father of the son in his own likeness according to his image and named him Seth," and so it is reiterated that man bears certain aspects of the very attributes of God. His image. His likeness. Now these attributes are not spelled out in so many words. There is not a nice listing of them, as much as we would like to have that in the first two chapters of Genesis, but there is enough there for us to put together a decent list. And we ought to look at that real briefly.

The Attributes of God in Man

First of all, it is clear that as God is rational, so also is man. As God is rational, so also is man. Now this is implicit of God. What I am calling rationality is implicit of God in Genesis 1:1-25. There, God Himself is seen to be rational. And all I mean by rational at this point—and I am not trying to over stretch this—all I mean is having intelligence and will, having the ability to formulate plans and execute them. That is very clear from Genesis 1:1 and following, that God is that kind of God. He is a God who plans and who carries out. He formulates the thoughts of His mind and He carries them out by His divine will. He speaks those thoughts into being. That is stressed in the very structure of the language that Moses uses for the first six days. And man, too, is endowed with this kind of rationality and knowledge and understanding and this is seen, for instance, in Adam's naming of the animals in Genesis 2:19-20. Understand that that action of naming the animals is not only an exercise of its rule. When an explorer explores and "finds" or "discovers" a new country, what does that explorer usually get to do? Name it. When Adam names the animals, that is a function of his rule, his dominion over them. In other words, it is a divine signifier that God has put him in charge. He

is the one who gets to name the animals, not the other way around. So it is a sign of his rational capacity.

But we must also recognize that there is every indication that Adam's naming of the animals is not arbitrary, but that the names that Adam assigns to the animals are correspondent to their nature. Notice again that in redemption, for instance, in passages like Colossians 3:9-10, this aspect of the restoration of man's true capacities for knowledge and rationality are stressed. "Do not lie to one another," Paul says, "since you have laid aside the old self with its evil practices and have put on the new self which is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him." So the true knowledge that we possess as redeemed is what? According to the image of the One who created us. So that is true about Him and it is true about us. So part of being in the image of God is that rational capacity, and man's rationality is reflected in his rule, his understanding is a gift of God.

That too, is a very important for our witness for our evangelism. If we forget that the true knowledge of God is a gift, we may be tempted to think that we can produce that true knowledge in someone. Only God can bestow that. There are certain things that we are called to do and be very faithful in our responsibility to carry those out in bearing witness. But we must recognize that, ultimately, only God can bestow that kind of true knowledge on a person. That is why we are prayerfully dependent upon the work of the Holy Spirit in His grace.

2. Secondly, *as God is personal, so also is man.* And you cannot miss, in the interaction from Genesis 1:26 on, that God as a personal being is interacting with man as a personal being and even the hints that you get in the language of 1:26, "Let Us make man in our Own image," hinting perhaps not only at the majestic exalted position of God, speaking with a Royal We, but perhaps even pressing forth to the doctrine of the Trinity itself, reminds us that God Himself is in communion with Himself, because He is both three and one. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are in communion and therefore God is personal. And it is interesting, isn't it, that it is stressed that man is personal as well, and therefore has relational capacities. "Let us make man in Our image according to Our likeness and let them rule." So the male and the female

aspect of man is stressed from the very beginning and is seen as part and parcel of His ability to convey the personalness of God. Thus the very differentiation of the sexes, male and female, is part of the image of God which we bear and reflect.

Now the implications of this are tremendous. I couldn't possibly begin to apply all the implications of that. One thing, however, does come to mind again, in our society which is so vital, and that is the whole issue of the homosexual movement. You understand that homosexuality depersonalizes a human. It depersonalizes a human. It dehumanizes a person because it denies the essential male-female sides of the human marital relationship that are at the very core and foundation of the society which God created in the original creation. It denies the essentialness of that and it says, "No, male and male and female and female, same sex unions are capable of functioning and reflecting the fullness of humanity just as well as male-female relationships." And we will talk more about that perhaps at some other time. But the practice itself is a denial of the scriptural teaching on man in the image of God.

3. Thirdly, we can also say that *man is moral*. Man is moral. That is another of his attributes as an image-bearer. We are told in Genesis 1:31 that God made all things good. That is because, of course, He is good Himself. "God saw all that He made and behold it was very good," Genesis 1:31. Man, too, is endowed with righteousness and holiness. He knows what the good is. And again in redemption this is stressed. In Ephesians 4:24, Paul will say, "Put on the new self which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth." So Ephesians 4:24 says the new self has been created in the likeness of God in righteousness and holiness of the truth, so this moral aspect, this personal aspect, the rational aspect, all of these are part of man as image bearer. So that is all a subset of what we are saying about man as a bearer of certain of God's own attributes. God is personal. God is rational. God is moral. And we reflect His image in those. And we could more than this, but we certainly can't say less than this.

4. Fourthly, *life is sacred*. Now we move on to another aspect of what it means to be made in the image of God. It not only means that we are distinct from the animal creation, it not only means that we are endowed

with the capacity for dominion and rule, it not only means that we are the bearers of certain of God's attributes, it means fourthly that man's life is sacred because of the image and it must be treated so. This is stressed in Genesis 9:5-6. In that passage, it is stressed that precisely because man is in God's image, capital punishment is required by capital crimes. The argument is precise and this is so important to hear because you will hear some advocates of anti-capital punishment legislation argue that they are arguing their position on Christian grounds and they will argue something like this: "Man is created in the image of God. Who are we to take that life away from anyone, no matter what they have done, because they are indelibly made in the image of God. How can we take the life of someone?"

Now that is not God's logic. God's logic is recorded not only in Genesis 9, but elsewhere. But in Genesis 9, His logic is this: Because man is so special, because man is an image bearer, when a man violates the principles of My law so grossly so as to take the life of another human being, they have just purchased by that action, the inalienable right to pay for that action with their own life. And to put it in the very language of Genesis 9, we have a responsibility to bring to bear capital punishment for capital crimes because of the image of God in man.

God's argumentation is anything but a diminution of the sacredness of man. And so in Genesis 9, we have this kind of argumentation: Anything less than capital punishment for capital crimes dehumanizes man and devalues his life.

By the way, that passage in Genesis 9 also reminds us that the image of God was not lost at the Fall. If you have read any stuff as high powered as Barthian anthropology, whether you are reading Barth's *Doctrine of Man*, or Bruner, or someone else, you will find the idea that man lost the image of God at the Fall. That is not the historic Reformed doctrine of man, and it is made clear in Genesis 9 that even after the Fall, though the image is effaced, it is not erased. So Noah lives after the Fall, and still God speaks of the image to him.

This, by the way, is the only adequate basis for the establishment of basic human rights and respect. And again, friends, this is such an

excellent area for you to press in a postmodern society. We are “rights crazy” in this society. We think that there is a right for everything. And you can use that to your advantage because, the funny thing is, as these rights have multiplied, the grounds, the foundations for these rights have eroded because we do not live in a society which by and large believes in transcendent truth anymore. People just believe that you kind of make it up as you go along. There is no transcendent basis for truth. It is either individually produced or it is societally agreed upon. But it is not transcendentally and universally true.

But how can you have a right that is not transcendentally and universally true? How can you have an inalienable right, if there is nothing that is transcendentally true and essential about that particular right? Well, when you hear people arguing for human rights, whether it is in the context of race, or sex, or religion, or whatever else, you as a Christian have a reason, and a good reason, and a ground on which you can argue for certain basic elemental rights. And that ground and reason is the doctrine of the image of God in man. We do not believe, as believers, as Christians, that just because someone worships a false god, that they cease to be in the image of God. And therefore, we have certain basic responsibilities to them, even if they are idolaters. We are called, by the Lord, to love them. We are called to respect them in certain ways. And we are even called to defend their own elemental rights by the Lord as a part of our responsibilities to Him.

But a modern or a postmodern non-Christian is in big trouble trying to set forth a doctrine of why it would be wrong, for instance, for Hitler to exterminate Jews. I mean, why not? I mean they were declared non-persons weren't they? What is wrong with that? And your doctrine of man in the image of God gives you an incredible leverage because there are people who, at a gut level, sense that there ought to be certain basic human rights. They have perhaps expanded those rights too far and they have perhaps not thought through why there ought to be those certain things, but they have a gut hunch or instinct that there are these things. But you are the only person who can supply them the ground of that because this is God's world and God's world only works the way He made it. It doesn't work the way that other people make it up as they go along.

So again, here is a great launching point for a Gospel discussion with someone. Do you believe in human rights? You do? Or, you don't have a reason to. I do. How is that for a starter? And I promise you that is a good discussion to have.

One more thing. Let me mention this: We see here in Genesis 1, and perhaps especially set forth in Genesis 2:7, that *man is endowed with an immortal, spiritual aspect to his being*. This is seen not only in the giving of the Tree of Life in the Garden, but it is even seen in the phrase of Genesis 2:7, "then the Lord God formed man out of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being." Genesis 1 and 2 speak of man as a personal, self-conscious being with the capacities of knowledge and thought and action, but he is a personal, self-conscious being with those capacities who goes on forever. He was not made like the animals and the plant world to be here today and gone tomorrow. He was made for eternity. And this is another one of the aspects of his distinction from the animal world.

Now, we have glanced upon the obligations that the Lord gave in Genesis 1:26 and following, but I want to go back and look at them in more detail. We have defined covenant already in a couple of different ways. We have mentioned Robertson's description of the covenant: it is a bond in blood sovereignly administered. Let me throw out another definition of covenant. Robertson, himself, as you will remember, opens the book by saying, "Defining a covenant is sort of like defining your mother." The dictionary definition sort of falls short. It is hard to give one definition that includes everything that you need to say about a covenant.

But here is one that I think will help you see the covenantal nature of Genesis 1:26-31: *A covenant is a binding relationship with blessings and obligations*. A covenant is a binding relationship with blessings and obligations. Now that is not adequate in any way as a total, final definition of "covenant," but it certainly stresses at least a couple of things doesn't it? It stresses first of all that a covenant is a relationship. It is a special kind of relationship. It is a binding relationship. And in a religious context, of course, it is a saving relationship. Furthermore, it is a relationship that involves both blessing and obligation, both promises

and responsibilities. And lo and behold, as we look at Genesis 1:26 and following, that is precisely the pattern we see there of the relationship that is described between God and Adam.

Why am I mentioning this? Because you will have noticed that nowhere in Genesis 1 and 2 is the term “covenant” used. In fact, that term “covenant” will not occur until Genesis 6:18. But let me hint ahead and steal my thunder a little bit ahead of time. It is very interesting that there are two ways of speaking about the making of a covenant in the Pentateuch and elsewhere in the Old Testament. One can speak of making a covenant firm. Sometimes your translations translate that as “establishing a covenant” and one way is to speak of “cutting a covenant.” The one, the latter, the cutting of the covenant, often refers to the inauguration of the covenant. The other phrase often refers to the confirming of an already established covenant relationship, to make that covenant firm. Is it not interesting to you that in Genesis 6:18, the passage says that the covenant was made firm? Now that is the first usage of “Covenant” in the Bible. *But the very language forces you to understand that there was a covenant before it was mentioned.* And the only question is, how far back did it go? Now we will look at that passage in detail because that is important. But it is very important for us to understand that the whole structure of the covenant of God with Noah implies with massive force that it is a continuation of a previously established relationship.

Now, I could show you other places in the Bible where the concept of covenant is present and the term is not. For instance, in II Samuel 7, God establishes His covenant relationship with King David, this glorious culmination with David. And you remember the story. David sets out to build a temple for the Lord and the Lord says, “David, don’t build Me a temple.” And you remember there is a play on words there. David says, “I am going to build a house for the Lord,” and the Lord comes back to David and says, “David, will you build a house for Me? No, I will build a house for you.” So there is a wonderful play on words in that passage that we will look at very closely in a few weeks, but in the passage, the covenant is established with King David.

Now how do we know a covenant is established there since the word

“covenant” is not mentioned? We know it two ways. First of all, know it because of the contents of what is transacted between God and David in II Samuel 7, even if we had no other reference explaining to us what was going on there. The very contents of the chapter contain the elements of a covenant. Secondly we know because Psalm 89 tells us it was a covenant. So the Bible will look back and see II Samuel 7 as a covenant-making event and Psalm 89 confirms that.

Now there are indications in the Scripture in various places, and we will look at this at some point, that the relationship of Adam and God in the Garden is covenantal. In other words, that actual terminology is used. Hosea 6:7 is one of the classic passages that we will have to look at in some greater detail, but there are other passages as well that give indication of this covenant relationship.

What we are going to concentrate on today, however, is showing you that the elements of the covenant are already here without any further comment from Scripture. The elements of the covenant are here. First of all, notice in verse 26 that God creates man in His own image and designs him as the vice-ruler over His creation. And this verse reminds us that man was created in God’s image and likeness and he was destined for dominion over the remainder of creation. By the way, the uniqueness of man is seen in the phraseology of 1:26. If you were to look at the other creative days, for instance, Genesis 1:3, Genesis 1:6, Genesis 1:14, those creative days begin with what phrase? “Let there be...” But Genesis 1:26 begins with what? “Let Us make...” So again, the uniqueness of man in the creative order is expressed by Moses even linguistically; even linguistically he is distinguishing man from the rest of God’s creation.

Now let me say in regard to Genesis 1:26 and man as ruler and man as image, there is both a dynamic and a static element to the image of God. How can I put that in more understandable language? There is both an aspect of the image that is inherent in us as we are made as persons and there is an aspect of the image that is expressed in us as we act. In other words, we both are the image of God *and* we express the image of God in our actions. Both of those aspects of the image are present there in Genesis 1:26. We are in His image and we must reflect that image in our actions.

Secondly, in Genesis 1:26 and 1:28, we see that God established certain blessings and obligations for man at the very outset of his relationship with man. So we see a unique relationship established between God and man in Genesis 1:26. God endows man with something that He has not endowed any other part of His creation with. He endows him with a responsibility that He has not given to any other part of His creation. And then, in verses 27 and 28, we see both blessings and obligations attached to that particular relationship from the very outset. So here we have a relationship with attendant blessings and obligations.

There are four great obligations in that relationship. Perhaps I should put it this way: There are at least four great obligations in that original relationship, and, ironically, corresponding to those four great obligations are four great blessings. So the blessings and the obligations of this relationship in Genesis 1:26 and following are coordinated. The blessings come in the obligation, the obligation comes in the blessing. It is interesting how God tied that together. It reminds us, doesn't it, that the way of blessedness, or the way of happiness, is in the way of duty, because in the very created order, God made duty and the doing of duty to be blessed. Now that is such an alien concept to our culture. We tend to think that if you have to do something, that kind of ruins it. If you have to do it, how can you really desire to do that? Isn't that against grace or something like that? But the idea that duty is opposed to grace is utterly alien to biblical thought. It is alien to Moses. It is alien to Paul. It is alien to Jesus. Some of you may know of Robert E. Lee's famous quote, "Duty is the sublimest word in the English language." It is up on a plaque in The Citadel. If you have ever been to The Citadel, the military university of South Carolina, you will see it on the walls as you walk in. "Duty is the sublimest word in the English language." And that idea is totally alien to our culture, because duty is confused with "I have to do it." But here we see in the very duties of the created order, the blessings are intertwined, so that as man does what God created him to do, interestingly enough, he finds his fulfillment and his satisfaction and his happiness and his blessedness.

The Creation Ordinances

What is meant by a creation ordinance? By a creation ordinance, we

mean a pattern of responsibility woven into the very fabric of the creation by God as He originally made it. A pattern of responsibility woven into the very fabric of creation as He originally created it. If you have read John Murray's *Principles of Conduct*, Murray comes up with seven creation ordinances. Perhaps most frequently we hear of three creation ordinances. I am not so concerned about the numbering as I am of us grasping the concepts of these creation ordinances.

1. The first creation ordinance that we see there is ***the ordinance of procreation***. Genesis 1:28. The ordinance of procreation. "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth." This is the first of the creation ordinances given in Genesis 1 and, of course, it is related directly to marriage as we will see when we finally get over to Genesis 2:23-24. And it is obviously essential for the fulfillment of the later mandates of labor and dominion. Adam and Eve as two isolated individuals, no matter how powerful in their capacities as unfallen human beings, can't subdue the whole of this globe. There has got to be procreation in order to harness and order the world as God has established it. And this ordinance, it is made clear in Genesis 1 and 2, was to be expressed only within the bonds of mutual commitment, that is, marriage. So this is an obligation and a blessing. It is an obligation and a blessing. Can you imagine God coming to Adam, and Adam responding, "Do I have to?" "Yes. It is an obligation and a blessing. Be fruitful and multiply." And there again you see it is a blessing to Adam as a family. Adam needs sons and daughters to help him in the work that he has to do. And so it serves as a familial blessing for his family as a whole, as well as something essential to the fulfillment of the mandates for labor and dominion.

2. The second ordinance that we see, we also see in verse 1:28, and that is ***the ordinance of labor***. The ordinance of labor. "Fill the earth and subdue it and rule." Now notice the two parts of this ordinance. The *mandate* is to work. The *blessing* is that God has given man rule. He is mandated to work, but God has set up the creation so that the lower creation fears man, respects his position of authority, and this dominion mandate expresses itself necessarily in work or labor and thus, work is good. *Work is part of the original created order*. When we go to heaven, we are not going to heaven either on flowery beds of ease or for flowery

beds of ease. There will be work in heaven. That is what we were originally created for. There will be no toil. There will be no frustration. There will be no tiredness. But there will be fulfilling work. The dominion of man was to be expressed in two spheres. You see it in this passage, first in the subduing of the earth and second in the ruling over the animals.

And let me go on to say that this labor ordinance was implicit even in the Sabbath ordinance of Genesis 2:1-3, because what does the Sabbath ordinance do? It puts a limit on labor. It says to man, you can't work all the time. But it implies the obligation of work on the other six days. So, what are man's obligations? Procreation. Labor. He is to express dominion. How is blessing entailed in his labor? Not only in the satisfaction of that labor, but also in the dominion that God has given him, the rule that God has given him over his creation.

3. Then, ***the ordinance of the Sabbath***. We see this in Genesis 2:3: "God blessed the Sabbath and sanctified it." This seventh day is marked by the completion of God's special created work; His labor was finished in the first six days. The work of creation as such is done. That doesn't mean that He is inactive. He continues to work in providence in preserving and governing His creation, but the same word, *finished*, is used here as it is used of Moses finishing the tabernacle in Exodus 40:23, and of Solomon finishing the temple in II Chronicles 7:11, and of Jesus finishing the redemption in John 19:33. The same concept used here—same term.

Notice also that these labors which are rested from are the creational labors. God's finished work of creation is sealed with these words, "He rested." And what is being implied is cessation from that special creational activity. As we said, that doesn't mean that God is inactive; He continues to nurture, and that is seen from the following.

First, we see it from our Lord's constructive use of the Sabbath. The Pharisees' Sabbath was by and large merely a negative Sabbath entailing cessation from certain activities, whereas the Lord's Sabbath was actively a Sabbath of deeds of mercy and necessity in addition to worship. For an example, see John 5:15-17: "The man went away, and told the Jews that it

was Jesus who had made him well. And for this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath. But He answered them, ‘My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.’” So he indicates that God’s cessation from the creational activity doesn’t mean that God is utterly inactive on the Sabbath. It just means that the focus of that activity has changed.

Second, Jesus’ preservation of the creational pattern of the Sabbath. And what is that creational pattern, that the Sabbath is both blessed and holy. It is both a blessing and something to be set apart. Both of those aspects. And once again, here we are seeing how the creation ordinance of the Sabbath is both an obligation and a blessing. The original Sabbath was both a blessing and an obligation. Notice Jesus’ words of it, about it in Mark 2:27-28. “And He was saying to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.”

Notice what is being stressed there: that man was given the Sabbath as a blessing. Man wasn’t created for the sake of the Sabbath. The Sabbath was created for the sake of man. It was for his good. It was a blessing of God to him. And what is the other side of it? So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath. It is the Lord’s day. We have an obligation to the Lord that day to follow in His way with worship, deeds of mercy and necessity, just as He observed that day. So we see that pattern of blessing and hallowing, of blessing and obligation, of blessing in responsibility upheld in Jesus’ explanation of the Sabbath in Mark 2.

Then, finally, as we saw from Genesis and as we see again in Hebrews 3, God’s Sabbath was a gift to man. God’s Sabbath was a gift to man. God didn’t need that rest. That is Jesus’ whole point in Mark 2. God didn’t need the rest. He rested because *you* needed the rest. So His very resting was not a necessity for Him. It was something that you needed that He did out of His love for you. So He rested for your sakes, and we learn in Hebrews 3:7-4:11 that, for believers, the Sabbath is not only a blessing, but it is a promise of a rest to come. So the Sabbath is a day for nurturing, for spiritual life, for worship and service.

In the third verse of Genesis 2, we learn that the Sabbath is set apart and specially favored by God because of His rest from creation. “Then

God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.” Because of His resting, which He did for our benefit, God both favored and hallowed the Sabbath. He blessed it and He made it holy. He blessed it in the sense that He made it an effectual means of blessing to those who sanctify it by rest, worship and service. And He sanctified it, in the sense of making it holy or hallowed, whatever term you want to use, by consecrating it and setting it apart for a holy use.

Now remember, friends, those who are hearing Genesis 1 read to them for the first time, have already heard the Ten Commandments from God’s own mouth. Remember that now. Those who are hearing Genesis 1 read to them for the first time, have already heard the Ten Commandments spoken to them from God’s own mouth. So Moses is not telling them about something new when he speaks about the Sabbath in Genesis 2:1-3, he is not telling them about something that they have never heard of before. He is telling them about something that they have already heard of, but now he is telling them where it came from. The whole structure of Genesis 1:1-2:3 is a gigantic argument for the Sabbath. It is simply a gigantic argument for the Sabbath by explaining to the people of God where the Sabbath came from. And I think it is not surprising that the Exodus emphasis on the Sabbath is specifically mirroring creation. It is not until Deuteronomy that you get the redemptive significance of the Sabbath stressed in the Ten Commandments as they are recorded there. And so the Sabbath serves not only as a memorial of redemption, as we see in Deuteronomy, but it serves as a memorial of creation. It is woven into the very fabric of creation. So that is the third of the ordinances that we see in Genesis 1:26-2:3.

4. The fourth ordinance that we will look at is ***the ordinance of marriage***. We not only have the ordinance of procreation, the ordinance of labor, the ordinance of Sabbath, but there is also the ordinance of marriage. And the ordinance of marriage is seen in Genesis 2:24-25. And let’s think about that for a few minutes. It is made clear in Genesis 2:18 that man had social needs even in paradise. Man had social needs even in paradise. He has relational needs, human relational needs, even in paradise. Genesis 2:18 says, “Then the LORD God said, “It is not

good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him."

So even with everything pronounced good, God announces that "it is not good for man to be alone." This is the first thing that has been described in God's creation as not good. It is the only thing that has been described in God's creation that is not good. It is not good for man to be alone. So, solitary fellowship with God even in paradise is not God's plan for us. By the way, you see in that verse the seed for the doctrine of the church as well. Solitary fellowship with God is not God's plan. We need one another and such a plan that invites believers into individual experiences with the Lord apart from mutual relations and obligations with the body of believers ignores this basic creational human need for companionship.

Secondly, as God calls Adam to name the animals in Genesis 2:19-20, God makes Adam more aware for his need for this companionship. As we have said before, the naming of those animals demonstrates that man is the monarch of all he surveys under God, but it also reminds Adam that there is no one out there for him, like him. He needs a helper suitable to him, a perfect fit, a support, and an honored mutual companion. Genesis 2:21-23 record God's provision for this need, and man's grateful acknowledgment of that provision to God. God creates a companion for Adam because there was none for him before. Woman is made for him. Eve is made to be Adam's crown and glory and man stands in need of her. It is perhaps significant that Adam was asleep when she was created and so he can take no credit for her creation, for her provision, for nature. He contributed nothing to her, except the stuff which God had already given to him.

And then in Genesis 2:23-24, God in his special creative providence establishes the very foundations of marriage. And here we see the creation ordinance of marriage. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." Now both Moses and Christ then, see this provision of Eve for Adam as the very foundation of marriage. Jesus makes that clear in Mark 10:6-9 where He goes right back to this passage when the issue of divorce is brought up by the Pharisees and He basically says to them, "You can't even begin to talk about divorce until you understand marriage first."

And where does he take them? Right back to Genesis 2. And I think that is important for us to remember because before we are able to reassert marriage in our culture, we need to understand what it is. It is grounded in this creational ordinance.

And then of course in verse 25, Moses reminds us that there was no sin in this original order or relationship, and therefore, there was no shame. They were naked, and they were not ashamed. No sin, no shame, no barriers to relationships with one another. No barriers with relationship to God. That need for covering was a result of the Fall. And so this is the fourth of the ordinances. And again, the blessing of this relationship is obvious. It is an ordinance, it is a mandate, but it is a blessing. And so we see woven into Genesis 1, though the word is not mentioned, we see a binding relationship with attendant blessings and obligations. And the blessings are set forth even as the obligations are being set out in Genesis 1:26-31.

The Covenant Established

Now with that as the background, with that as the preface, we see the establishment of this covenant relationship in Genesis 2:4-25. First in verses 4-14, I would like you to see *the blessing of the Covenant of Works* set forth, the blessings of the Covenant of Works. God's original covenant with man was filled with privileges. And Moses gives you a sampling of those privileges. First in verses 4-6, he gives you a brief reminder of what the world was like before the creation was completed in the sixth days. He gives you a synopsis of what the primordial world was like, what the form, what the shape, what the visage of the world was like before God's completion of it. Why does he do that? Because he wants man to appreciate that the form of the world which he experienced in the paradise of Eden is not how the world was before God completed His six days. It is this enormous, undeserved gift that God has given to man. Even this paradisiacal surrounding that he has provided with Adam is a gift of God to him. And God wants Adam to know what the world was like before He finished working on it. It would be like taking him into a garden and saying, "Now Adam, I want you to understand this garden was not always like this. Two years ago, it was a bed full of weeds, but this is what I have done. And of course it is even more radical than that.

There was nothing here, and then there was a something here that was disorganized, and now, I, the Divine Creator, have organized it and filled it and blessed it and made it fruitful and I have given it to you.” So the first thing that we see in these verses is that the paradise of Eden was God’s gift to Adam. It was one of the blessings that God gave to Adam at the very outset of the relationship.

In verses 7-9, Moses continues to meditate on the original environment of Adam as he thinks about his origin. Notice those words, “Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being. The Lord God planted a garden toward the east in Eden and there He placed the man whom He formed. Out of the ground, the Lord God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food. The tree of life in the midst of the garden, the tree of knowledge of good and evil.” So man is formed out of the ground. God breathes into him his own breath and makes him a living soul and immortal being. He plants a garden. He provides man for food. He places two trees in that garden which are distinct from all the other trees. One of these trees is a sacrament. We’ll talk about it in a moment. The other tree is a test. So again, God, having created us from the dirt, blesses us with goodness.

Then in verses 10-14, we are reminded again of the blessing of this original relationship. Man’s original environment is said to be perfect. We have the description of the rivers that flowed out of Eden to water it. We have a description of the natural resources of that land and what we have is a picture of man’s original environment as extraordinarily rich in resources, water, gold, precious stones. So in the first verses of Genesis 2, especially from verse 4 down to verse 14, what we see are the blessings of this original relationship set forth.

Then, as we continue on from verse 15 down to verse 17, we see the responsibilities of this covenant relationship. “Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the Garden of Eden, to cultivate it and keep it. The Lord God commanded the man saying, ‘From any tree of the Garden you may eat freely, but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it, you shall surely die.’” So I want you to see here that in paradise, God has entered into a special

relationship with Adam. We see this in at least three ways. We see it in the blessing of God's image in Genesis 1:26-31, we see it in the provision of the creation Sabbath, in Genesis 2:1-3, and we see it in the blessings of the original creation given to Adam in Genesis 2:4-14. So in each of those ways, God is showing us the kind of condescension, the kind of good and blessed condescension that He is engaged in as He enters into this relationship with Adam.

Now this relationship, of course, is undeserved in the strict sense. And there is nothing about Adam that requires God to do this. But notice also there is no demerit in Adam either. There is no demerit that needs to be overcome in him. He is created. He is good. He is righteous. Just because he is created, doesn't mean that he deserves these blessings. God gives them to him anyway.

As we said last week, we distinguished that kind of activity of God from grace, simply because sin is not present here. Later when he shows this kind of goodness in condescension, it will be grace-based. Why? Because sin is present and grace is for the purpose of overcoming sin. There is no demerit, there is no sin here to overcome. What God is doing is not merited. Adam has not merited this. We use the phrase *Covenant of Works*, not to say that man earned these blessings, but to express the fact that this original relationship had no provision for the continuation of God's blessings if disobedience occurred. **So it was a covenant contingent upon Adam continuing in his obligations.** And here in Genesis 2:15-17, the specific aspect of his obligation, that is, of not eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, is brought into sharp focus.

Now that is not the only thing that Adam has to do in this relationship. We have already seen four things that he is responsible to do. He is responsible for procreation. He is responsible for labor. He is responsible to hallow the Lord's day and he is responsible to procreate in the context of marriage. So those things are already established as obligations. But the negative test and obligation of this original relationship we see here in Genesis 2:17-18. Look at the nature of this relationship.

Let's break it down for a few moments. We have already said first of all that there are ordinances in this relationship. There are positive ordinances. Procreation, labor, Sabbath, and marriage. So there are obligations in the relationship. There are also prohibitions in the relationship. We might put it this way: there are positive obligations—there are things that he is supposed to do, and there are negative obligations—there are things that he is not supposed to do. Specifically, he is prohibited from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The Lord says, “From the tree of knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat.” So you have ordinances. Positive ordinances. Negative ordinances. And you have a consequence spelled out. There is a penalty given: In the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die. So what do we have here? Well, we have a relationship divinely established between God and Adam. So we have a bond. We have life and death consequences in the penalty. So we have a bond in blood. And let me also say that we have blessings implied in this relationship, not only in the ordinances, but also in the presence of the tree of life, because that tree of life reappears where? Not only in Ezekiel, but in Revelation. And where is it? It is in the presence of God and the company of the redeemed. And so it is a hint of what is in store for Adam, if he is faithful in the keeping of the obligations.

And finally, we have these stipulations, these ordinances and prohibitions sovereignly administered by God. And so we have all the elements of a covenant, whether you want to define it as a bond in blood sovereignly administered, or whether you want to define it as a binding relationship with attendant blessings and responsibilities. All the elements of a covenant are there. But the word isn't found. Now this made John Murray very nervous, and so he didn't want to talk about a Covenant of Works. He didn't want to talk about Covenant of Creation. He wanted to talk about this as the Adamic Administration. I am going to come back and talk about those kind of reservations at a later point. But let me just share with you a little bit of speculation and see if you can follow this. Why would the term *covenant* not be found here, if it is so important structurally to this argument, especially as seen in Paul in Romans 5? Well, think about it for a moment. If a covenant was a Near Eastern cultural convention, something that grew up in a Near Eastern

society as a way of expressing binding obligations and promises, could it be that Moses was being careful not to read back the specific terminology of a cultural convention prior to its appearance in human culture? Could it be that by the time of Noahic covenants, the language, the concept of that were well known in human culture in the Near East, but that prior to that, the concept had not fully or adequately developed and that Moses, precisely because he wants to be so faithful to the historical accounts that he is giving, refrains from using the language of covenant although it is entirely appropriate as a concept theologically to the situation? Could it be that the fact that we don't have the word there in Genesis 1-5 is simply a testimony to Moses' strict and particular and careful attention to historical detail in his recounting of the original chapters of the life of man? We will have to ask him when we get to heaven, because ultimately we can't give an answer to that question. But I think it may be interesting if we view the covenant as a human convention that was common in the ancient Near East. We know it was common in the third and in the second millennium BC in the Near East. If we view that as a human convention which God divinely chose to illustrate the nature of His relationship to His people, it makes sense that Moses would have refrained from using the terminology in the original order before that convention had been developed in human culture. Because the minute that God takes up the convention, things about it change, because it is not like any other human agreement or relationship. But the concept is clearly there. The elements are all there.

Why is this Covenant Important?

What is the significance of all this? Well, let me see if I can summarize this for you for a few minutes. As we look at Genesis 1 and 2 in this original covenant relationship, what is significant for us theologically about that original relationship in the Covenant of Works? Well, let me throw out about six things to you here. First, Genesis 1 and 2 give us in no uncertain terms a clear picture of the Creator/creature distinction. We know from Babylonian mythology that creation was often pictured as god birthing the world into being, so that the world was considered to be somehow part of god. This was sort of a Pantheistic notion. God is in the world. The world is in god. They are all connected. And you can't read Genesis 1 and come away thinking that Moses has a hint of that kind of

thinking in the back of his mind, because first there is God, and then later there is this world. And then as Moses explains how the world comes into being, what does he say? God speaks it into being. It is created literally by divine *fiat*. He decrees it into being. So there can be no idea of this world somehow being part of Him and of Him being somehow part of this world. This is a direct assault on all Pantheistic views of God: all views that say that the world is god and god is the world, god is in those trees, or god is in the grass.

Now the beautiful thing about that is it demythologizes the creation. There is a reason why the rise of modern science occurred under the reign of the Protestant understanding of the Creator/creature distinction. You can't go down the street and experiment on a tree that might be God, or a demon for that matter. But a creation which God has brought into being, and over which not only He is sovereign, but man is sovereign, can be studied and harnessed and so the creation is demythologized so that it can be studied. We can learn better how it works, so that we can enhance certain aspects of productivity in creation.

Man's exercise of dominion over the earth is another implication of this Creator-creature distinction. Again, if I am scared that there might be a demon spirit that is locally controlling an oak tree outside, I am probably going to cut a wide path around the oak tree. But when I understand properly that God is in dominion over His creation, then I recognize that there is nothing, there is absolutely nothing that is out from under His providential control. You have to love that beautiful story about the Celtic missionary who winds up in the land of the Franks, and the Franks tell him, "See that oak over there?" "Yep." "That is the oak of Thor." "That oak?" "That is the oak of the god Thor. That one right over there. That is Thor's oak." "Anybody got an ax?" And he heads right over to it and he chops it down. What is he doing? He is saying, "I don't care what god you say is in charge of that oak. My God owns that oak. And I will cut it down if I want to." But the point was to show the sovereignty of God over His creation. Creation is not invested with spirits that are out of control of the living God. God is sovereign. He is distinct from that creation. By the way, that doesn't mean that man is reckless with his treatment of creation. So often you have heard the charges, "Oh,

Christianity, it encourages horrible ecological practices. It encourages people to exploit the environment.” Oh no. You see, we are not the owners, we are just the stewards, we are just working in the vineyard. One day, the Master’s coming back and we are going to have give account for how we used His creation. And so in the very essence of the Christian view of creation there is a rationale for appropriate environmental and ecological concern, because this isn’t our house. It is His. He has given it to us as stewards, and so we had better use it wisely and well. So there is not exploitation implied in dominion. Because why? We are not our own master. We are accountable to Him. By the way, if you have not read Schaeffer on this, Schaeffer will give you lots of ammunition in precisely this area. This is again a nice point of contact with our postmodern culture where you can engage some people to think, because there a many people who say, “Oh it is a traditional western, white Anglo-Saxon male patriarchal system that is responsible for all the ecological and environmental problems in the world today.” And you can say, “Well let’s talk about that a little bit. Let me explain to you the Christian philosophy of creation.”

2. There is a second thing that this original covenant in the structure of Genesis 1 and 2 gives us. It emphasizes the cosmic or universalistic concerns of God. It emphasizes the cosmic or universalistic concerns of God. Now as we have already mentioned before, that is reemphasized in the covenant with Noah and we will look at that later. It is important that we understand that God is concerned with the whole created order, and not just man, as expressed in Genesis 1 and 2, and this protects us from misusing our particularistic doctrine of grace. Let me try and exegete that. As evangelical believers, we may believe that God’s saving grace is visited only upon those who embrace Him by faith. Now we may say additionally, as Reformed evangelical believers, that it is visited only upon those whom God has chosen, who are called. But whatever way, if you’re an evangelical, you have a particularistic view of grace. You don’t believe that everyone is being saved. You believe that only those who trust on the Lord Jesus Christ are being redeemed. What protects you from going to the extreme and denying God’s concern for non-redeemed creation, and for non-redeemable creation? Well, there are a lot of things in the Bible that protect you from that. One of the things that protect you

from that is the fact that in Genesis 1 and 2 we see clearly that God is concerned for the totality of His creation. And the universalistic implications of Genesis 1 and 2 counterbalance our particularistic doctrine of grace by affirming God's broader concerns for humanity. How is that seen? These creation ordinances are just as important for unbelievers as they are for believers. And we ought to work to see unbelievers putting these creation ordinances into practice. It will be a blessing to them and to society and it will in many cases be a gateway to the Gospel. So the creation ordinances are not just for Christians. Creation ordinances, they are for everybody.

3. Third, this original covenant expresses a relationship between God and unfallen, pre-fallen man, which is not by grace. We mentioned this earlier. What do I mean by that? I don't mean that we deserved all the things that God gave us in the original creation. That is not the point. I don't mean that we earned all the things that God gave us in the original creation. I do mean, however, that because we were not estranged from God as He originally created us, that this original relationship was natural and without a mediator. I mean, you only need a mediator if there is a fight. You only need a mediator if there is estrangement. You only need a mediator if two sides are at odds.

Now why is that significant? It is going to be very important for you to understand that this is the point at which Karl Barth's critique of Covenant Theology fails most dramatically. And unfortunately many evangelicals have picked up on some of Barth's ideas at this point and have imported them unwittingly into their own Covenant Theology, so I am quite keen for you to understand how Barth errs here. Barth wants to argue that all, *all* of God's dealings with man are by grace, and that all of God's dealings with man are through Christ, and that Christ's mediation is therefore not a post-fall office or function. It is an eternal function that occurs prior to the fall in human experience. You hear what Barth is saying there? He is saying that from the very beginning God had to relate to man by grace and through Christ. And he basically says that the reason was because of the finiteness of man. And unfortunately you see here a category confusion between finiteness and sin. Now we are going to talk about this in the next point. But I want to introduce it here.

Basically (and Professor Barth would be bouncing off the ceiling if I said this in his presence, and he would deny it up and down, but I think I could prove it to you if you gave me enough time), Barth says that man's fundamental problem in relating to God is not sin, it is that he is man. And in my opinion, and in the historic opinion of the church for two thousand years, that is not the Bible's view of man's basic problem in relationship to God. Notice that God has no problem interacting and interrelating to Adam in an unmediated way in the Garden. Adam understands Him. God talks to him. They walk together in the Garden in the cool of the day. There are stipulations, obligations, relationships, blessings, and no hint of a problem of God entering into a relationship with Adam. But Barth wants to say that it is our very creatureliness that separates us from God.

Now let me say one other thing to be very careful of. Calvin dabbles with this idea. He dabbles with the idea that we always need a mediator, not just because we are sinful, but because we are so vastly inferior to God in our finiteness. And he would appeal to passages like Isaiah 6 and the angels, the beings that surround the throne are doing what? Veiling themselves as they cry, "Holy, holy, holy." Now, were they sinful? No. But they still had to veil themselves in the presence of God. And he will sort of take that and run with that. But Calvin doesn't use this concept like Barth will use it. Now Barth will go back and he will read all of his theology into Calvin, but he is miles away from what Calvin was trying to do with this point. But I want you to understand that this is a key part of Barth's critique of Covenant Theology. He does not like the idea of a Covenant of Works and a Covenant of Grace, or a Covenant of Nature and a Covenant of Grace, because he wants grace to be the only way that God relates to man.

Barth's major error with this is that it underemphasizes sin. You see, Genesis 3 is where Moses is going when he writes Genesis 1 and 2. He wants you to understand that things then were not like they are now. And things are like they are now because of what happens in Genesis 3, and therefore the very nature of the way that God relates to us has to be different. And I do not think that there is any way that you can do justice to the significance of Genesis 3 and man's original sin if you say that

there has always simply been one Covenant of Grace from the very beginning, and there is not a Covenant of Works *and* a Covenant of Grace.

What we are beginning here is an argument for what is called a *bicovenantal structure* as opposed to a *monocovenantal structure* of creation and redemption. The bicovenantal structure of creation and redemption says there is a Covenant of Works *and* a Covenant of Grace, or a Covenant of Nature, and a Covenant of Grace. The Covenant of Nature is prior to sin and therefore it does not have to be mediated and God does not have to provide a mediator or propitiation in order to enter into relationship with man. Whereas, after the fall of man, a mediator is provided out of the graciousness of God, sin is satisfied, and the covenant is fulfilled by Christ in order that we may experience the blessings of the covenant. So you have the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace, but what Barth ends up with is an eternal Covenant of Grace.

And by the way, this is the same thing that Herman Hoeksema comes up with, and it is the same thing that many other types of hyper-Calvinists have come up with. So there is continuity between Barth and certain hyper-Calvinists. In fact, there is a sense in which Barth is the ultimate hyper-Calvinist. In fact, I would call Bart a hypersuperlapsarian. And if you want to get into that with me someday, I can explain what I am talking about there. But this monocovenantal view that says that there has been this eternal Covenant of Grace and that it was in place even before the fall, cannot help but downplay sin and see finiteness as our problem, not sin.

4. So, that moves us on to the fourth significance of this original relationship that we have been describing. By a close study of Genesis 1, 2 and 3, we are enabled to recognize the difference between *finiteness* and *sin*. For instance, one aspect of Adam's finiteness was his need for human companionship expressed in Genesis 2:18, when God says it is not good for man to be alone. But notice that Adam is not held culpable for that. And God doesn't say, it is not good for you to be alone, therefore I can have nothing to do with you without a mediator. No. That is not what happens in Genesis 2:18. Man is recognized to need rest because of his finiteness in Genesis 2:1-3 and so a Sabbath is made for him. He is

not made for the Sabbath, but a Sabbath is made for him. Why? Because he is finite. But is that held against him? No. No. It is a blessing. He is divinely created, unfallen, he is sinless. But his constitution needs a Sabbath rest. And it needs a woman. And so sin and finiteness are not the same thing.

Let me put this in another way. Sometimes you hear this phrase said: “To err is human, to forgive, divine.” I know what they are getting at when they say that. But the point I want to bring across is **that to err is not human, to err is fallen.** To err is fallen. We are not being quintessentially human when we make mistakes. *Mistakes* is an overused word. **We are not being quintessentially human when we sin, we are being quintessentially fallen.** If sin is of the essence of humanness, not only does that raise real problems for God’s original creation, but it makes me wonder what heaven is going to be like. **Sin does not make me more human. It makes me less human.** It is not how God originally created me. And to say, “Man’s basic problem resides in the fact that he is finite and God is infinite and this chasm cannot be crossed, we cannot even conceive Him because he is so majestic, so infinite and we are so finite,” is to miss the whole point of Genesis 3. And Barthian theology over and over confuses finiteness and sin. Again, I think I could argue the case. Barth’s problem was not with sin; it was with man. He basically says, “You know what your problem is? Your problem is that you’re not God. Your problem is that you are not infinite.” And that is not the problem the Bible says that we have. Adam was finite. God did not mock him for that. The problem was that Adam rebelled. Sin is the problem. Rebellion is the problem. Not finiteness. We are going to be finite in glory.

5. Fifthly, this original covenant makes it clear that matter is not evil. This original covenant makes it clear that matter is not evil. God created the world and God called it good. Matter and things are not evil. People’s use of them is. So, if you have proper understanding of the original creation, salvation is not viewed as an escape from matter, or an escape from the body into a pure spirit, as you get in all the manifestations of Gnostic teachings from the first century until today. No, salvation in the biblical sense will involve the whole man, body, and soul, because that

body was created good. **Now it is very significant that right now on the throne of the universe, human flesh sits, in the ascended Lord Jesus Christ who is forever fully God and fully man. The dust of the earth sits on the throne of glory.**

6. Sixthly, and finally, as we study this original covenant, we see that man is created in the image of God and, even after the fall, continues to bear that image, no matter how effaced it is by sin. And thus respect for human beings, as those who are created in the image of God, is established; the equal status and responsibility of all men before God as His stewards of creation is established. Racism and sexism is therefore banished under a Christian worldview, but only under a Christian worldview, since a materialist evolutionist can only argue for human rights by a sheer act of irrationality. There is a reason why Darwinism became a dominant philosophy in nineteenth century England. Because survival of the fittest, far from being a quintessentially anticlassicist argument, is a quintessential class argument which says, "I can give you a reason why I am superior to you; I out evolved you. And therefore I have the right to do with you what I will." So a materialist evolutionist Darwinist can only argue for basic human rights and human dignity by a sheer irrational act of the will. Only a Christian can provide an adequate foundation for appropriate view of human rights. You notice that human rights, or rights at all, are really contained under the category of the covenant in that realm of blessings and obligations. And rights fall under the blessing of the covenant relationship. They are not infinite, by the way, and they cannot be forever multiplied. They are specific and limited, but they are there. And we are the only ones who can give an adequate argument for that today.

Covenant of Works and Covenant of Grace

If you have your Bibles, please open to Genesis 3:14 as we read God's Word.

And the Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field. On your belly shall you go, and dust shall you eat all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed. He shall bruise you on the head and you shall bruise him on the heel." To the woman, He said, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth. In pain you shall bring forth your children; yet your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you." Then, to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree which about which I commanded you saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; cursed is the ground because of you. In toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you and you shall eat the plants of the field by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground. Because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

Amen. And thus ends this reading of God's holy Word, let's pray.

Our Father, we bow before You, we know that those words are words for us as much as they were for Adam and Eve, for we are in Adam born children of wrath. We have inherited not only the original corruption flowing from that sin, but we have inherited original culpability because Adam was our federal head. We thank You, O Lord, that in Christ we have been redeemed from the curse that we were under and we are no longer under that law of the Covenant of Works, but are now under the Covenant of Grace. Help us this day as we contemplate these things not only that we might be better able to communicate the truth to Your people, but also that we may be built up in the truth, that we might grow in our love and appreciation for Your great redemption. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Let me make a couple of comments about the Covenant of Works before we move on to look at what God did in the aftermath of the failure of Adam in the test of probation, specifically with regard to the tree, the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. I mentioned that there have been a number of orthodox Reformed Theologians who have objected to a bicovenantal structure of redemptive history.

We have mentioned that there are some folks who don't want to look at the unfolding plan of God in relationship to humankind in terms of a Covenant of Works and a Covenant of Grace, the Covenant of Works being Pre-fall, and the Covenant of Grace being Post-fall. They actually want to talk about this Covenant of Grace as being the overarching plan that structures all of God's dealing with man both before fall *and* after the fall.

Now, I am not going to respond to that particular critique today. But I want to respond to a permutation of it. Murray wants to still have a two-fold structure of God's dealing with man, part one and part two. But he doesn't want to call the Covenant of Works the Covenant of Works. If any of you have read John Murray's class lectures that are found in the second volume of his collected writings, in an article called *The Adamic Administration*, you will remember that he wants to call this first relationship between God and Adam "The Adamic Administration," not "The Covenant of Works." And there are four reasons he gives for not wanting to call this a Covenant of Works, of why he has a problem with that terminology.

Murray's rational for *The Adamic Administration*

The first reason that he gives for having a problem with this idea is that he says that it downplays the grace of this relationship. The title, The Covenant of Works, downplays the elements of grace in the relationship between God and Adam before the fall.

Secondly, he objects to the term because he says the term *covenant* is not found in this passage. He says the terminology covenant is not found and therefore it is not a good idea to call this relationship a covenant since the terminology is not found.

Thirdly, he says that the *covenant* is a term which, when used in the Scriptures, denotes a relationship between God and man and is uniformly used of a redemptive relationship. And obviously this is in a sense a pre-redemptive relationship between God and Adam.

And finally, he suggests that the term *covenant*, as it is used in the Bible to describe the relationship between God and man, always carries with it a sense of security. We argued this ourselves when we read from Hebrews 6 on the first day of class and commented on the fact that often covenant is linked with assurance. God's covenant is there to help us understand the grounds on which we ought to properly be assured of our salvation. So he argues, it shouldn't be used of this relationship because *covenant* denotes security and Adam fell. So he gives four reasons why this relationship shouldn't be thought of as the Covenant of Works.

And I want to give you a little inside knowledge of Murray's thinking processes for a few moments, because I have access to that and those folks, perhaps, don't have access to that. It is not because I knew Murray, but because I do know a man who was a very good friend of Murray and spent a lot of time talking theology, and especially this point, when Murray came back to Scotland after his time of teaching at Westminster Seminary.

I also want to address this because Murray has had a tremendous impact in the Reformed community in making people a little bit skittish about talking about a Covenant of Works and a Covenant of Grace. And in that sense, as much as I admire Professor Murray, I think that he has done us a disservice. Because the breakdown of a bicovenantal understanding of God's dealing with mankind actually weakens our concept of the Doctrine of Atonement and has a tendency to foster "cheap grace" teaching. Now, with that, my agenda is right out on the table there. I want you to have the strongest possible Reformed doctrine for the atonement that you possibly can have, and I do not want you to teach cheap grace to your people. And you'll hear me pounding in that direction throughout this particular term. So this is why I am going to take issue with Professor Murray.

Now did Professor Murray have a weak doctrine of Atonement? Read

his ***Redemption Accomplished and Applied***. What a wonderful book! And if you have never worked through his teaching on the Doctrine of Atonement, it is wonderful. I think that Murray was an inconsistent Federalist. That is, he was a Covenant Theologian, but he was inconsistent at this point and I think at some points he works out of his theological framework like he is a good old fashioned seventeenth century Scottish Covenant Theologian. And then, he has some little quibbles in the back of his mind which he can't quite square up with that, which make him go the direction of "The Adamic Administration." Let's take each of these four particular complaints that he has about the Covenant of Works and let's say a few things about them.

1. Now, the first thing that he said was that it downplays (this terminology downplays) the grace aspect of the relationship between God and Adam. Now, as we have already said, I want to flatly deny the idea that the relationship between Adam and the Lord prior to the fall was a grace-based relationship. Let me use one of Murray's own arguments: The terminology of grace is never used in the Scripture to denote a relationship where no demerit exists. Grace is always used to denote God's relationship to those who are already in a position of demerit. And so to talk about God and Adam having a grace-based relationship is unbiblical. There is no demerit prior to Adam's fall for God to overcome. Now does that mean that Adam deserved everything that the Lord gave him? No. Does that mean that Adam earned the right to the blessings that God gave to him? No. That is not what we are getting at either. But once God has made commitments to Adam based upon Adam's obedience, Adam could be secure in God following through those commitments.

And that is precisely why this thing was called by the Old Covenant Theologians, *The Covenant of Works*. In other words, it was obedience based. Adam was in a relationship of blessing which he didn't deserve. God, in His goodness, has drawn him into that relationship and basically said this: "Adam, walk in obedience and this blessing will be yours and there will be more." It wasn't, "Adam you're in a state of non-blessing and if you will obey, I will bring you into a state of blessing." God, in His goodness, plops Adam into a state of blessing and He says, "Just obey and

you will not only have this blessing, you will have more.” That is implied in that probationary test. There will come a time, Adam, if you walk in obedience, I will confirm you in this and I will give you more blessings yet.

That is why the terminology of Covenant of Works was used. So I want to rebut Professor Murray’s argument by saying that that is not how the terminology of grace is used in the Scripture itself. So if you want to use an exegetical argument, his argument against the terminology against the Covenant of Works fails at that point. Now, does that mean by saying that God’s relationship to Adam prior to fall *was not* a grace relationship, are we downplaying God’s favor or His goodness or His blessing? No. We want to play up those things. We want to stress those. We want to stress that there was absolutely nothing in the world that made God enter into that kind of relationship with Adam but His love.

God did not have to overcome innate sinfulness in Adam in order to enter into that relationship. And our *Confession*, by the way, gets this exactly right. In *The Westminster Confession*, chapter 7, section 1, it says that “the distance between God and His creatures is so great that there would no way for His creatures to enjoy the fruition of His relationship unless He condescended by means of a covenant to enter into a relationship with them.” And notice what it does. It doesn’t suggest that there is any demerit there in man. It simply suggests that God is so great and God is so exalted that there would be no way that we could expect the fruition of intimate fellowship and relationship with Him unless He, of His own volition, and out of His own love, determined to enter into such a relationship. And that He did, and He did it in the Garden with Adam in that original covenant. So I want to counteract Murray’s first argument by saying, I think he has confused terminology there about grace.

Now, you know, we can quibble about *grace* as opposed to *mercy*, or grace in graciousness, and we even got into a little discussion about that last week. The important issue is, of course, the presence of demerit. That is my point. There may be different terminological ways of getting at this, and I am not saying that there are not different terminological ways of getting at it, but the main point I want to make is you have got

one relationship in which the demerit of sin does not exist, and then you have another relationship in which the demerit of sin does exist, and the beautiful thing about a bicovenantal structure is, it makes this distinction clear. And if you wipe out that bicovenantal structure and you say, “It is all just one big glop of a Covenant of Grace,” what do you do? You downplay the difference between a relationship in which demerit must be overcome, and a relationship in which demerit is not present at all. And that is a very serious downplaying.

And if you do that, that is why I say, you have to teach cheap grace. You see, if you downplay the difference between God having to overcome demerit and God not having to overcome demerit, you by the very virtue of that fact, have to teach cheap grace. That is why I say Murray was not consistent in that because he still wants to have this double structure. He still wants to have a bicovenantal structure but just not call the first covenant a covenant. So he ends up with an Adamic Administration and a Covenant of Grace. But for him, he still has this wall that is the great divide of the fall.

2. His second argument is that the word *covenant* isn't there. We have responded to that already in part, and that response is that there are examples in the Scripture where a covenant is certainly present but where the terminology is not. And again, in my opinion, this is a reflection of a little bit of the weakness of biblical theology coming through in Murray. Murray was very influenced by Vos. And as much as we appreciate Vos's work, and the work of those evangelical biblical theologians at the beginning of the century, I wonder sometimes if they did not allow the exegesis to circumscribe their theology, and where they didn't see certain terminology they questioned whether concepts were present.

In the Reformed tradition, we have always believed that everything in Scripture is true and authoritative and it is our only rule in faith and practice, not only in what it says explicitly, but what it says implicitly by good and necessary consequence. That is a very important doctrine. And not only in the Reformed faith, but in Christendom. For example, if you reject that hermeneutic, if you reject the Doctrine of the Trinity, you reject all manner of Orthodox Christian teaching.

Let me give you an example of this. A friend of mine and I, when we were in Scotland, were doing devotions together for a period of time, and we decided we would work in the Gospel of Matthew. And each of us was trying to pick up on themes and do some outlining in the Gospel of Matthew as to major themes that Matthew presses in his Gospel. And I had picked up on several of them, basically just going through word studies and seeing repeated words that Matthew was using on a regular basis. My friend came in one day and he said, "You know one of the themes I see Matthew pressing here is the issue of faith, the importance of a person's personal embrace of Christ as Messiah." I ran a quick word study on that and numerically faith was not one of the major categories if you are just counting words. It was not one of the major categories that came up. The categories that I had come up with had far more words in them and hence more verses in them than his. Let me give you an example. Maybe I would have come with the category of the idea of Jesus' fulfilling prophecy and you know that repeated language in Matthew and this fulfilled what the prophets said. And that occurs something like 50 times in Matthew. He hits that over and over. So that is an easy theme to pick up in Matthew. And faith was only mentioned, let's say 18 times or something like that. And when I first heard my friend say that, I thought, "Hum, I am not really sure whether that is a major theme." But my friend who was working with me was a literature major and he did know how to read and I think what he had actually picked up on was a theme that was definitely there which was not supported by word study, but which was definitely there. And as I have been working back over the last two years in the Gospel of Matthew for the purpose of preaching, this theme of the importance of faith in the Messiah, I mean it knocks you over the head in the Gospel of Matthew. It is clearly a significant theme. It is the divide between the crowds and the Pharisees and the true believers of Christ in the Gospel of Matthew. It is a major theme, even though the term faith is there, Matthew does not hit you over the head with it. So, over and over in the Scripture we will find places where the concept will be used, and where the terminology is not. And I think it is shallow simply to stop and say well, the terminology is not there, therefore the concept isn't. I think we can see even a covenantal structure given at the end of Genesis 1 and in Genesis 2 in terms of this relationship between God and Adam. All the elements are there. And so

that, in my opinion, is Murray's weakest argument of all: Terminology is not there, therefore we should refrain from calling it a covenant.

The authority of Scripture extends not simply to what it explicitly says but also to what can be deduced from Scripture legitimately. So that someone may say, "Well there is no proof text for the Trinity in the Scripture." Well, we could argue that point. But no matter what our answer to that was, let's say if we said, "Let's assume for the sake of argument that there isn't one proof text for the Trinity in Scripture," that does not mean that the doctrine of the Trinity isn't a scriptural argument. And then we could proceed to operate both exegetically and theologically to answer that question. And I think for those of us who come from an evangelical tradition, we like to be able to say, "Turn to Genesis 14:3 and I will show you." But sometimes, biblical teaching has to be presented with a little more nuance than that. It is no less explicitly God's Word for us. It is no less truth. It just means that there may not be one verse that you can turn to seal the particular issue.

One of the classic arguments that you get if you have ever been a student at a state university where you had a religion professor who enjoyed bashing evangelicals, or if you have been at a private religious college where you had a professor in a religion department who was really exalting in the fact that he was dashing to the rocks the faith of these young evangelical students coming to school, is they will say something to you like this: "There is not a single passage in all the New Testament that says Jesus is God and you evangelicals have just made that up." Well, you know, we could argue the point of the *Theos* passages and we could look at eleven passages in the New Testament which come pretty close to using just that language. But once you have granted that person his faulty logic you have a problem. And I might add that a statement like that without qualification in and of itself could actually be a heresy. That could be a "Jesus only" heresy there. Jesus is God and there is no Doctrine of the Trinity. You could interpret even that statement in a heretical fashion. So there is a reason why the New Testament uses the language that it uses in that area and you have to be careful about an argument that says unless you can show it to me in black and white, then clearly it is not there.

That is the argument that heretics used against the Orthodox party in the early church with regard to the Doctrine of Christ, both at Nicaea and Chalcedon. The Arians were arguing, “Well look, we just want to use scriptural language about Jesus and you guys keep wanting to bring in these Greek philosophical terms. Why can’t we just say, ‘Okay we all believe what John 8:38 says, you know, why can’t we just all get along?’” And the Orthodox party said, “Because you are twisting the meaning of Scripture we have got to find language that you can’t use, in order to convey what the Scripture is trying to convey because you are claiming to believe what the Scripture says, when in fact you are undercutting the doctrine of the Scripture. So we don’t care whether you parrot the language of Scripture when you are undercutting what it means.” So there the distinction between what it says and what it means becomes significant.

3. Murray’s third argument against the use of the terminology of “Covenant of Works” was it is something that is used in a redemptive relationship in the Scripture. No question. It is overwhelmingly used in redemptive relationships in Scripture. But let me mention that there are certainly blessing and spiritual overtones to this relationship established in the Garden. Yes, it is true that there is no demerit to be overcome here. But there are certainly what we might call saving, eternal, nontemporal blessings that are in view to be conveyed to Adam in the Garden under the Covenant of Works. In other words, it is not merely an earthly blessing that is contemplated in Genesis 1 and 2. And so again, I don’t think that the argument, “Well everywhere else we find it, it is connected with something redemptive,” is valid. It is just lexically true. From Genesis 6:18, following, you are already in a redemptive framework. Only two chapters of the Bible are in a nonredemptive setting and everything else is in a redemptive setting. I mean you haven’t discovered much by saying that.

4. The final thing, of course, that he argues is that *covenant* also always involves security. It is there to assure you that you can’t lose your salvation. And what happens here? Well, Adam rebels against God. He is kicked out of the Garden. The relationship fails. And what do you say about that? Well, you simply say this. There would have been all the

security in the world under this relationship if Adam had obeyed. And the problem wasn't in the covenant; the problem was in Adam. It was Adam's disobedience that caused the insecurity of this particular relationship and, of course, that is the uniqueness of this relationship that in the Covenant of Works; there is no provision for blessing despite demerit. That is the glory of the New Covenant, and in fact I don't think we can properly appreciate that fact about the Covenant of Grace until we see the fact that God can enter into a relationship where there is no provision for blessing despite disobedience. You know the relationship between God and the fallen angels: Fallen angels, they don't get a second chance. There is no provision for forgiveness for the fallen angels. So when God enters into the Covenant of Grace, He is doing something quite extraordinary.

Influences on Murray

Now, here is the inside scoop. As Donald Macleod talked with John Murray when he came back from Scotland, there were a number of things that had made a major impact on Murray with regard to Covenant Theology. For one thing, Murray was impacted by Vos and by a guy named Adolph Desmond. Desmond was a big time German New Testament scholar at the turn of the twentieth century who had argued very strongly that *Covenant* should not be translated as a *contract* or a *treaty* or a mutual relationship, but it ought to be translated as a *disposition* or a *testament*, something that was one-sided as opposed to two-sided. And Desmond did this because he had uncovered all this literature from Greek legal documents contemporary to the New Testament and many New Testament scholars followed Desmond for a period of time. His views have since then been overturned, but he was very influential in the first part of the twentieth century. And so Murray was very influenced by this one-sided idea of covenant. And he found the obediencial aspect of the historic Covenant of Works to be a little two-sided for his taste. So, you will see him, when he defines *covenant* in his little tract called *The Covenant of Grace*, he will define it in a very one-sided, a very monopluric sort of way. And he is following Vos there and he is following Desmond.

But, the other interesting thing is, is that Murray indicated to Macleod

that he had actually been impacted a bit by Barth's argumentation on the nature of the Covenant of Works and so although Murray would have been stridently in opposition to Barth's doctrine of the Scripture and his doctrine of the Atonement, yet he was swayed to a certain extent by some of Barth's arguments regarding Covenant of Works. And Macleod had opportunity to interact with him on that and argue against those particular points, but Murray held to his objections and to this day, Westminster Seminary has tended to be a little bit skittish about the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace framework. You will hear more guys coming out of Westminster talking about *The Adamic Administration*, unless they were big fans of Meredith Kline when they were there. And there is a rather nasty little fight that goes on between the descendents of Murray and now Gaffin, and the descendants of Kline over this whole issue. There has been a pretty significant division on precisely this issue with Kline insisting on the language of the Covenant of Works, and with Murray having problems with that language. So if you run across articles by Calvinists out of the Westminster sphere, and sense that there is an argument going on that you don't know why, this may be one of the origins of that particular argument.

The Covenant of Commencement – Robertson

The Doctrine of Sin

Now, having said a few words about Murray's objection to the Covenant of Works, I would like to look at the Covenant of Commencement, as Robertson calls it, God's inauguration of the Covenant of Grace after the fall. And before we look at that inauguration of the Covenant of Grace, let's just say a few things about the Doctrine of Sin as it is found in the first thirteen verses of Genesis 3. Genesis 3:1-13 is absolutely essential to our understanding of the Gospel, because without an understanding of sin, and our culpability, we cannot understand or embrace grace. It

seems to me that at least three things are taught to us about sin in Genesis 3:1-13. In the first five verses, we have this conversation between Satan and the woman. It constitutes his temptation of her. And the very nature of the woman's response to the tempter indicates to us that sin is being defined for us here as rebellion. The picture of sin here is a picture of rebellion. There are lots of legitimate ways of describing sin. Many of you, if you have been through Knox Chamblin's classes on Paul, will have heard the various terminologies that Paul will use for sin. He has various different terms and images that he will use for sin. Here the image is rebellion. The serpent serves as the tool of Satan in the passage. Sin is not presented as something that is self-existent, something that is always been in the world, something that is co-equal and co-eternal with good. Sin is depicted in this passage as something that *comes into* the world.

Now God's sovereignty is stressed throughout the account by reminding us, for instance, that even the Lord made the serpent. Notice the phraseology of the passage, "The serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made." So, even though you may fear when you are reading some of these early narratives by Moses that Moses is depicting a God who isn't quite in control, there are ever so clever indications throughout of the absolute sovereignty of God. In this narrative you may be wondering, "What in the world is Satan doing interfacing with God's creation like this if God's in control?" And then later, when Cain sins, you may be wondering, "Why does God react like He does?" Or at the end of Genesis 3, when God says, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us knowing good and evil, now lest he stretch out his hand and take from the tree of life and eat and live forever, let Us drive him from the Garden." You may feel like, "Well, is God indicating that man can do something that He wouldn't be able to control?" And you can go to the story of the Tower of Babel and see God disrupting that process and saying, "We have got to go down and intervene lest they build a building to the skies." And it sounds like God is something less than sovereignly in control.

But upon closer examination, Moses is actually providing some pretty, sometimes some clever, theological humor. To give you an example on the Tower of Babel scenario, what does Moses tell you that they were

building the tower out of? Anybody remember? Bricks and mortar. Now Moses knew a little bit about bricks, didn't he? He had supervised the making of a few bricks in his day, okay. He could tell you about bricks and mortar as a building material. Okay. He had seen a people have to make brick without straw. He knew what the significance of that was. And in Moses' world, bricks were an inferior building material to stone. So when Moses tells you that they were going to build a tower to the sky out of bricks and mortar, it is kind of like, "Ha, ha, ha, they are going to do what?"

Now again, on top of that you know that the idea was not that they were literally going to build a tower into heaven, but this was going to be in the form of a ziggurat, just like some of the great structures that archeologists have unearthed in that world there today. So there are subtle things in the text to let you know that Moses didn't have the slightest fear that God was somehow going to lose control of this situation. The fallacious man is shown at every point, and even so in this passage, Satan, the great enemy of God, the serpent, who is craftier than any beast which the Lord God has made. So the Lord God is in complete control in this passage.

But the tempter begins with an insinuation against the Lord rather than an argument. The question that he puts initially to the woman in Genesis 3:1 is not meant to query whether God had said what He has said. "Has God said you may not eat from any tree of the Garden?" The question is put to the woman in order to entice her to question God's judgment. Notice, Satan makes God's prohibition harsher than it is. Think how often the world does this to Christians. You know Christianity doesn't let you do anything fun. That is sort of the thrust of this particular argument. I mean God doesn't let you do anything. He is not going to let you eat from any of the trees in the Garden. So the prohibition, the restriction, is overstated at that point. And his question, "Has God said" is not saying to Eve, "Did God say that?" It is saying, "Is He so unreasonable as to have made that kind of restrictive prohibition?" He is inviting Eve to question God's judgment. He is inviting Eve to do what? To stand in judgment over the Lord. And that is the essence of rebellion—where you forget that God made you and now you

stand in rebellion over the Lord.

One of the brightest high school students that I ever had the privilege of working with, is now a godly wife and mother of an active church officer in Nashville, Tennessee. When she first came to St. Louis, her father had been transferred with a major telephone company into St. Louis and they had been going to relatively moderate to liberal kinds of Presbyterian churches. They accidentally stumbled into our PCA church and the father really didn't like the church, but the kids loved it, and the mom loved it and so they sort of begged Dad to settle in and come to our church. But interacting with Nancy was always a challenge because she was very intelligent and she was very sensitive. And when we were tackling the doctrine of Hell, you know, it wasn't something detached and intellectual for her. It was real. And I will never forget the look in her eyes, that Wednesday night when it dawned on her that I really believed that there was a hell and that there were people there. And you know, she cared about me, and I cared about her, and she said, "I just can't believe that you believe that." And we engaged in a long discussion that night about how there could be a hell—how could there be a hell, if there is a loving God. How could a loving God create a place like that? And how could He send people to be there? And by the way, it was Nancy who drove the point home to me that the problem is not what people often think it is. So often people lock into the problem of how people get to hell, (*aka* "Predestination versus free will"). That is kid stuff. The problem is hell. Who *cares* how somebody gets there? The problem is the fact that it is there and that there are people in it. That is the real problem. And Nancy, she had locked onto that with her sharp mind, just like a bulldog and wouldn't let go. And we went round and round. And frankly, she had me baffled. I had run out of all my apologetic bag of tricks in terms of trying to argue this point with her. She knew that I had a strong biblical presentation of the truth, but she couldn't accept that truth because the pain of that truth was so great to her. She just couldn't get her head around it. And finally I said to her, I said, "Nancy, are you a sinner?" "Yes, I am a sinner." "And you do things that hurt your parents and hurt your friends from time to time? You do wrong things?" "Yes, I do." "And you are unfair sometimes and you are unkind and you agree with that?" "Yes, absolutely I do." And I said, "Let me ask you this: Has

God ever done anything wrong to you?” “Oh, no, of course not.” “Has He ever been unfair to you?” “No, never.” “And you believe that God is good?” “Absolutely. I believe God is good.” And I said, “Well, let me ask you this: So what you are saying is really this, that you, Nancy, who admit that you are sinner, you are worried that God is going to do something wrong here?” And she stopped for few minutes and she said, “Now I guess that is what I am saying.” I said, “You Nancy, who hurt people, who admit to me that God has never hurt you and never done wrong and He has never been unfair, you’re just a little afraid that He might be a bit out of line on this particular thing? Isn’t that what you are saying?” “I guess that is what I am saying.” I said, “That is kind of ridiculous, isn’t it? That you and me, sinners, worry that the perfect God might do something wrong?” Now in the sincerity of her question, and I want you to hear, I am not downplaying the sincerity of that question, there was hidden rebellion. Because she had decided that she was more caring, more loving, more concerned about people than God. And she is not, and you are not, and I am not. But she had lifted her sense of compassion above the Almighty’s and she was concerned that something that God had said in His Word was less compassionate than she would be if she were in charge.

And that is the essence of rebellion and that was what Satan was trying to tempt Eve with; that was the direction that he wanted her to go. And Eve answers pretty well initially, you’ll see there in verse 2, she says, “From the fruit of the tree, we may eat.” So she contradicts him. She says, “No, we can eat from the fruit of the trees from the Garden, but from the fruit of the tree in the middle of the Garden, God says, you shall not eat it or touch it, or you will die.” So she starts off by contradicting the serpent. She rejects the implication that God has done something that is not very wise or fair or good.

But notice how she already has begun to answer on Satan’s own terms. Two mistakes she makes. First of all, notice that she adds words to the response. She says, she indicates that God had said we are not to *touch* the fruit, and of course that was not part of the proscription that had been given to Adam in Genesis 2, as far as we know. And given the economy of words in these passages, we may assume that Moses had

some specific reason for including that particular report. In other word, if she were just simply expanding on a shortened account that had previously been given, one wonders why Moses would have included that in order to contrast with the previous account that had been given.

Secondly, notice she gives a wrong motive for obedience. She says, "You shall not eat from it, or touch it, lest you die." So there is an indication here that the motivation is rather than keeping this command for God's glory, keeping lest we die. So, we already see a crack in the dike here.

Then, Satan openly contradicts the Word of the Lord in verse 4. Notice that Satan quotes the Lord better than Eve does, except he adds a negation. Instead of the Lord's original words, which were "*You shall surely die,*" Satan says "*You shall surely not die.*" And so he emphatically contradicts the Lord. And so we see both in Adam and Eve's decision in this passage and in Satan's attack and assault on Lordship, it is rebellion. Satan is rebelling against the Lord's Word directly. "You know, I am going to contradict what the Lord has said to you." And Eve and Adam are being tempted to trust their judgment and the advice of Satan more than the Word of the Lord. In both cases, Adam and Eve and the serpent are doing what? Setting themselves up over the Lord to judge for themselves what is right and wrong. So we have got a Lordship issue, we have got a rebellion issue. So sin is depicted as rebellion in this passage.

Verses 6 and 7 make it clear as well that sin always involves shame. Sin always involves shame. You see in verse 7, "Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they knew that they were naked and they sewed fig leaves together and they made themselves coverings." So disobedience has consequences. And one of the consequences of sin is shame. Utterly unexpected consequences. They had been told that they would be enlightened. They would be like God and what in fact happened was they were in enlightened in a horrifying way. They woke up to an experience that they had never had before. The experience was shame.

Then, it is made clear in verses 8-13 that sin is not only rebellion, sin not only brings shame, it is made clear that sin disrupts divine/human fellowship and human/human fellowship. In other words, it disrupts

relationships, both vertically and horizontally: relationships between God and man and between man and man. Verse 8 depicts this loss of relationship with the Lord. They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the Garden in the cool of the day and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord in among the trees of the Garden. So there is estrangement, man in hiding because of his sin.

Then we see in the following verses, especially 9-11 the estrangement between Adam and Eve. Isn't it interesting, in verse 8 we are told that the man and his wife hid themselves from the Lord. So the two of them together hid themselves among the trees. And then we have in verse 9, the Lord God called the man and said to him, "Where are you?" and he said, "I heard the sound of You in the Garden, I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid myself." The personal pronouns are overwhelming in this passage. Where did Eve go? She just disappeared off the face of the earth. Now maybe we can relate to the psychology of that, you know when you are caught red-handed and suddenly you're the only person in the world because you were just caught red-handed. But you can already see the fracturing of the relationship. It is every man for himself at this point. Eve, bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, all of that is gone in a flash. And then, of course, the blame shifting begins. "Who told you, who gave you?" "The woman, which You made, you know. It is her fault and it is Your fault, Lord." And so this is the scenario that confronts us when we come to Genesis 3:14-24.

The Curse

Now here is what I would like for us to do. I want to look closely with you at these words of curse. And I want you to see at least three things. I want you to see first of all, that ironically, these words of curse are the first step forward in the Covenant of Grace. **These words of cursing are the first step forward in the Covenant of Grace.** Particularly, I want you to note that in these curses, blessings are intertwined. In these curses, blessings are intertwined. So the words of curse are often times backhanded blessings. Secondly, I want you to see that the Creation Ordinances are not only mentioned but reinforced as continuing responsibilities. And then I want you to note that there is a movement towards restoration in this passage. There is a movement towards

restoration. Notice that the words of Genesis 3:14-19 follow the order of the transgression. The serpent was the first transgressor, so he is first addressed. Then Eve is addressed, then Adam. Notice also, that that order culminates with Adam because he is the one who is ultimately held responsible. It is a very interesting thing in this passage that God does not ultimately place the blame of sin on the serpent but upon Adam because he is the federal head. That also ties in with a very important aspect of our understanding of sin. I think a lot of times, even in the Christian community, we get sort of a Flip Wilson, “the devil made me do it” kind of attitude towards sin, or at least original sin. Whereas Murray has that wonderful quote that “there is no external power in the universe that can cause a rational being to sin. That movement, that decision, comes from within.” We are never robots in sin.

Now it is also interesting as we look at these curses, no question is put to the serpent, you know. God speaks to Adam first, and questions him. He speaks to Eve, and questions her. And then immediately begins a curse against the serpent. Why? Because he was already convicted and already excluded from pardon. The fact that Satan is in the Garden in the form of serpent lets you know that the Fall in the angelic world has already taken place. There couldn't have been a tempter there if the fall of Satan and his angels hadn't already occurred. And God has absolutely no intention of remedying that rebellion. And it stands as a stark reminder at the outset that what God is about to do for Eve and for Adam, He doesn't have to do this. He could continue to be the God of love eternally and not remedy their sin. And it magnifies the glory of His grace that He does precisely that. He remedies sin. He inaugurates a program of redemption.

Now this word in Genesis 3:14 is formally spoken to the serpent, but it is directed towards Satan. And it is also important to note that this curse contains implicit blessing. In fact, it may contain the greatest of the blessings stated in all the curses, especially in verse 15. Genesis 3:15 shows us a divinely established enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. And that enmity, that warfare, that strife, is the most blessed strife that has ever existed in the history of mankind. Because God to put enmity between Satan and the woman is to drive a

wedge between the woman and the enemy of her soul. For God to say, “I am establishing a never-ending war between Eve, between her descendants, between the serpent, and his descendants,” is to say, “I am putting up a barrier of protection for the woman and for her descendants after her to protect her from concluding a false peace with the serpent and his descendants.” So this is the most blessed thing that God could ever do, is to establish warfare. And the whole framework of the Christian life in our wilderness experience in the Old Testament as it is described and our spiritual warfare described in the New Testament flows from this. There are many times we yearn for peace in this life, a cessation of this warfare. That would be the most dangerous thing that could ever happen because this is the most blessed war that was ever inaugurated. It is a just war. It is there for the eternal benefit of our souls. And it is inaugurated right there in Genesis 3:15 when God says, “and I will put enmity between you and the woman.”

The talking serpent.

A couple of comments about the talking serpent before we move on. Let me say that I think this is another element of the narrative that Moses is highlighting to remind us how ridiculous this rebellion of Eve is. There is no indication that there were other talking animals in the Garden. The talking serpent should have definitely been a red light for Eve. Again, we have the picture of an animal tempting and arguing with a human when just a few verses previously, who had been put in charge of the animals? The humans. There again is a picture of what happens, the reversal of order and priorities. when sin occurs. So there is a second element of the narrative designed to point out the irony of sin. Finally, this idea of Satan inhabiting the body of an animal is not unheard of. Think of pigs in the New Testament, remember? And the idea of an animal being used to convey revelatory spiritual truth is not unheard of. Remember Balaam's ass. And by the way, I love that narrative in Numbers on Balaam's ass in the King James Version. Go back and read it sometime because Balaam's ass, you remember, keeps talking to Balaam and you know what the first word of response of Balaam is to his ass in the King James Version? “Nay.” And I have always gotten a kick out of that. You know, here is Balaam saying “Nay,” and the ass saying, “You know but Balaam, we can't go that direction, there is an angel.” So Calvin says this about the talking

serpent:

“Though the impious make a noise, there is nothing justly to offend us in the mode of speaking as a serpent by which Moses describes Satan. Add to this the baseness of human ingratitude is more clearly hence perceived, that when Adam and Eve knew that all animals were given by the hand of God into subjection to them, yet they suffered themselves to be lead away by one of their own slaves into rebellion against God. As often as they beheld one of the animals, which were in the world, they ought to have been reminded by that both of the supreme authority and the singular goodness of God. But on the contrary when they saw the serpent and apostate from his Creator, not only did they neglect to punish it, but in violation of all lawful order, they subjected and devoted themselves to it as participators in the same apostasy. What can be imagined more dishonorable than this extreme depravity? And thus I understand the name of the serpent, not allegorically as some foolishly do, but in its genuine sense.”

And so that is Calvin’s response to the allegorical interpretation of the serpent. That was a good question. I just wanted to mention that briefly since someone had asked about that at the end of class.

God’s curse on the serpent

The curse of the Lord against the serpent in Genesis 3:15. We have said here that in this curse there is implicit blessing for mankind, because for God to put enmity between Satan and the woman is to drive a wedge between the woman and the enemy of her soul. And in fact, we have the seed form here in this doctrine of the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent in Genesis 3:15—by the way that theme will run throughout the book of Genesis and be picked up by Paul in Galatians, especially with regard to the seed of Abraham—but in this passage, beginning here in Genesis 3:15, we have the seed of the doctrine of predestination. We have God clearly dividing the world into two camps, the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, and we have God taking initiative for the woman in her salvation. So you have the seed of the doctrine of election. By our nature, we are at enmity with God, but by His will, He changes our nature so that we are at enmity with Satan. And so this enmity is the most wonderful enmity that there can be for a sinner.

Now, the enmity is on three fronts in Genesis 3:15. Look closely at the passage. First, God says, “between you and the woman,” speaking to the serpent. So it is between Satan and the woman; there is an individual enmity to begin with between Satan and the woman.

Why does the Lord begin by establishing enmity between the serpent and the woman? Well, first, because the woman was the first seduced. So He begins with her in the remedy to the seduction. She was first seduced into sin and so God immediately begins His remedy with her. Second, because this enmity establishes the role that the woman will have in redemption. It establishes the role that the woman will have in redemption. By her, the door of sin was opened into the world. But now she will have a role in salvation. That is, the woman will be the bearer of the seed. And the seed, eventually Jesus, will be the source of salvation. So even as she was the door of sin into this world, so also, she will be the bearer of the seed of salvation.

Notice the second level of enmity, the enmity between the seeds: the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. So this is an expansion of the conflict. There is not just individual conflict between Satan and Eve, but between their seeds.

Now, who is the woman’s seed? To whom is that referring? Eve was the mother of Cain, just as well as she was the mother of Abel, so who is this seed referring to? It does not refer to all mankind clearly. Clearly. The seed of the woman is not every human being descended from Eve. That is made clear as soon as we get to Genesis 4:8. And John tells us explicitly in I John 3:12 that Cain was of the evil one. So though Cain was physically the son of Eve, yet spiritually, he was of the seed of the serpent.

Now that again reminds us that family lineage is no guarantee of grace. He may have been in the physical family of Adam and Eve, but yet he was of the seed of the serpent. So when we refer to the woman’s seed, it can’t mean all mankind because immediately in Genesis 4, we come upon one of her descendants who is of the evil one. So, who does it refer to? It refers to the descendants of the woman in whom God sets enmity

against Satan. It refers to all of the descendants of the woman in whom God sets enmity against Satan. And we will look at some examples of this in just a few minutes.

Who is Satan's seed? Well, all those in whom God did not set enmity with Satan. And Moses gives you a string of them from Genesis 4 through Genesis 11 and further.

One last thing, before we look at an example of this theme of the seeds in Genesis. If you look at the third front of enmity in Genesis 3:15, you will see this phrase, *it* or *he*, shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel. And notice here that the conflict is again individual. The conflict between you, Satan, and it, or he, the singular seed of the woman.

So two representatives, one representing all the hardened hosts of hell, the other representing the redeemed hosts of God, engage in hand-to-hand combat. And so the history of redemption is the history of God-originated enmity culminating in the conflict between Satan and the singular seed who is Christ, Paul says in Galatians 3:16.

And the development of this conflict between the two seeds can be seen in the period recorded by Moses in Genesis 4 – 11. You can see the seed of Satan in the life of Cain in Genesis 4:1-17. You can see it in the life of Lamech in Genesis 4:19-24. You can see it in the description of Noah's contemporaries in Genesis 6:1-6, and you remember the phrase, "and every intention of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually." That is the description of Noah's contemporaries. Then again you can see it in Nimrod, the man hunter, in Genesis 10:8-10 and then you can see it in Genesis 11:1-9 in the builders of the Tower of Babel. So you see this theme developing there. Those who follow in the line of Cain in wickedness.

On the other hand, we can see the seed of the woman and God's grace on the seed of the woman in Genesis 4-11. In Genesis 4:25-26, we see Seth as one who is in the line of grace and under whose influence people began to call out upon the Lord and corporately worship. We see the godly Enoch in Genesis 5:22-24, we see the godly Lamech in Genesis

5:28-29, father to Noah. And we see Noah himself in Genesis 6:8-9, and verse 22 as part of the seed of the woman. So when we refer to Genesis 3:15 as the first giving of the Gospel, as the *protoevangelium*, that is not just wishful thinking by allegorizing early church interpreters. Clearly here, we have in Genesis 3:15, the very seed of the Gospel. Matthew Henry says this; “For by faith in this promise, we have reason to think our first parents and the patriarchs before the flood were justified.” And so in this establishment of enmity between the woman and Satan and between her seed and his seed, we see the very root of the Gospel and of divine election.

So this warfare is the very evidence of life and grace. That is very important for us to remember, pastorally speaking. We will have many Christian friends, perhaps ourselves, who will be depressed from time to time, because of the eternal turmoil we have because of sin in our lives. And yet an appropriate sorrow and concern over indwelling sin is not a sign of spiritual death. It is a sign of spiritual life. It is when I am trying to deny that I have sin to deal with that I am in trouble, not when I am grieving over the continual fight against sin. That is a sign of spiritual life. And that flows from the reality of this enmity that God has established. This kind of warfare is the very evidence of life and grace. If we can be at peace with sin, or reject the message of repentance, that is the sign of soul sickness. That is the sign of death.

And notice how often in the history of the church, the call of those who are the tool of Satan within the church is to do what? To make peace with the world. We see that is not our call to make. The church is called to say “No” to the world, not because it hates the world, understand that. This feeds into a good question that was asked earlier. When we start talking about the “us and them”—the divide between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent—doesn’t that lead into an attitude that builds an improper hatred for those who are created in the image of God and yet not redeemed, and as such, how do we relate to them?

The church must say “No” to the world; the church must refuse to be at peace with the world in order to love the world. So you can’t say “yes” to the church until you have first said “no” to the world. You can’t say, “I love you truly,” until you have been willing to say, “I will not tell you that

what will destroy you is good for you.” So you are not loving a person when you say, “Oh yes, I love you and you just go right on in that behavior which will land you in hell,” anymore that you could tell a friend who is an alcoholic, “I love you so much that I am going to buy booze for you.” That is not loving. So the church must say “no” to the world in order that it can say, “yes” to the world. There must be that divine enmity in order that we can preach the Gospel of peace.

So the enmity is not there so that we can build an improper hatred towards unredeemed human beings. The enmity is there so that we see that proper distinction between grace and condemnation, between righteousness and unrighteousness, between sinners saved by grace and sinners who have not yet owned their sin. That barrier must stay there in order for the church to have anything to say to the world. If we are no different than they are, then I have nothing to say to them of use or of help. So the distinction must be there, not so that we can beat our breasts and feel really smug and proud like the Pharisee, but the distinction must be there so that we can say we understand the circumstance that you are in, we have been there ourselves, but by God’s grace we have been brought from that and we know that God’s grace can change your life as well. And if you will not turn you will face the consequence of the sin. So the distinction is there not so that we can feel really good about ourselves, but so that we truly have something to offer to someone else. If we are no different from them, it is all the same. If there is no enmity between the church and the world, the church has nothing to say to the world.

The Creation Ordinances Reaffirmed

Now, having looked at that particular inauguration of God’s covenant in the Garden with Adam and Eve, let me make just a few comments on the remainder of the chapter, verses 16-24. First of all, notice how the original Creation Ordinances, the ordinances of the covenant in the Garden, are reaffirmed in the curse of both the woman and the man. In Genesis 16, the curse of the woman is, “I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you will bring forth children, yet your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” Notice here that that creation ordinance of procreation is still in force. And we are in the Covenant of Grace now. The Fall has occurred, but procreation is still a mandate. It is

very important for us to understand that childbearing is not the curse there, as much as it may feel like it sometime. Childbearing and child rearing is not the curse. The grief associated with it now is the curse. Matthew Henry says this, “The sorrows of childbearing are multiplied, for they include not only the travailing throws, but the indisposition before and the nursing toils and vexations afterwards. And after all if the children prove wicked and foolish, they are more than ever heaviness to her that bore them.” So the sorrows attendant with the obligation of procreation and child rearing, that is the curse. Child rearing is the blessing. The childbearing is a blessing. It is a blessing from God. It is always represented that way in the Scripture. But now, because of the Fall, there will be vexing aspects to that that were never present prior.

Notice also the phrase, “he will rule over you.” Now though there was already headship and hierarchy in the created order, in the husband-wife relationship, the implication is here that there will be as a result of sin an element of discord in the marital relationship, and that even as the woman may have inappropriate desires of control, the man may have inappropriate responses of subjection. So we see again here the order of headship in the marriage part of creation. But the abuse of that order in marital life is a function of the Fall. And it is not unfair to say that every marital difficulty can be traced to this point of origin. And our commitment to marriage requires us to be aware of that dynamic and to combat it consciously in our own minds. And it is not surprising that Satan attacks here at this point.

Now in the curse to Adam, we see another of the Creation Ordinances confirmed. That ordinance of labor or of dominion. In verses 17 – 19 we see God’s curse to Adam. And notice the mercy of this curse. Adam is not cursed directly. Notice the language, “cursed is the ground because of you.” A terrible and pervasive sentence is passed on to the world and his environment because of Adam’s sin. And Adam’s punishment included three distinct aspects.

1. First, toil in his labor (pain or heaviness is the literal translation of the word there). Pain or heaviness in his labor in the ground. Notice again, the creation ordinance of labor continues. The creation ordinance of labor continues. Labor is not the curse; toil in labor is the curse.

2. Secondly, the fruits of his labor will be impaired. Not only would there be toil and producing a yield, but there would be an impairment of the fruits of his labor. “Thorns and thistles will grow for you,” God says in verse 18. This parallels Jesus’ statements in Matthew, does it not, where He speaks about a place where “moth and rust corrupts and thieves break in,” in contrast to the kingdom of heaven. This is the same idea here with the thorns and thistles. Listen to what Derek Kidner says about thorns and thistles: “Thorns and thistles are eloquent signs of nature untamed and encroaching. In the Old Testament they marked the scenes of man’s self defeat and God’s judgment.” He also has a wonderful and suggestive word about what man’s labor would have been like apart from the fall. Listen to this sentence and see if it doesn’t bring ideas to mind: “The nature miracles of Jesus give us some idea of the control which man under God may have exercised over his environment.” Think about that.

3. The third aspect of Adam’s punishment: No earthly rest from burdens. They will plague him all the days of his life. Only at the very end of Adam’s sentence is death mentioned. You will eat bread until you return to the ground. And again, that is evidence of God’s grace to Adam in delaying the immediate execution of the sentence of physical death. But in both the curse or the condemnations handed out to woman and to man, God’s grace and mercy are manifest. Even in His punishment, there is a reemphasis on the creation ordinances and the blessings that are attached to them, in contrast to Satan’s sentence. Any questions about that so far?

Question: The Covenant of Grace as bilateral

A. The importance of the Covenant of Works and the bilateral aspects of that come to play in Christ’s work on our behalf in the Covenant of Grace. And clearly there is just as strong a bilateral element to Christ’s work on our behalf as there is in Adam. In fact you can make a case that Christ has to do much more than Adam was asked to do. For one thing, Christ was born in a world where there was already a ceremonial law, and Adam was not. And so Christ not only had to obey the laws of nature under the Covenant of Works, but the ceremonial code which was a burdensome code. In addition, He had to do it in a fallen world. And in

addition, He had to subject Himself to a type and station of relationship which was, as it were, beneath His dignity. So the beauty of that bilateral relation paralleling in both Covenant of Grace and Covenant of Works is that it highlights Christ's role on our behalf. Now, from our standpoint, you know that is where it becomes asymmetrical because the obediential element of the Covenant of Grace is not the same for you and me as it was for Christ. The beauty of the Covenant of Grace is Christ is fulfilling that obediential aspect on our behalf and so our obedience is of a different kind and order than His. That is a good question.

Question: "I just wondered as we are looking at how chapter two ends, how the curse ends for Adam, is the significance that we are seeing in the two covenants in the fact that the redemptive quality is not seen with Adam. All we see is that in him as our federal head leads to death, should we be making a strong connection that now that the woman, a new federal head must be given to us because through him, the way his curse is ended, it is just you shall return to dust, so in Adam as we go through Genesis they die. Are we supposed to be connecting that in the fact that we have a new, somebody new has to step into the scene? Adam has been relieved of duty."

A: Yes. Clearly the promise of, you know, of a new representative is not vested in Adam and the finality of that and you shall return to dust may be part of the rhetorical emphasis of that. But it is clearly there in Genesis 3:15 with regard to a descendant or a child of Adam and Eve. And there is indication in both at the beginning and the ending of Genesis 4 that Eve was already looking for that, first in Abel, and then later in Seth. And wondering is this the one who is the seed? So, I would agree with that, that the terminal language about Adam reminds you that he can't serve that role as a dual mediator for both these relations, you have got to be looking somewhere else.

Question: "Robertson speaks of death and the fig leaves and clothing. Is that a vague reference to some type of sacrifice?"

A: Oh, I don't think you have to try and make the garments some sort of leftovers from a covenant sacrifice or something like that. I think it is very clear, again as we discuss why covenant terminology isn't used prior, the explicit covenant terminology isn't used prior to Genesis 6:18, it may

have been that some of those ritual conventions were simply not contemporaneous to that time. The ritual conventions are not of the essence to describe the relationship. They are confirming and they certainly develop their own significance in terms of the Doctrine of the Sacraments as the Old Testament goes on. But, I don't even think you have to try and find some sort of ritual aspect of death at the inauguration of the covenant. Clearly, just as death was implied in the breaking of the Covenant of Works, we're going to see what happens when one cuts themselves off from the Covenant of Grace even in the book of Genesis. You will see it in the language of Genesis 4 and then you will see it again: where does Ishmael take his leave from Abraham's family? Is it Genesis 18, or is it later? Anyway, you will see the same language, they went and they dwelled to the east of their brethren and so you will see on at least three occasions, sons, in the physical line which you might think of as the line of promise, you will see them take leave of the covenant. With Esau, and in Ishmael, and in Cain, and so the death implication, the spiritual death implications are clearly there for the Covenant of Grace from the beginning.

The Broken Covenant of Works Brought Death into the World

The Broken Covenant of Works brought Death into the World
Romans 5:12-14

If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to Romans, chapter 5. It's been a month since we've been in Romans together, so let me refresh your memories. In Romans 1 and 2 the apostle tells us what the problem is. Our problem. The problem of sin and estrangement from God. Rebellion against Him. In Romans, chapter 3 he sets forth God's solution, the only solution to our predicament, and that is justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone. He set forth the atoning work of Jesus Christ, he set forth the importance of our trust in Him and in Him alone as God's way of salvation, as His resolution to our predicament. In

Romans, chapter 4 he defends that particular view from scripture. Particularly, he shows that it is an Old Testament idea that we are justified by grace through faith in Christ alone. Paul does not want to be accused of being an innovator in that regard. He wants to make it clear that he did not come up with the idea of God saving His people by grace alone. So he demonstrates justification by faith from the Old Testament, especially from the story of Abraham and David.

Having done that in Romans, in chapter 5, in the portion that we've already studied in verses 1 through 11, he begins to draw some implications from this glorious doctrine of justification. He tells us, for instance, at the beginning of Romans 5, that because we are justified by faith, we have peace with God. We are literally at peace with God. We've been reconciled. He has been reconciled to us. So now for the first time in our experience we have peace with God.

He furthermore tells us that because we are justified by faith we have reason to rejoice in sufferings. He tells us that because we are justified by faith, we have an experience of being awash in the love of God, and He tells us that because we are justified by faith, we have no need to fear the final judgment. We have no need to fear the great tribulation. We shall be brought through it, and in it we shall glory in Him because we are secure in the one who has died for us.

Now having reminded ourselves again of those things which Paul has been speaking about, Paul is now about to launch into a new section of the book. From Romans, chapter 5, verse 12 all the way to Romans, chapter 8, verse 39, Paul is going to do a little bit of a recapitulation. He's not going to say the same thing over again, but what he is going to do is he's going to say, "Now, having heard what I've said so far, I want you to understand what is behind what I have said. What are the presuppositions? What are the theological points and premises on which what I've told you about the gospel so far is based? And that's where we are in Romans, chapter 5 and we'll begin in verse 12. This is God's holy word. Hear it tentatively and relevantly:

"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world and death through sin. And so death spread to all men because all sinned; for until

the law, sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of him who was to come."

Amen, and thus ends this reading to Gods holy and inspired word. May He add His blessings to it. Lets pray.

Our Lord and our God, this is Your word. We ask this day as we come to it that as we understand it You would enhance our gratitude for the grace that You have shown to us; or if we have not yet tasted of that grace in Jesus Christ, that in the very hearing of this word, we would be driven to Him. This we ask earnestly in Jesus name, Amen.

Why cant we save ourselves by our own works? Why cant we do it? Why cant we do something to make up for our sin? There are a lot of people who think thats how youre saved. You do a few things wrong, you do a few things to make up for it and even out the account and youre accepted by God. Why doesnt it work that way? Theres a sense in which Paul, having gotten to Romans, chapter 5, verse 11, wants to pause right there and pull back and look at the presuppositions to which he has said, and he wants to explain to you again that salvation doesnt work that way. Why is that we cant contribute anything to our salvation. Why is it that we cant be justified any other way than by faith in Christ alone?

Well, beginning in Romans 5, verse 12, Paul supplies you a very ample answer to that particular question, and Id like you to follow his argument with me for a few moments. Paul is saying that everything that he has told you previously about the human predicament, about your sinfulness. And remember Romans 1 and Romans 2 where he talked about our sinfulness in heart. We didnt worship God as we knew that we ought to worship him. Hes talked to us about our sinfulness and perversion where weve actually inverted what God said. We glorified those things which He condemned, we have condemned those things which He glorified. Weve worshipped the creature rather than the creator. Weve perverted justice, weve perverted morality. So, he speaks to us of our sinfulness in heart. He speaks to us of our sinfulness in behavior, he speaks to us about sinfulness in worship, in all those ways. But in all those ways as he

demonstrated our need for redemption, what had he done? He had focused on our sins.

Now, he says ,think about that predicament that Ive already talked about. You are sinful, youre in need of reclamation. But I want you to think about it a little bit differently now. I have talked to you in the past about your sinfulness, in view of your own personal sin, and perhaps the sin of your particular group, whether you be Jew or Gentile. Now, however, I want you to think in terms of your sinfulness because of the fact that you are related to Adam. I want you to think of your sinfulness in light of the fact that you are under Adam, your head and representative, and he sinned and rebelled against God, and because he sinned and rebelled against God, you are justly condemned. Let me just pause right there. Dont argue with me, yet. I know there are already some people saying, "Thats not fair, Paul." Well get to a chance to let you argue in a few moments. But right now hear Pauls argument out. You can start probing him with questions in a moment. But unless you understand what he is asserting, you wont understand the answers to your questions about what he is asserting.

Paul is saying, because we are in Adam, we bear responsibility and we are accountable to God because of his sin rebellion and defection. However unfair that may seem to you, understand what Paul is saying about it. This doctrine is called original sin. It has been one of those doctrines which people have loved to hate for years. But its right here in Romans, chapter 5. And Paul clearly thinks it is important for us to understand it in order to understand and appreciate the gospel. And he says, I want you to think of yourselves as in Adam. Youre part of his race. Youre descended from him. Youre descended from him ethically and morally. You act like he acted.

But more significantly than that, Paul is saying, Adam was your covenant head and representative. What Adam did, he did as a public person, he did as your federal representative. He acted as if you were acting when he acted in the garden in taking that forbidden fruit. And because of that, I want you to understand yourself in that light, I want you to understand that if you are in Adam, you are under an old order of existence, and in that old order of existence, there is only sin, death and judgment.

Now the reason Paul is raising this point is so that we will be able to contrast Adam and being in Adam with Christ and being in Christ. Adam the negative example. Christ the positive example.

But you will notice in verse 12 that Paul didn't even get to that part of his argument. You need to understand that Paul begins a statement in verse 12 that he does not complete until he gets to verse 18. Now already you're thinking to yourself, "Boy, I understand what Peter meant when he said that there were things in Paul's writings that were hard to understand." Okay, I hear you, but it's not that hard. What Paul is going to say is going to be hard to swallow, but it's not going to be that hard to understand. In fact, in verse 12, Paul makes an assertion; in verse 13 and 14 all he does is prove those assertions. I'd like to look at three things with you today.

Before you do that though, notice, looking at verse 12, that Paul begins a sentence that he does not finish. And he does not finish that sentence until verse 18. You can see it. Look at the *just as* and the *even so*. *Just as* always begins as a clause that's going to be followed up by another clause that begins with *even so* or *so also*. Okay. Look at verse 12. You get the *just as*, but you don't get the *so also*. Where is the *so also*? Look at verse 18, "So then just as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men," he's basically repeating just what he said in verse 12. "So also, even so, through one act of righteousness, there resulted justification for all like men. So understand the structure of Paul's argument. He starts off in verse 12. In the middle of his statement, he's thinking, you know they're not going to have a clue what I'm saying unless I tell them something else in five more verses. So he stops right there in the middle of a sentence; plunk right in the middle of a sentence, and he plugs in a very long explanatory paragraph. And then he comes back to his sentence again; he repeats the first half, and he gives you the sentence again. So the whole point of this section is to parallel Adam to Christ. To compare them and to contrast them to show what it means to be in Adam and to show what it means to be in Christ.

But the reason he's showing you this is so you will appreciate how grave your predicament is. Your problem is not nearly that you do a few sins here and there. Your problem is not nearly that you make a mistake every

once and a while, and you need to be tidied up. The problem is more pervasive, its more comprehensive, its deeper, its more intractable than that. And Paul knows that unless you know what he is about to tell you in these verses you wont be able to appreciate that. So here are three things that we learn in the passage. For clarity, verse 12, point 1, our problem. Verse 13, proof of his point in verse 12, part 1. Verse 14. Proof of his point of his point in verse 12, part 2. Theres your outline. Three points.

I. Our problem - we sin because we are sinners.

Lets take the first verse and begin. Verse 12. "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world and death through sin. And so death spread to all men because all sinned. What is Paul talking about here? Paul is telling you what our problem is. And the problem is this. We sin because we are sinners. Now its very important for you to hear what Paul is saying. We sin because we are sinners. In other words, it is not that we are sinners because we sin, but rather that we sin because we are sinners. The problem of our sin is that we are constitutionally sinners. We are sinners by nature because we are united with Adam. If we are not trusting in Jesus Christ; and we are human beings, we are united to Christ and we are constitutionally sinners. And that is the point that Paul is making in verse 12. We sin because we are sinners. Its not just because we do certain sins, we perform certain sins that we are called sinners. It is that those sins flow from a nature which is itself corrupted by sin at its core. And you see this in what Paul says in verse 12. Just as through one mans sin entered into the world, and death through sin, so death spread to all men because all sinned.

And youre saying to me I dont follow that. It sounds like Paul is saying Adam sinned, death came into the world because of that sin, death spread to all men because all men individually sinned. Thats not what Paul is saying. Paul is saying Adam sinned, death invariably accompanies sin and so the presence of death in the world means that there is sin in the world which means there is nothing wrong in the world. And, all men were implicated in that sin and death because of Adams sin. See, we could really translate that passage 'just as one mans sin entered into the world and so death spread to all men, because all men sinned in Adam.' Pauls point is not to talk here as he did earlier about your particular sins. You

see it would be true if you said because of Adams sin, we sin. Thats true. Thats a true theological statement. I could give you a zillion Scripture references to back it up. Thats not what Pauls talking about here. Paul is saying, you sinned. You, youre sitting there in the pew, youre alive, youre breathing. You sinned in Adam. Pauls argument is that sin entered into the world through sin and death through sin. And death spread because all sinned in Adam. That is, sinners are united to Adam. He is our head and our representative. And what he did had implications for us. Its not simply that were sinful because we do specific sins, it is because we are by nature sinners. And Paul is arguing here, among other things, that death in the world is the result of sin, and the proof of the violation of Gods covenant of works. Pauls argument is that all have sinned in Adam, not that they have individually sinned as a consequence of Adams sin, though thats true, but that they had actually sinned in Adam.

Now I want you to think about this for a moment. Im not sure whether I buy that. That looks like hes talking about the individual sins of people. Let me give you six passages in this larger passage that make it clear that Paul is not talking about your individual sins, hes talking about Adam sin. First, look at verse 15. In verse 15, Paul says, "For many died by the trespass of the one man." Notice, he didnt say the many died because of their own sins. That might be true, but thats not what he said. The many died because of the trespass of one man.

Notice again verse 16. He speaks of the result of the one mans sin, not the result of your sins, but the result of the one mans sin. Notice again second half of verse 16. He says the judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation.

In verse 17 he says, "By the trespass of one man, death reigned through that one man." He doesnt say through the trespasses of us all sin reigned. That would be true, but thats not what he said. Through the trespass of one man.

Verse 18. The result of the one trespass was condemnation for all men.

In verse 19, through the disobedience of one man, the many were made sinners. Clearly throughout this passage what is Paul concerned with?

Adams sin, and its implications for us.

In other words, Paul is saying the problem of sin is far deeper than you are usually willing to admit. Apart from Christ it is not simply that you from time to time do things which are out of accord with Gods word. The problem of sin is that by nature, if youre not in Christ, by nature you are a sinner. You have inherited from Adam a sinful nature; but you have also, because Adam is your representative, been implicated in Adams sin. In other words, Paul is saying this so we will say, "Oh, well no wonder we cant save ourselves. Were involved in something that is so much bigger than us, so much deeper than our own outward and superficial desires and actions may be, that we need rescue from the outside.

And Paul is sitting there waiting for you exactly. You do need rescue from the outside. Your redemption cant be affected by your turning over a new leaf. Making a few resolutions, tidying up this and that area of your life where you have some problems or mistakes or some shortcomings. Its more radical than that. It goes to the heart of who you are. It goes to the heart of the race. It goes to the very first man who stood in as representation of all men. Adam the representative, Adam, the federal head. You are guilty in Him.

I know there are a lot of you that are saying, "But thats not fair." I understand that. Ill help you as we work through this passage understand a little bit more of why this is a just way of Gods working. But consider this for a moment. Even in the Scripture we have examples of people standing in and doing things which have implications for the whole of the people of God. Think of David and Goliath. Now theres a story that you learned as a child. And in the story, you remember that the deal was whoever won the hand-to-hand combat between Goliath and whomever Israels representative was going to be, won the battle. If Goliath won the battle, the Philistines won the battle. If the representative of Israel won the battle then Israel won the battle. "Well thats fair," you might say, but that was the deal. Thats the way it was.

We see this, of course, in human history, as well. Theres a fascinating story from the Scottish wars of independence, Robert the Bruce had been in rebellion against the King of England was the first, and then his son,

Edward II for maybe fifteen years or so. A British army marched north to Sterling in Scotland and laid siege to the castle. Roberts army was there. On the very first day of the battle, Robert was out inspecting his troops. When Sir Henry De Bohun, who was reckoned by some to be the third greatest knight in Christendom, and who was in Edward IIs English army, saw Robert the Bruce out in front of his troops, he said, "This is my change for glory. I am going to engage Robert the Bruce in hand-to-hand combat, and Im going to kill him." So he went charging across the marshes on this giant horse of his, charging against the King of Scotland. Now its a very interesting story, and I cant tell you a lot of it. But to make a long story short, if Robert the Bruce had been killed in that hand-to-hand combat that day, it would not have been, 'Oh well, the Scottish army goes home that night and regroupes and fights again tomorrow.' That would have been not only it for the battle, that would have been it for the Scottish independence because Robert the Bruce was the only claimant to the throne in Scotland. If he dies, the war of Independence is over. So in that case, that hand-to-hand combat between the Bruce and De Bohun was the whole show. Bruce loses, game over. Now hint, he didnt lose. Ill tell you that story later. Its great. But the point is, what one man did had implications.

Now we live in the day of genetics. Its maybe a little less difficult for us to swallow the fact that somebody can have an impact on you, and you have no say in it. I have a friend whose family has a genetic eye condition that is passed along. His children have no say in whether they receive that eye condition or not. They may or they may not. And theyll have absolutely no say in it. And you say, "Well, thats not fair." Well, Im not ready to answer that question yet. Well get there. But it is the way it is. We know this even psychologically. Im thinking of a friend right now whose father left his father when he was a little boy. His dad in many ways never, ever got over that desertion on the part of his father. And it has impacted my friend profoundly in numerous ways. My friend had nothing to do with that action. But he was impacted by that action.

Suffice it to say that Paul is saying that you are all impacted by Adams sin. Not only subjectively, so that you follow his objective, but objectively so that he was your representative. He stood in for you, and as he stood in

for you, and as he rebelled against God, you are implicated in that rebellion. And you might say, "I don't like that." Paul says, You shouldn't like that. But there's only one way out of that; and that's to get a new representative, and he's the One that I want to tell you about - Jesus Christ. But Paul isn't to that point in his argument yet. What he's wound up doing now is convincing you that what he's already said in verse 12 is true. And that's all I want to spend the rest of our time today doing.

II. Proof of the problem, part 1 - Universal sin demonstrates universal law.

Verse 13 is simply Paul's proof that what he said in verse 12 is true. Is it true that we sin because we are sinners? Is it true that we are constitutionally united with Adam and implicated in his guilt? Paul says, let me give you two lines of proof that what I have just said is true. First of all he says, 'for until the law, sin was in the world but sin is not imputed where there is no law.' In other words, Paul says universal sin demonstrates universal guilt. Universal sin demonstrates universal law. Paul says here that there was sin in the world before the giving of Moses law. And so there must have been a law to break. You can't sin, you can't transgress unless there is something to transgress. You can't sin unless there is a law.

And so Paul is saying, Look, I know that Moses' law was not given until Sinai, but guess what? We also know that there was sin in the world before Sinai. You can see it in the lives of the patriarchs. Therefore, there was a law in the world before Sinai, and it was broken. Sin was in the world before the giving of Moses law, and so there must have been a law to break. And for Paul, that establishes that all men are under the covenant of works. God has given a command, all men are to give obedience to it. All men have been given a command, all men are to give obedience, they haven't, they've broken the law. They are under that covenant of works. That's the first part of his argument. He says you can look out there in the world, and even the people who have not heard the law of Moses, sin." That shows that there is a law over them. That shows that they have an obligation to keep the law. That shows that they have violated that obligation, and they are guilty. All men are under obligation to obedience to God because of the covenant of works.

Our *Confession of Faith* gives a beautiful outline of Paul's point here in the sixth chapter. If you take your hymnals out and turn to the back, I think its page 852, look at the top of the page, sections 1 through 4. This is how *The Confession* summarizes it: "Our first parents being seduced by the subtlety and temptation of Satan sinned in eating the forbidden fruit. This their sin God was pleased according to His wise and perfect counsel, having purposed to order it to His own glory. By this sin, they fell from their original righteousness and communion with God. And so became dead in sin. And wholly defiled in all the parts and faculties of soul and body." Now you might think well, that's it. They sinned. They bear the consequences. Look at section 3. "They, being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed." It was charged to your account. "And the same death in sin and corrupted nature, conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation." That's you and every other human being except Jesus who did not descend from Adam by ordinary generation. But was the only, begotten Son of God. And so *The Confession* goes on to say, "from this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed and made opposite to all good and holy and inclined to all evil, do proceed to all transgressions." In other words *The Confession*, which is simply paraphrasing Paul, is saying, "The problem of sin is much deeper than you're doing something wrong from time to time. Your wrongdoing flows from a heart which has been corrupted by sin which itself flows from the original sin of Adam, which itself is a manifestation of the fact that you are in Adam, you are under bondage to his judgment. As he rebelled, you are implicated. That's part one of Paul's proof of what he said in verse 12.

II. Proof of the problem part 2 - Universal reign of death from Adam to Moses proves the effect of his sin on us. Here's part two, look at verse 14. Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam. Here's proof of the problem, part 2. The universal reign of death from Adam to Moses proves the effect of Adam's sin on us. Everyone is under the penalty of the violated covenant of works. In other words, Paul is saying that when you look at the Bible, and you look at the time from Adam to Moses what do you see? Everybody dies. Everybody dies. Now they haven't been given the law of Moses until that point. They haven't

been given that special revelation of the law of God from Moses mouth at Sinai. "But even amongst those who havent sinned against that special revelation, death reigned," Paul says. And that proves the radical and universal nature of sin. And it proves our solidarity with Adam in sin. Paul is saying that despite the fact that Moses law had not yet been promulgated, that before the time of Moses, death reigned. And that is an evidence that Adams sin had an impact on everybody. If we are to be extracted from this predicament, we are not going to be able to do it ourselves, because we are I involved in a web, in a complex of sin that is bigger than we are. If we are going to be extracted from this predicament, we require a mediator who is simultaneously like us and not like us. He is fully human, but he is without sin, and he comes from outside our predicament, and not under the bondage of sin which we are in Adam. And Paul is saying that is precisely what Jesus Christ does. Jesus Christ comes into the world to redeem people that are in this position. Its not just that they need to turn over a new leaf, or make changes in their lives, or get their act together. Thats not Christianity. Christianity is not doing your best to make yourself a little better. Were in a much worse situation than that.

This is so important to remember in evangelism. I had an evangelism professor in seminary who said, now look, when youre evangelizing, dont tell people this. Dont tell them what Paul said in Romans 5. Theyll get all hung up on it. Talk about their sins. Why, I understand that to a certain degree, but you understand that Paul is telling you this precisely; because if you dont know this, and if you dont understand it, you wont be able to evangelize. Because evangelism is not about getting somebody to switch from brand X to brand Y. Its not about you changing your name brand loyalty. Its not some sort of a detached decision that you make. You are involved in the greatest predicament that every existed, and you have not a clue about how to extract yourself from it nor anyway to effect your extraction from it. In evangelism we are sharing the message that God has done something to draw you out of that predicament, unilaterally, by himself, and you must receive it by faith. That is very, very different than sort of presenting the merits of one case, and the merits of the other, and saying, "Okay, its up to you now." The consumer approach. Ive got the better brand, try it, your life will be better.

Christianity, you see, is not making a new start in life, you see. Its receiving a new life to start with. And here in Romans, chapter 5, Paul is telling you why that is. Because you were involved in such a web of sin that you that could never extract yourself from it. Im thinking right now of a young man reared in an abusive home. His wife has born the marks of that abuse in his own rebellion. He is the recipient of things which he himself contributed nothing to. But he now bears the effects of it. If it is difficult for a counselor to come along side of that young man, and to bring restoration to his life, how much greater is the difficulty to redeem a people that are to the very core of their heart involved in a sin which has been existing and growing in our humanity for 6,000 years. Jesus alone can redeem that kind of person. Those kinds of people. And Paul is here to tell you that He can conquer there. But until you appreciate how bad the fix is, youll never see how glorious the fix is to the fix. Lets pray.

Our Lord and our God, we thank You for Pauls blunt words. None of us likes to hear that we are sinners in Adam. None of likes to hear about the implications of his actions upon us. But at the same time, *none of us can deny those implications. Help us then to flee to the only place for hope, which is Jesus Christ, who was like us and yet not like us. He was human in every square inch of what it means to be human, and yet without sin. And He obeyed the law perfectly, and he bore the penalty of the law that we might be rescued out from this web of sin. Help us to then flee to Him. In Jesus name we ask it, Amen.*

The Covenant of Grace Stands in Bold Contrast to the Broken Covenant of Works

The Covenant of Grace

[Romans 5:15-17](#)

If you have your Bibles, Id invite you to turn with me to Romans 5, and look at verse 15. As we do so let me remind you where we have been. We

said last week in [Romans 5:12](#), Paul is beginning a new section of the book of Romans. He is recapitulating for us. He is actually providing us the underlying principles, those things which under gird the argument that He has made from Romans, chapter 1, verse 18, all the way to Romans, chapter 5, verse 11. Hes trying to show you the things which under gird this glorious gospel of grace which hes been explaining to you during that time. And he is showing us a bigger picture. Hes answering the question why it is so necessary to be saved by grace, not through works, to be saved by faith alone in Christ alone, by Gods grace alone.

And we said that as he began this new argument in Romans, chapter 5, verse 12, that he immediately interrupted himself. You can tell how excited Paul is in Romans 5, verses 12 to the end of the chapter, because he interrupts himself repeatedly. In [Romans 5:12](#), he had begun with the assertion that all men through Adams sin were guilty, and that death had spread throughout the world because of Adams sin. And before he can get his very next phrase out, he pauses and thinks now I know theres somebody whos going to disagree with that. Theres going to be somebody out there that doesnt like that. They take issue with it, and so he pauses and in verses 13 and 14 he explains it. He demonstrates it scripturally. He goes back to the period of time prior to Moses and prior to the law, and shows that the principle that he sets forth in Romans 5, verse 12, is indeed true.

And then he gets to the end of verse 14, and he says something very interesting. He parallels Adam and Christ. He parallels the Old Covenant or the covenant of works with the covenant of grace, and he speaks of Adam as a type of Christ. Notice his words, Adam who is a type of Him who was to come. Its almost an after thought. He throws it out there, and hes ready to say his next word, and he realizes, O thats going to confuse some people. So he stops and in verses 15, 16 and 17, he wants to explain some ways in which Christ is different from Adam. Hes just asserted that there are certain parallels between Adam and Christ. Indeed, he has asserted that Adam himself was a foreshadowing in some ways of Jesus Christ. But the minute that He says that, he says, you know, Ive got to qualify that. Ive got to show you three ways in which Adam is not like Christ, and in which Christ is much greater than Adam and in which the

covenant of works stands in, or the covenant of grace stands in bold contrast with the covenant of works.

Now you remember the reason that Paul has been doing this all along is to show us why salvation by works just wont work. Especially that was the focus of what he said in verses 12 through 14. Now in verses 15 through 17, indeed we can say in the whole of this section, he is concerned that our assurance of salvation would be grounded in what God has done in His covenant of grace, and not in our own righteousness. If its found in our righteousness, well never be assured; and if its truly grounded in our righteousness, our acceptance with God will be secure. And so Paul is concerned that we see the big picture, that we see this web of sin that were involved in, but that we also see the greatness of Gods grace in Jesus Christ. So lets study this passage together. Lets hear Gods holy word beginning in verse 15:

"But, the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one, the many die. Much more did the grace of God, and the gift by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression, resulting in condemnation. But on the other hand, the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification. For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one. Much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ."

Amen, and thus ends this reading of Gods holy and inspired and inerrant Word. May He add His blessing to it.

Our Father, we thank You for this word. We pray that you would teach us by Your Holy Spirit what You mean, for as deep and as profound as are Pauls words. He wrote them us not to impress us with his grasp of your ultimate truth, but to comfort us with that truth, and especially with the reality of Your grace, as such he meant to be understood. By Your spirit, help us to understand and to respond accordingly. In Jesus name, Amen.

Whats so amazing about grace? A recent author has asked that question

in his book title. Another recent Christian author has suggested that we need to put amazing back into grace. Both of them are, I think, are echoing the same sentiments. It seems that the Christian church in our time doesn't think that grace is that amazing. Grace is rather blasphemous. Grace is almost expected by many Christians today. It's our right. God has to show grace. There is nothing surprising about grace. Well, of course, God forgives. Of course, God shows mercy. Of course, God grants grace. That's His job, after all. That seems to be the attitude. The apostle Paul in this passage is undercutting that attitude, not to be a spoiler, not to be an ogre to rain on our parade, but precisely in order that we might know the blessing of true grace. Because, as the apostle Paul will tell us in this passage, it's utterly amazing, it's utterly surprising, it's utterly unexpected, and it's greater than anything you've ever imagined. And he's calling those who are doubters to realize that. And he's calling on those who don't know the grace of Christ to taste of it, because there's nothing in the world like it.

And in this passage he underscores the glory of grace. The glory of what Christ has done in three ways. He makes three distinctions between what Adam did and what Christ has done in order to underscore for us the glory of grace, to drive us away from dependence upon our own works, and to woo us to trust in Christ alone. And I'd like to tell you those three distinctions, just to help out lying in our own minds a passage which can be difficult. After all, the run-on sentence here can leave your mind spinning. And let me outline those three distinctions, and then we'll come back to them, and see how Paul deploys them in his argument.

In verse 15, you'll see the first distinction, the first discontinuity between Adam and Christ. The first distinction is between God's justice in condemnation, and God's grace in redemption. And that way the covenant of works and the covenant of grace are totally different.

The second distinction, or just continuity, you'll find in verse 16. There Paul emphasizes that through one man's sin came death for all. Whereas, on the other hand, in the covenant of grace, many sins were covered by the righteousness of one man.

And then thirdly in verse 17, the third contrast or distinction or

discontinuity between Adam and Christ is this. One mans sin led to the reign of death, Paul emphasizes. On the other hand, one mans death led to his peoples reign in life. Those are the three distinctions, the three differences that Paul wants to highlight between the work of Adam and the work of Christ.

Why does he want to underscore this? So youll understand how amazing grace is. And so that youll understand that what he is saying to you is not this: what was lost in Adam, was regained in Christ. You see, thats almost a parallel, isnt it? What was lost to Adam, is regained in Christ. As far as Paul is concerned, the story of redemption, the story of redemption, the story of salvation, the story of Gods grace is better than that. And it is that what God has done in His covenant of grace is beyond all that we could ask or imagine, and it so far outstrips what was lost in the covenant of works as it was broken in Adam that it will blow your mind to think about it. And he walks you through that argument in three parts. Id like to look with you briefly this morning at each of these parts of his argument.

I. The free gift is not like the transgression.

First, in verse 15, the free gift is not like the transgression, he says. For if by the transgression of one, the many die, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one man Jesus Christ abound to the many. In other words, what Paul is saying is that universal judgment is not surprising. Gods universal condemnation is not surprising. Gods universal judgment is in fact warranted by the fact. There is absolutely nothing surprising about the bad news. There is nothing surprising about the condemnation to hell of men and women who have rebelled against God. Theres nothing surprising about that, Paul says. Its deserved. Its warranted. But salvation, even the salvation of one single, solitary soul is gratuitous, its undeserved, its unearned, its surprising, its amazing.

Now friends, very frankly, thats totally opposite from the way we think in our day and age. We think of salvation as an entitlement. We think that one person, separated from God and held for eternity, calls into question Gods justice and His goodness. The apostle Paul begs to differ. Paul sees the other way around. Paul says that because of Adams transgression, all deservedly die. But because of what Christ did, everyone in Him becomes the undeserving recipients of Gods grace.

Paul is deploying a much more extensive argument here. He is not just saying that what was lost through Adam was regained in Christ. No, he is saying more than that. He is saying that the gift of grace in Christ is incomparably greater than the condemnation which resulted from Adams sin. He gives us an escalating contrast. If all received the just sentence of death because of Adam, he argues, how much more is it true that all have received the super abundance in Gods grace in Jesus Christ. Whereas, one sin led to the consequence of universal death, and that death was justified, so also the righteousness of Christ led to grace super abounding, but grace which was undeserved, unearned, unwarranted by anything in us. And the apostle Paul wants you to see that this continuity from the judgment that has been visited on us because of Adams sin, and the grace that has been shown us by Jesus Christ. As far as the apostle Paul is concerned, it makes perfect sense that people go to hell.

Perhaps you have run into someone who thinks its unfair that God would send anyone to hell: "Well, I call into question any God that would send someone to hell." And the apostle Paul comes back to them, and he basically says, "Look, if youre going to complain about something being unfair, youre going to have to complain about heaven and grace." Thats unfair. Thats unwarranted. The pardon that God gives to us to open up the gates of glory, thats unfair.

Weve been thinking a lot about pardons recently, havent we? On the last day of our former Presidents presidency, he managed to stir up another controversy. And the Mark Rich pardon has obtained a great deal of discussion and scrutiny and criticism. And there are a lot of reasons for that. Theres the question is there a *quid pro quo* here, and furthermore there is the question that this man is a fugitive of justice. He was under indictment, with a great weight of evidence for the embezzlement of millions of dollars which belong to individuals and the United States government. He was engaged in activity that was immoral at best with the enemy, according to the indictment. He fled authorities as he was almost in their grasp, he went to another country, and there are a lot of question. What is the warrant for this pardon? What justifies pardoning a man like this?

And I want you to understand that what Paul is saying is that Mark Richs pardon is childs play compared to the pardon that God gave to you. Paul is saying, there is absolutely no warrant in you whatsoever for God to pardon you. And thats what He did in Jesus Christ. Theres nothing in your that commends yourself to a received pardon from the almighty God. And yet God has pardoned us. So if youre going to complain about something being unfair, then its heaven and grace that youre going to have to complain about. Youre going to have to complain that God let somebody in. If youre looking for human warrant, thats the only place that youll be able to complain against God. Thats how great Gods salvation is. Thats how great Gods grace is.

II. One mans sin leads to death for all.

But Pauls not finished yet. Look at verse 16. Here he argues again. The free gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. In the first discontinuity, Paul contrasts Gods justice and Gods grace. Gods justice is deserved when we are condemned. Gods grace is not deserved when we are pardoned. We havent contributed anything to the deserving of that grace. Here however, he focuses on the implications of Adams sin, one mans sin leads to death for all, whereas in Gods covenant of grace, many sins are covered by one mans righteousness. In other words, Paul says that Adams sin had race-wide implications. Everybody in the human race was involved, was implicated, was corrupted and deserved justice because of Adams sin, whereas, in contrast many, many, many iniquities, and by the way thats an understatement, not a hyperbole, were covered by Jesus Christ. Because of Adams transgression, because of one sin, all were judged and condemned Paul argues in verse 16. But in spite of millions of sins in the covenant of grace, Christ the one man, his righteousness caused all who were in him to be acquitted. So Pauls second contrast focuses on the consequences of Adams actions in distinction from the consequences of Christs free gift. Adams transgression, his deliberate transgression of Gods law, his rebellion against Gods will led to a just judgment in condemnation. But in contrast to this, on the contrary, the sins of all who believe in Christ are forgiven and their persons are justified and acquitted and pardoned by free gift and grant.

And think of this for a minute, it makes perfect sense to us to see how one iniquity can spread and ruin. Husbands, I know this has happened to you before. You walk in the house. One sinful cross word to your wife, and suddenly you are looking at three weeks of tension, because one thing leads to another, which leads to another, which leads to another thing, which leads to another thing, and it all just breaks apart. We are familiar with how one sin disrupts a relationship. Paul says, theres nothing surprising about that. Theres nothing surprising about judgment and condemnation flowing from the sin of Adam. But what is totally surprising is this picture of millions and millions and millions of sins. And suddenly, because of the superabundance of Gods grace, the pattern of sin is disrupted, and the pattern of condemnation is broken, and these people are acquitted and justified.

Perhaps you have friends whose lives are in shambles because of sin. Maybe its because they have sinned themselves. Maybe its because they have been sinned against someone else. And the apostle Paul says, you know its the most surprising thing in the world when I look out, and I see Gods grace reverse the effects of sin. You think of it. Adam is the only person in the history of the world who was an appropriate scapegoat in his life. Would you have liked to have been Adam living another 900 years after the fall. Hmmm, it would be pretty nice to live 900 years. But think about this: everywhere you go, somebody can point to you and say, "You know, this is all his fault. Its all his fault. He messed up. He got us in this mess." And Paul says, "You know, thats true, but think of the contrast. A hundred and fifty generations of generational sin and corruption reversed by the grace of God in Jesus Christ." You see its not just that Jesus Christ has put the lid back on Pandoras Box. Its better than that. Hes liquidated our debt. Hes absorbed our penalty. Hes acquitted us in court, and Hes transformed our hearts by grace. He has put a stop to the incessant seemingly immutable pattern of sin and judgment and condemnation. And Paul says thats surprising. You want to find something to be surprised about, dont be surprised about sin in a fallen world. Theres nothing surprising about that. Whats surprising is about the transforming grace of God.

III. Christs righteousness leads to life for believers

Thirdly, he goes on to argue in verse 17. There's another difference between what Christ has done in the covenant of grace, and what was done by Adam in the broken covenant of works. One man's sin led to the reign of death. That's what happened to Adam. But in bold contrast, one man's death led to His people's reign in life. Adam's transgression led to the reign of death overall. But Christ's righteousness led to believers' reign in life. The reign of death in this world, can be traced to Adam. Paul is telling us that believers here and now, as well as then and there, reign in life in Christ. Paul's third contrast compares the reign of death through Adam's sin, with the reign of life with those who trust in Christ.

Now let me pause right here and draw your attention to two terms that are very important for you to understand. Throughout this passage you will see Paul use the terms "all" and "many." Does he mean something different by those terms. The answer is no. The words *all* and *many* in this passage are interchangeable as far as the apostle Paul is concerned. They are stressing two aspects of the same truth.

Let me prove my point. Look at verse 15. There it says by the transgression of the one, the many died. Now, does Paul mean that by Adam's sin some people died, but not all people? Is that why he uses many there. No. Go back and look at verse 12. Through one man, sin entered into the world and death spread to all men. All in verse 12, and many in verse 15 are parallel. Paul will use many in this passage to stress the amazing multiplying effect of sin; even though it was one sin, many are impacted. He's not saying many, but not all. He is saying, "Isn't it amazing that one sin can wreak this kind of destruction?" But the parallel between many and all is exact. Now, why do I raise that point? Because there are many well-meaning people who come to this passage and say, "Well, you know it says that all die because of that one sin, and it says that the many died by that one sin, and it says that all were justified by Christ, and the many were justified by Christ. So I guess what this passage is teaching is that everybody is saved." In other words, many people come to this passage and say, "Aha, Paul is teaching is teaching the doctrine of universalism here. Everybody is justly condemned, but everybody is also justified and saved through the work of Jesus Christ. And, therefore, they say to us it's our job as Christians not to go out and

say repent and be saved. It is our job as Christians to go out and say, Look, youre already saved. Gods already saved everyone. The gospel is to announce to everyone that theyre already saved." I want to tell you, my friends, that is a lie from the pit of hell, and people who tell you that are wolves in sheeps clothing. Universalism is absolutely false biblically and even this passage shows it. Lets look.

Verse 17 lets you know that Paul is not saying all are saved. Paul is not establishing universalism 2000 years ahead of time. Paul is not telling us go out and tell everybody they are already saved. Look at verse 17. "For if by the transgression of the one, death reigns through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace. And of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ." You see, the apostle Paul does not say the sin of Adam resulted in the reign of death overall and the righteousness of Christ resulted in the reign of life over all. Thats not what he said at all, is it? The parallel is this. The sin of Adam led to the reign of death overall. The righteousness of Christ led to all those who receive Him reigning in life by His grace. Thats the parallel. Those who receive Him are the ones who participate in this great gift. Those who receive Him by faith alone as He has offered in the gospel. Now of course, thats not Pauls prime point in this passage, but it is a truth which is invariably and unavoidably, appropriately and rightly deduced from this passage.

Pauls point, however, in this passage is to show you that whereas sin and judgment and death are inevitable, the super abundance of Gods grace is the most surprising thing in the world. We see the grace of God abounding when we see sinners reigning in this life, by faith in Jesus Christ, because of the grace of God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Think of the woman at the well. Heres a woman with five former husbands whos living with a man. And her timing is so perfect that she ends up standing next to the only sinless human being that ever lived. And she is out at the well at a time of day when nobody would have been drawing water. And why is she there? Because she knows that if she were there with the other women, they wouldnt have talked to her. They would have talked about her. And suddenly she is standing there before the King of Kings, the water of life. And suddenly her life is changed. And His

grace takes over. And suddenly she is back in her little hometown and everybody is going, "What has happened to her? She has changed. What has happened?" Ill tell you whats happened. The reign of grace. Its not like the sin of Adam. Its unbelievable. It reverses generational patterns of sin. It gives newness of life. Think of Paul, he was a Christian hunter. He loved to see Christians captive imprisoned and killed. He held the cloaks while Stephen was stoned to death. And suddenly there he is, hes on the road to Damascus, and his life is changed. Hes made to be an emissary for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace changes things. Its not like the sin of Adam. That makes perfect sense, the pernicious influence and corruption of sin, but grace, its the most surprising thing in the world. Its also the most unexpected thing in the world. Maybe youre here today, and youve been blasñ about grace, and youve forgotten about that initial excitement about the freshness of Gods mercy to you in Jesus Christ. Maybe you need to be reminded just how amazing Gods grace is. And Paul is waiting for you. And hes saying to you, "Christian, you need to sing the doxology for Gods grace." Lets pray.

Our Lord and our God, theres nothing like Your grace, and we take it for granted. We underestimate our sin. We overestimate what we deserve. We are arrogant before You. We stand before You in our own pride, and we think that we can earn Your love. And we forget the words of Isaiah that You dwell in unapproachable light, You are high and lifted up, and yet at the same time You dwell with those who are humble, those who are lowly in heart. As we are humbled by Your word in this very passage, so exalt *Yourself and exalt all those who humble themselves before You, trusting by faith in Jesus Christ and resting in His righteousness alone for salvation. Well give you all the praise and all the glory. In Jesus name, Amen.*

The Parallels Between the Broken Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace

Romans 5:18-19

The Parallels Between the Broken Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace

If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to Romans, chapter 5. We're going to be looking at verses 18 and 19, but let me ask you to allow your eyes to roam back to verse 12, because you will remember that in verse 12 Paul began a sentence which he did not complete. There is a "just as" for which there is no "so also" in verse 12. In fact the apostle interrupted himself mid-sentence to tell you two very important things. One thing he wanted to tell you in verses 13 and 14, another thing he wanted to tell you in verses 15 through 17. Having accomplished his purpose in telling you those two things before he completed his sentence, in verse 18 he now goes back to his original sentence in verse 12, phrases it slightly different and completes it. That's where we are today. Let's hear God's holy word. Romans, chapter 5, verse 18:

"So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men. Even so through one act of righteousness, there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man's disobedience, the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one, the many will be made righteous."

Amen, and thus ends this reading of God's holy and inspired word. May He add His blessing to it. Let's pray.

Our Lord, the sentences of this word are dense with truth, but clear as day. By Your spirit help us to understand and to respond to them in faith, belief, obedience and gratitude. In Jesus name, Amen.

The apostle Paul we have said from Romans, chapter 1, verse 16 all the way to Romans, chapter 5, verse 11 has been laying the groundwork for explaining why it was that salvation was by grace alone, or more particularly, why we are saved by grace through faith alone in Christ alone; why we are justified by God's grace through the alone instrument of our believing on Jesus Christ as He is offered in the gospel. And when he gets to Romans, chapter 5, verse 12 he begins a new section of the book.

In that section, which will run all the way to the end of chapter 8, he is concerned to pull back and give you a deeper, a broader background and understanding for what he has taught you so far. Hes not merely repeating himself, hes not merely recapitulating what hes already said, hes actually pulling back and saying, "Let me explain to you some of the underlying reasons for the purposes of God and why salvation has to be this way. Why it is that you cant save yourself. Why it is that you contribute nothing of your own righteousness to your standing of righteousness before God. Why it is that you have to look away from your works and to look to Jesus Christ."

And so beginning in Romans, chapter 5, verse 12, he wants to explain to you the parallels which exist between Adam and Christ, our first head, our federal representative, Adam, who fell in his rebellion against God from the state of righteousness and grace which God had blessed him with. And he wants to compare Adam to Jesus Christ so that we might understand, first of all, something of the web of sin that were involved in, and also some reason again for why we need to flee to Christ alone for salvation.

But before will discuss those parallels between Adam and Christ, he wants to explain a couple of other things, especially the discontinuities between Adam and Christ. He wants it to be very clear that Christ, in what He does to save us, is far more glorious and the fruit of it is far more glorious in comparison to Adam than the work that Adam did to bring us into this situation, and the situation which we actually find ourselves in. In other words you cant talk about Adam and Christ and compare them without drawing out the bold contrast that exists between them. And thats exactly what he did in verses 15 through 17.

Having done that, however, he now goes back to discuss the continuities or parallels between Adam and Christ. To put it another way, the parallels between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace here in verses 18 and 19.

Now you will appreciate this passage more if you will remember once more the audience context in which Paul is speaking this. Remember who the people are that are Pauls opponents. Paul has Jewish opponents and

professing Christians who he will call the Judaizers. Those who will say that at some level our individual righteousness must commend us to God in salvation, either through the ceremonial law, or through our keeping of the moral law. Some of them said, 'Well Christ saves you, but its Christ plus circumcision.' And others said, 'Well yes, Christ saves you, but its Christ keeping the ceremonial law of Moses.' And others were saying, 'Yes, but its Christ plus keeping the Ten Commandments. You have to add some of your own obedience, some of your own moral rectitude in order to commend yourself to God.' In other words, a theology of *plus* pervaded the thinking of Pauls opponents. They thought *Christ plus this*, equals salvation. And what Paul wants to press upon them is that it is Christ alone who brings our salvation, and it is faith alone in what He has done alone that brings to us our right standing before God.

And so Paul, when he goes to this analogy between Adam and Christ; when he explains to us the covenant of works and the covenant of grace here in Romans, chapter 5, verse 12-19, is doing it in order to set at naught misconceptions of the right way of salvation.

Now having said that as introduction, I simply want to walk you through three things in this passage today. Theres a lot of truth in this passage, and we cant cover it all. But we can cover some of it. Id like to do it using these three categories. Your predicament, your culpability, and your only hope. Hang your hat on those three things as an outline for what were going to look at today. And then permit me to make one or two or three digressions along the way, and I think well have some sort of a grasp of this passage.

I. If you are counting on your own works for salvation, you are in a hopeless position. - *Your predicament.*

First of all, lets start in verse 18, the first half of the verse, and lets look at your predicament. The apostle Paul makes it clear in verse 18 again that if you are trusting in your works in any way for your salvation, you are in a hopeless position. Paul in verse 18 begins to restate the case that he had made in verse 12. Everything in between, from verses 13 through 17, consist of the two qualifications he wanted to make about what he was about to say. But see this parallel, its very clear. Look up at verse 12, you will see a "just as" in verse 12, but youll never see a "so also." Youll see

protasis, but no apodosis for any of you grammarians out there. You'll see a "just as" and a clause associated with it, but you'll not see a "so also," a responding, an ending clause, a concluding clause of the article. But if you look down in verse 18, you'll see that in the first half of the verse, Paul virtually restates what he had said in verse 12. So then, as through one transgression, there resulted condemnation to all men. The "so then" could also be translated "consequently," "therefore," or "just as." 'So then' is the perfectly good word for it.

But notice the perfect parallel. As through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all. Now look back at verse 12, just as through one man's sin entered into the world and death through sin, and so death spread to all men. Notice the parallel. What you have in verse 18 that you didn't have in verse 10 is the "so also." Read ahead in verse 12: Even so, through the act of righteousness, through one act of righteousness, there is also justification of life to all men. So Paul is resuming his argument here in verse 18.

But in the beginning of this verse, and that's what I want you to concentrate on for a moment, Paul is asserting again that Adam's one original sin resulted in the condemnation of all men. In other words, he is asserting that Adam was our representative. He was our federal head. And that his original sin had consequences for us.

Now again, before you argue with that, let's get one thing clear first. Here's what Paul is saying. Separate two questions. Some of you are saying, "That's not fair." I know that. And I promise that I will give you an answer for that today, God willing. But before you get to the 'that's not fair,' let's first think about what Paul is saying, because before you get to verse 18, six times Paul says the same thing. Walk me through the passage beginning at verse 12.

Six times Paul reiterates that Adam's sin impacts not only you, some of you, but all of you, all of us. All of us are involved in the guilty and condemnation of Adam's sin. Look at verse 12: "Through one man, sin entered into the world." Look at it again. You're saying, "That's not fair." Well, hold on. Through one man, sin entered into the world. Look again, verse 12: "Through one man death through sin entered the world." Look

again, verse 12: Through one man death spread to all men because one man sinned through Adam is the implication there. Look at verse 15, "By the transgression of the one, the many died." Look again, verse 16: "The judgment arose, (that is the judgment of all of us) from the one transgression resulting in condemnation of us all. And again in verse 17: "If by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one." You see in all of these clauses, Paul is stressing that one mans sin, Adams, impacted everybody. He stressing not just the doctrine of original sin that Adam had rebelled, but hes stressing the doctrine of the imputation of Adams original sin to everybody in the human race. That is, in some way we bear a responsibility for that sin.

And look at the progression of Pauls thought. Adams sin resulted in what? Sin in the world, death in the world, judgment in the world, condemnation in the world, the reign of death in the world, and ultimately the condemnation of us all. So Paul here is focusing us on the one act of Adam as the problem for us all.

Now the reason he is doing that you will see, I hope later one, when we parallel what he says about justification. Because just as he says one act got us into this mess, one act, and one act only, can get us out of this mess. Now, thats very important because Paul is speaking to people who think that in order to be right with God theyve to do certain things. Theyve got to do this ritual, theyve to obey this command. Theyve got to commend themselves to God. And whats Paul trying to do? Hes trying to draw their attention away from their singular acts, from their individual acts, from their individual righteousness, to think about one act, one obedience, one righteousness done by Jesus Christ. So this is one reason why Paul is doing this Adam-Christ parallel. In other words, the one place to look for salvation is not our own works, or the works of other men even saintly men. But to the one man, the right man, Jesus Christ.

Now let me also say in passing, seemingly problematically, Paul does an interesting parallel in this passage. That is a parallel of two *alls*. Look at verse 18, the whole verse. He says, "Through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men." Now once again, were back to that universalism thing. Is Paul teaching that

everybody is saved? Our job is just to announce it. Everybody is saved. Why bother? Close up the church doors at home. Were all saved. Why bother? It looks like condemnation to all men, justification of life to all men.

Well, three reasons why Paul is not teaching that salvation has a universal scope or that the work of Christ results in the actual salvation of all men. First and foremost, Paul throughout the book of Romans has made it clear that salvation is for believers, and believers only. Think of [Romans 1:16](#) and [17](#) where he makes this point. Salvation is for those who believe. To the Jew first and also to the Greek, "To them that receive the gospel." As they believe in it. Think again of Romans, chapter 3, verses 21 through 26. Who is it who receives the benefits of Jesus atoning work? Those who believe on Him. Those who exercise faith in Him.

Secondly, in this very passage we saw last week in verse 17, that Paul stresses that Christ's salvation is not for every last person that ever lived. It is for whom? For those who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness. This salvation must be received by faith. In this very passage, in other words, Paul makes it clear that the salvation of Jesus Christ does not extend to every last person, but to those who receive that salvation by faith.

And finally, if we were to look at I Corinthians, chapter 15, verses 22 and 23, we would find a verse that is very similar to [Romans 5:18](#). That verse says, "As in Adam, all die; so in Christ all shall be made alive." So there again is that *all* parallel. But if you look at verse 23, you will see that Paul parallels *all* with *something*. What is that *something*? In [I Corinthians 15:23](#) that *something* is *those who are Christs*. So the *all* of salvation parallels with what? With *those who are Christs*, those who belong to Christ, those who belong to Him by faith, those who have trusted in Him. So Paul is not teaching in this passage that all are condemned, and all are saved, speaking of every last person that ever lived.

Well then, you say, why then is he saying the word *all*? Isn't that a little confusing? Well, that's a very good question, and I think I've got an answer for you. And it has to do with the very point that Paul is making. Paul is talking to Jewish folk who think that in order to be saved, you've got to

become like them. And Paul is saying, "No, no, no. Salvation is for all, Jew and Greek; slave and free, male and female." The Jewishness of this thing means nothing. And so Pauls stress on all men is beautiful because hes saying all of us are condemned, and all of us have only one hope, and that is Jesus Christ and saving faith in Him. The reality of the broken covenant of works and the consequences that lie behind it, remind us of our inability to save ourselves. Paul in this passage is telling us about our predicament. All of us are involved in the sin of Adam. All of us are accountable to God for it. All of us are guilty for it, Paul says.

II. If you are counting on your own works for salvation, you are in a hopeless position - *Your culpability.*

Now theres a second thing Id like to see here. Now Paul not only speaks about our predicament, he speaks about our culpability. We are justly condemned because we are responsible in our sin to God. So we are not only in a predicament, we are personally culpable. You see, a lot of people hear that Adam brought sin into the world, or Adams sin brought sin into the world, and they think, "Well, thats not fair. Poor, innocent me. Poor innocent me, being caught up in this wicked thing that Adam has done." But Paul here says, "No, under the covenant of works, there is not only universal condemnation because were in union with Adam, in the covenant of works there is universal sinnerhood by virtue of our union with Adam.

Paul in this passage, stresses two more things. Look at the first part of 19. First, Id like you to see that he stresses the nature of Adams sin. Have you noticed in this passage Paul uses three words to describe Adams sin: *Transgression, trespass, and disobedience.* Now why is Paul using three different terms to describe Adams sin? Basically because Paul wants to sum up for you that Adam broke Gods law in about every way you could break it when he sinned against Him. It was *transgression*, that is, he crossed the line that God told him not to cross. He broke his command. God gave him an express command, and Adam broke that command. It was *transgression*. It was *trespass* in that Adam not only broke Gods commandment, but he did positively what God has explicitly and specifically, negatively told him not to do. Its just like the little boys, who want to go hunting on somebody elses property. They dont have

permission. The sign up there says "No Trespassing." They go right past the sign on the ground, they did exactly what the sign and the law told them not to do. So its not just breaking the law, its breaking of an explicit prohibition. Dont do it, but he does it. Thirdly, its *disobedience*. In other words, Paul is saying it was willful. Adam didnt stumble into this. He wasnt tricked into this. Eve did not seduce him into this sin. Adam did, as Paul tells us as in II Timothy 2, Adam did exactly what he wanted to do. He knew exactly what he was doing.

So the apostle Paul is saying that Adam involved himself in sin in just about every way you can involve yourself in sin all at once. And as a result, that kind of sin nature pervades our race. Paul has already described it in you, especially at the end of chapter 1, chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 3. Really, from 1:18 all the way to 3:20 Paul has been showing you that you were a sinner. Hes saying to you here, "Now dont forget, you are a sinner." Dont say, Oh Paul, youre saying the opposite of what the prophet is saying." You remember Isaiah and the late prophets often said to Israel, dont say, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the childrens teeth are set on edge." In other words dont say, "Heavenly Father, our spiritual forefathers were wicked and evil and they did bad things, and were paying the consequences for it. Poor innocent us." The prophets told the people of Israel, dont do that because God was going to judge them for their own sins. And you can see somebody saying to Paul, "Well Paul, youre saying the same thing. Youre saying, Here we are Adam did something and were responsible for it." And Paul says, "Uh, uh, uh, youre a sinner." In every aspect of it youre a sinner." But Hes not done.

Theres a second thing. You not only see the nature of Adams sin here, but you see the fact of our sinnerhood. Notice the words. Look at verse 18 and then look at the parallel in verse 19: " As through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men." Now when he says that all men are condemned, all hes doing is summing up what he said so far. In verse 19, he says something a little more: "For as through one mans disobedience, the many were made sinners." Paul says, Through Adams sin, you not only became representative sinful, you became actually sinful. Gods condemnation is just.

Now you're still asking yourself, I still don't understand this whole imputation thing. I don't understand how it is that Adam does something and it's imputed to me. I don't understand how he can be my representative. And that sin can be imputed. I don't understand this whole representative principle. It's not fair. Let me give you an answer to that. I'd like to divide my answer in two parts.

First, I'd like to speak to believers. Believers that are just scratching their heads and wondering, "I just can't make sense of this. Help me." Then, I'd like to address unbelievers because in a congregation of this size there have got to be a skeptic who is saying, "You know, you Christians, will fall for anything. I've got a couple of things I'd like to say to you."

So, let's start off with the believers. Believers, I've got five answers I'd like to give you to that question. How is it that it is fair? What are the reasons that we have for believing that the imputation of Adam's sin is fair, that it is fair for Adam to be our federal representative. What are the reasons that we have for accepting and assuming it to be fair even if we don't understand it all? Five of them.

First, think of it friends, God was gracious in the way that He arranged the covenant of works in give Adam to us as our federal representative. Have you ever seen these half-time contests in college and professional football or basketball or baseball games where in-between innings or halves or quarters, they will bring out some person who won a drawing, and they'll either throw a football or they'll shoot a basket or they'll hit a long put, or they'll do something extraordinary and win a million dollars. You know, a guy has to stand at the fifty-yard line and throw ten straight passes through this shape, this thing fifty yards down the field. Okay, well in giving Adam as our representative, it would be like you're in a million-dollar contest at half time of the national championship game in April. And God says, "Look, you're not going to have to take this shot in order to win salvation. I'm going to bring out Michael Jordan for you. I'm going to let Michael Jordan take that forty-five foot jump shot for you. Or, you've got to sink a put from the fairway. I'm going to bring out Tiger Woods to take that shot for you. I'm going to let him hack away at that ball on your behalf. When God gives you Adam, as your representative, he is giving someone of extraordinary capacities that you could hardly even grasp. He

is an optimal representative. Aristotle is but the rubbish of fallen Adam, who is the greatest intellect that ever lived in the history of the world, until Jesus Christ. You cant even concede what an unfallen human being has with regard to intellectual and moral potential. Thats your representative. And so God was generous even in the construction of the covenant of works. You might say, "Well, I would have done better." Well youre a sinner, and you cant even think about it. You cant even think about how you would have functioned as a non-sinful person. You cant even get out of yourself to think in those categories. And so God was gracious in the way that He constructed this. He gave us this optimal representative in Adam, and even Adam failed.

Secondly, why is it that the imputation of Adams sin is fair? Because God shows meticulous concern for justice in His covenant of grace. Think about it. In the way that God goes about saving us through Jesus Christ, He shows meticulous concern for justice. He doesnt say, "Okay, look, Im going to sweep those sins under the closet. Its kind of the good ole boys club, where you messed up, and they say ah, were going to just forget it this time." God says, "Okay, I love you so much that My Son is going to bear your sin. Why does He do this? Because He is concerned for justice and fairness. So if, in the way of grace, God is concerned for fairness and justice, is it not reasonable to work back to the fact that in the original relationship that He has sustained with man, that He was concerned with fairness and justice? And in that original relationship, what did He do? He appointed Adam as our representative as the representative of all humanity. Its clear that the covenant of grace and imputation is fair. And, therefore, looking back, you can see that the covenant of works is fair.

I remember being in seminary and a young man was arguing this point with a professor. We had been studying the imputation of Adams sin, but we hadnt gotten yet to the imputation of Christs righteousness. In other words, we had been talking about the fact that we were constituted sinners in Adam, but we hadnt yet been talking about the fact that we were constituted as righteous in Jesus Christ. And the young man started arguing with the professor. He said, "Its not fair, I didnt exist when Adam was brought into being in this world. Adam died at least 6,000 years before I was brought into being. Its not fair that what he did would

impact me. And the professor said, "Well, let me ask you this. Do you believe in Jesus Christ? Absolutely. Do you believe in Christ alone for salvation? Absolutely. Do you trust in what Jesus did and was for your salvation? Yes. Let me ask you a question. Were you alive when Jesus was alive? Um, no. Did you exist when Jesus came to this earth to live and die on your behalf? No. Is Jesus righteousness imputed to you. Yes. I don't know what you're complaining about." You get the point. You're willing to accept the gracious imputation of the righteousness of Christ, but you've got real problems with the imputation of this Adam's sin business. You didn't even exist when he did. You didn't exist when Christ did what He did, but you know what? Paul in this passage is going to tell you that if you're a believer, you are clothed in His righteousness. So working back from the covenant of grace, to the covenant of works is another indication that it is fair.

Thirdly, there are biblical patterns that establish this, and teach us to expect us to expect this kind of representation on the part of others. There are numerous Biblical examples that show us the principles of representation. For instance, David and Goliath. David stands in for the army of Israel. Goliath for the army of Philistia. David wins, Israel wins. Goliath wins, Philistia wins. One man loses, one nation loses. One man wins, one nation wins. Not fair. That's the way it was. David and Goliath provide an example. What about Abraham and his descendants? Abraham believes God. Abraham obeys God and his descendants are blessed and become God's chosen people for evermore. Well, hold on, what about his descendants? Abraham believed, his descendants are blessed. Think again of David, in a less than favorable way this time. In I Chronicles 21 David takes the census. He's proud. He wants to see how many army men he has. So David takes a census and 70,000 citizens of Jerusalem die. David the King, the representative, the head, sins, and Israelites die. Over and over in the Bible we see these principles. Pharaoh opposes God. You live in a mud hut in the south of Egypt, and you're an Egyptian and you pay because of his sin. Over and over we see the principle of representation in the Bible.

Fourthly, as we've just said in looking at verse 19, it's not simply that we are imputed the guilt of Adam's sin. We are made sinners in Adam. We

are not only representatively sinners in Adam, but Paul tells us in [Romans 5:19](#) that we are actually sinners in Adam. So we can't say, O, Lord, we were just innocent bystanders, victims here. There was a car wreck, and we just happened to see it. We were involved in this thing. No, we were driving the vehicle. We are sinners in Adam.

Fifth and finally believers. The character of God guarantees the justice of all His actions. There are going to be many things in this life that you can ask me about that I'm going to answer you by, "I don't know, I don't have a clue. But the character of God guarantees that He will do what is right. And when there are areas of mystery that we do not understand, we are on very good ground to assume God to be doing that which is right because He has proven Himself to us in the way that He dealt with us in His Son. So for all those reasons, let me argue that it is perfectly appropriate to accept as fair, the imputation of Adam's sin.

Now to unbelievers, very briefly. I've got three things that I'd like to say. You're sitting here saying, "Well, this is not fair." I want to say three things. First, you're not in a position to judge. You are standing in the dock. You are standing before the bar of God's justice. You're not here to judge the judge. You can't extract yourself from this situation. But let me say this. He is so sovereign that even if it were unfair, there would be nothing that you could do about it. Because He's the judge, He's in charge, that's just the way it is. Think of it, He's sitting around in the time of Moses, and He decides that He's going to take on the most powerful kingdom that ever lived, or ever was in that day, the king of Egypt. And He says, let me see, how am I going to take down Egypt? I think I'll send frogs. That's how sovereign He is. He can decide He's going to wipe out the most powerful kingdom in the world. How does He do it? I think I will send frogs. God is sovereign. God has every capacity to bring you to the bar of justice.

Secondly, because of your sin, my unbelieving friends, you can't even think past the fall to think about fair. You can't get over the fact that we have fallen and get back into an unfallen world and think about how justice would have worked there. You can't even think there, your mind is darkened by sin. You are involved in sin. It's like a person who is slipping into dementia being asked to work through problems for which he no

longer has the capacity to contemplate. They forgot where they were fifteen minutes ago. They forgot what they ate ten minutes ago. They forgot to whom they spoke five minutes ago. That's you in a fallen world. You don't even have the capacity to think about what's fair.

Thirdly, and finally, let me say that for unbelievers, there is often a voice that says, "That's not fair, reject Him." And I want to say that that voice has been heard before in human history. That voice once said to Eve, that's not fair, reject Him. And I can categorically, without having any prophetic powers or omniscience today say that voice that is whispering in your ear, "That's not fair reject Him," that's the voice of the evil one, the enemy of your soul, Satan who is seeking to destroy you. That is not a word of somebody who cares about you, that is someone who wants to destroy you. And for all those reasons, I believe that your only wise response is to accept what God has said in His word, and flee to Christ for grace.

III. We must look away from our own deeds and righteousness to the act of the One Man - Your Only Hope

And that leads me to the last thing that I'd like to say today. And you'll see it at the end of verse 18 and the end of verse 19, and that is your only hope. Salvation is by works my friend, salvation is by works, or rather by *one* work. Salvation is by the one work of the one man, Jesus Christ. It is not by your works, it is by His one work. The work of which the complex is represented in His life and in His death on our behalf; and, therefore, we must look ahead from our own deeds and our own righteousness to the act of the one man for salvation.

Let me ask you to do one thing. Take your hymnals out and look at number 92. If you look at the second stanza of number 92, this is "A Mighty Fortress is Our God." And interestingly enough, the hymn that we are about to sing, makes the same point. But you know this hymn by heart, so let me just remind you of it. Hymn 92, stanza 2, notice what Luther says: "Did we in our own strength confide our striving would be losing. We are not the right man on our side, the man of God's own choosing. Just ask who that may be, Christ Jesus, that is He. Lord Sabaoth His name, from age to age the same, and He must win the battle." What is Luther doing? He is summarizing for you Paul's argument

from [Romans 5:12](#) to 19. And it is simply this: In your own strength confide, and you will lose. Trust in your own works, and you will lose. Seek to be righteous before God in your own strength, and you will lose, unless you run from your works to the one man, the one work, the right man, Jesus Christ.

But He will, in fact we can say, He *has won* the battle. Now Paul's whole point in this passage is you flee from your works. You make a heap of all your bad works; and all your good works, and you flee from them to the one work of Jesus Christ which alone saves. May God bless you as you do. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, grant that we would seek our only hope in Jesus Christ, receiving Your grace, accomplished by Him alone, by faith in Him alone. We ask it in His name, Amen.

The Law, the Covenant of Works, and Grace

The Good News: There is an Alien Righteousness
Romans 5:20-21

If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you turn to Romans, chapter 5, we'll begin in this passage that we've been looking at for a few weeks. [Romans 5:12](#) until the end of the chapter, there's a passage in which Paul goes a long way to explaining why salvation has to be by grace alone. You know throughout this passage, Paul has emphasized that we sustain one of two relations, and those two relationships determine our everlasting future. We are either in relationship to our representative Adam, or we are in relationship to our representative Jesus Christ. We are either in this sphere of Adam's influence, and part of his family, or by grace we are in the sphere and influence of Jesus Christ and part of His family. And the apostle wants to make it clear that everybody in the world is in one of those two camps. You are either in Adam or you are in Christ.

Paul is wanting to make that analogy between Adam and Christ to show

the similarities and differences that exist between Adam and Christ precisely so that we will understand that the only place that you can flee for salvation is to Jesus Christ. There's no third way. There's no fourth way. There's one way. You're either in Adam, or you're in Christ. It's that simple.

Now having said that, the apostle has provoked the thoughts of the thinking members of the group that opposes His teaching. And they are wondering to themselves. Well, wait a minute, where does the law fit in? Sounds to me, Paul, that you don't have a place for the law. Where does the law fit in? They are thinking of this. Now they don't ask a question, at least Paul doesn't record the question that they are asking to themselves, or maybe even objecting out loud here in verses 20 and 21. But he certainly records their objections in chapter 6 and 7. And I want to suggest to you that the fact that Paul brings up the law here again at the end of a passage which has not, by and large, talked about the law, but which has compared Adam and Christ, and their particular headships or representative roles or mediatory roles, however you want to describe them, the fact that he introduces the law here then, is an indication that he knows what his opponents are thinking. He knows the question that they want to press. He knows the objection that they have to his teaching, and he is pre-empting that objection before they even get it out of their mouths. So with that with a word of introduction, let's hear the word of God in Romans, chapter 5, beginning in verse 20.

"And the law came in that the transgression might increase, but where sin increased grace abounded all the more; that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord."

Amen, and thus ends this reading of God's holy and inspired and inerrant word. May He write His eternal truth upon our hearts. Let's pray.

Our Heavenly Father, show us Yourself in the Word, show us our sin in the Word, and then show us the Savior in Your Word, for Your glory and our good, in Jesus name, Amen.

Now Paul's skeptical opponents are thinking, "Well, what about the law.

All this Adam and Christ stuff, no mention of the law." They are thinking to themselves, "Look, Paul, the distinctive thing about us as believers in the one true God is that God has granted us the law. When God through Moses gave us the law, moral, civil and ceremonial, it set us apart from the nations. And yet as you describe the way into saving fellowship with God, there is not one mention here of the law. All this Adam headship stuff, Christ headship stuff, and no law. What about the law, Paul?" And I want you to see that the answer that Paul gives to that unspoken as yet objection is as bold and as audacious as it could possibly be.

Lets remember that Paul, though he is indeed speaking to a mixed congregation, that is, there are some Gentile Christians there, as well as Jewish Christians, he is speaking in the context where Judaism and the religion of the Hebrews and the Scriptures of the Hebrews is very much dominant in the thought world. Even the Gentile Christians that are a part of this fellowship know the Old Testament well. And they know the teachings of the Old Testament; and they know the importance of the revelation of Gods law to Moses, and how that distinguished Israel from all the nations. And there are some of them who are just a bit suspicious of what Paul is saying, and they hear him speaking against the law, and they hear him speaking against Moses; not unlike His Master was heard by some who objected to His teaching, and they are suspicious of Paul here. And the apostle wants to take opportunity again to shock them into a realization about why salvation is by grace. Because of that, what Paul is saying to this original audience, is just as relevant to you and to me today as it was when He first spoke it. This is not just an interesting text thats two thousand years old that dealt with the specific cultural theological problem with a particular group of people that has no further reference or relevance to us. It has every reference and relevance to us. As Paul himself could say about the Old Testament. These things happened and were written for our benefit. Thats true of what Paul is saying today.

Now theres a lot in this great passage. But all I want to look with you at is two things this morning. Were really going to skirt over verse 21 because next week, Lord willing, were going to come right back to verse 21; and look at what it means for grace to reign in righteousness. Today I just want to concentrate on verse 20 with you. And Id like you to see two

things there.

First of all, in the first phrase of verse 20, the apostle teaches that God gave the law to convict and to convince us of sin. And second of all, I want you to see in the second part of verse 20 that Paul teaches that despite the increase of sin by the law, grace has been even more expansive. Grace has super abounded, despite the increase of sin. Those are the two things that I'd like to look at with you this morning in verse 20, the first part of the verse and the second part of the verse. And I think as we look at it, you will see the importance of grace and the reason why grace is the only way that you can be reconciled with God.

I. The law is not our Savior, indeed its presence exacerbates our predicament.

Lets begin in the first part of the verse. The law came in so that the transgression would increase. Paul is telling you here that one reason, and hes only giving one reason, and hes not saying more right now, but Paul is telling you that one reason that God gave the law, was to convict and to convince us of sin. Paul is saying this because it is vital that the Romans understand, and its vital that you and I understand that the law is not our Savior. Indeed, the very presence of the law exacerbates our predicament. You remember last time we were together, we looked at the predicament that Paul talked about that we were in? Well Paul says, "The law doesnt help that predicament." The law, coming along in the time of Moses, does not solve that problem that Adam plunged you into. The coming of the law with Moses was not Gods great solution to the Adamatic problem of sin, Gods great solution to the Adamatic problem of sin was Christ and grace. And so Paul wants you to understand that the law was never given to be your Savior.

The purpose of the law, not exclusively, but as Paul explains it here was to; listen to it, increase sin. Look, if youre paying attention at all, youve got to be asking what in the world are you talking about, Paul? Are you saying that God gave the law so that sin would increase? Are you saying that God caused the increase of sin? Are you saying that God wanted sin to increase, and so He gave the law to Moses? Are you saying that He gave the law to Moses because He desired for us to send more? Well, the answer of course is no. But if the answer is no, youve still got to ask, what

in the world are you saying, that the law came in that transgression might increase?

Let me answer that question in four parts. And I'll give you four words beginning with "p" to sort of help outline this thing. Paul's answer is polemic, it is partial, it is pedagogical, and it is provocative. So there are four parts to the answers. Paul's answer is polemic. In other words, it is argumentative. The first thing I want you to see is that this phrase, the law came in that sin would increase, this phrase is deliberately designed by the apostle Paul to promote the maximal offense in his hearers. He wants everyone listening to be offended. Look, Paul is talking to people who are the descendants of people who were sent into exile in Babylon because they disobeyed the law. These people are serious about the law. They know, especially as people who are no longer part of a Jewish theocracy, that they're under Roman domination, and that the one thing that sets them apart from everything else in the world is the giving of the law. And the apostle says here, "Now why did God give the law?" To make you special amongst all the nations? No. So that sin would increase. You couldn't have said something more offensive to these people if you had thought for a million years. Paul deliberately says this to shake them out of their tree. Paul wants them to be shocked. Paul wants them recalibrate. He wants them to, as one of my dear colleagues likes to say, he wants them to reframe. He wants them to look in a different way than they are looking. The law is not their instrument of salvation. No. In fact, he says, "The law came in that transgression might increase." That's the first thing that I want you to see and understand in this phrase. He's trying to shock them. He's trying to shock us. He's succeeded. We're all ears. Tell us more, Paul.

Secondly then, notice that what Paul says about the law here is partial. This is so very important. In the worship guide, if you want to sneak a peak real quick, under the section on the sermon, I mentioned that there are three phrases in this passage that are very, very difficult to understand and have promoted a lot of misunderstanding. This is one of those phrases because a lot of people have taken Paul here to be given the sum total of what he believes about the law of God. In other words, they've said, "Aha!" You see this is what Paul says, and therefore, the law has

nothing to do with the believer. That's Old Testament; it doesn't have anything to do with the New Testament believer. But it's very important for you to see that what Paul is saying about the law here is partial, it is selected. This is not all that Paul has to say about the law. If we would look at Galatians, chapter 3, verses 17-25, if we were to look at II Corinthians, chapter 3, verses 6 through 11, and if we would look at I Timothy, chapter 1, verses 8 through 11, in all those places Paul has more to say about the law than he has here. In fact, Paul is going to take up this very subject again in Romans, chapter 7; and he's going to have more to say about it than he says about it now. So it's important for you to understand that this is not all that Paul has to say about the law, about its function, about its purpose, about how it relates to Christians. But what Paul is saying here is very, very important about the law. It's essential to understanding the role of the law. So what he's saying is its polemic and its partial.

It's also pedagogical. He's telling us that the law is given to teach us something. It's a pedagogue. What is the law given to teach us? Paul is telling us here that the law served to teach us what sin is. It serves to expose sin. We might even put it this way. It serves to expose sin in us. Paul is telling us that the law serves a function of teaching us our need for grace. This is what the old Reformed theologians referred to as the second use of the law. It drives us to Christ by showing us our sin. As James speaks of the law, do you remember what he calls the law? He says, "The law is a mirror." You look at the law and what do you see? You see yourself. And it's not a pretty picture. It's early in the morning; the makeup is not on yet, it's not a pretty picture. The law shows you yourself, it shows you your need for grace. It shows you your sin, and thus by showing your sin and your need for grace, it leads you to the Savior. The Greek word *pedagogue*, for which we often use teacher, that's how we translate it today, actually referred to the slave that was a member of the household that took the children to school. So the pedagogue took you to the schoolteacher. He's the one who led you to the one who was going to give you what you need. And who was that one? Jesus Christ. So the law leads you to the one that you need. Paul is saying that the revelation of the law that God granted to us especially in the days of Moses was designed to show us our sin, not to be the instrument of salvation. It is

not our Savior; but if properly understood, it leads us to our Savior. The law apart from the Savior simply exacerbates our predicament. But the law rightly and spiritually understood leads us to our Savior.

Do you remember that scene in "The Hunchback of Notre Dame?" I'm not talking about the Disney version. I mean the book. Read the book. You remember the scene where Quasimodo is with this beautiful thing that he has captured, and she's crying. And he says to her, "Why are you crying?" And she says to him, "Well, you're crying." And he says, "Well, yes, I am crying." And she says, "Well, why are you crying?" And he says to her, "Because I never knew how ugly I was until I saw how beautiful you are." And my friends, that's the law. You never knew how ugly you were, until you saw how beautiful your God was. The law shows you the beauty and the glory and the honor and the uprightness and the holiness of God, and it humbles you. You never knew you were such a mess before the law. Furthermore, Paul is saying that the law had a distinctive role in God's purposes and mankind. He said, "Look, before the law, we knew the difference between right and wrong. This wasn't a relativistic moral universe until God spoke to Moses from Mt. Sinai. From the time of Adam, and his fall, we knew the difference between right and wrong. If you had been around when Cain slew Abel, you would have known that what Cain did was wrong. If you had been around when Abram went down to Egypt, and told the leaders of Egypt that his wife was his sister, and sure, you can have her, you would have known that the seventh Commandment had been violated. You didn't need a copy of the Ten Commandments up on your school room board to know that. If you'd been around when Lot went into the land of Canaan and chose the choice land before Abram, his superior, and the representative of the Covenant had the opportunity to choose his land; you would have known that Lot was greedy without having the Ten Commandments spelled out for you, or the Tenth Commandment spelled out for you as it is in Exodus, chapter 20. But, when Genesis is succeeded by Exodus and Leviticus and Deuteronomy, you better believe you know about sin now. If you knew about sin then, after you've read through Leviticus, whew, boy do you know about sin. After you've read through Exodus 20 and not only the summarization of God's ten moral commands, but the exposition of it from the Exodus 20 to 24, and the discussion of worship that runs from

25 to 40; then when you pick up Deuteronomy, and you see this gigantic farewell sermon by Moses that's about what the righteousness of God revealed in His law, you better believe you know about sin.

Paul is saying, "Look, God didn't send the law into the world to be the solution. God sent the law into the world so you would know that you need grace. You need to understand what sin is. But furthermore, in the very giving of the law, there is an expression of grace because in the sacrificial system, we are pointed to the answer. The sacrificial system points beyond itself. We know, as the Old Testament folk knew as well, to a certain degree what the author of Hebrews said, when he says, "The blood of bulls and goats cannot forgive sin." So did the people of God think that by slaughtering calves, they were actually appeasing the righteous judgment of God? No. They knew that those sacrifices pointed to something greater, something beyond. And so the law itself reveals sin to us in ways that we have never known it before. But it also pointed to the Savior. "This is one thing," Paul says, "that the law was for." That's the third thing that Paul is saying when he says, "The law came in that transgression would increase."

Fourth, and finally, Paul is saying, "The law is provocative." Paul may be indicating that the law provokes sin. You know how this works. The minute the boundaries are set, somebody wants to cross them. But that's why you can say to your young children, "Don't you eat those peas." And eighty-seven percent of the time it provokes the immediate response of eating the peas. Why? Because in a fallen world, once the righteous boundaries of God are laid down, there is an inclination in the wicked, human heart to find those boundaries and transgress them.

I had the privilege, when I was in Colorado Springs last week with the PCRT, of taking out the entire University of Arizona RUF group for supper. Now don't have in your mind Ole Miss or Mississippi State. This was ten people. But we went to Chilis. And as we drove into the Chilis parking lot, there was a bumper sticker on the back of a car that said "Keep your laws off my body." I thought, well, that's fairly in your face, isn't it? But, you understand the resistance there. How dare you tell me how to use my body. Isn't it interesting that when you lay down the good and perfect law of God, it instinctively provokes a rebellion in the wicked,

sinful human heart. We resent the law. We don't like the law. We want to find every place that it can be bent, find every place that it can be aggravated. You see, once you've seen your sin, and once you understand that the law is not an instrument of salvation, then you have to look somewhere else. That's why Paul is telling you this. The reason you can't be saved by the Mosaic Law is that's not what it was made for. It wasn't the instrument of salvation.

II. We need to look to grace, for grace superabounded and outdistances the increase of sin.

Now that leads Paul to the second part of this sentence, which is the thing that he really wants to say. And that is simply this: We need to look to grace for salvation. We need to look to grace for grace super abounded, it outdistances the increase of sin. If you're wondering what in the world Paul means when he says, "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more." He doesn't mean what some have said that he means, in saying that we ought to sin so that grace can abound. Paul's going to deal with that in just a couple of verses. In fact, if you want a good commentary on this Psalm, go back and look at that Psalm that we just sang, "Marvelous Grace of Our Loving Lord." That song is a commentary on that part of [Romans 5:20](#). What Paul means is that God actually takes advantage of the negative functions of the law in order to exalt Himself in order to exalt His grace, and in order to foster His saving purposes. The more sin is multiplied, the more it is shown to us, the more aware we become of it, the more aggravated it is, the greater is the grace that conquers it, and the more that grace is known and appreciated. The reign of sin is trumped by the triumph of grace. Grace meets sin head on, and it defeats it.

What's our favorite Southern way of dealing with sin and shame? Number one of my list is denial. Obstruction. Make sure nobody knows about it. If anybody knew that about me, they wouldn't like me. So let's pretend like it's not there. The elephant is in the room, right behind me, but it's not there. If anybody sees it, it's not there. Denial. That's our atoning work, denial. God is saying, "Grace operates in a far more effective way than that." Because grace, knowing that you ought to be rejected, if someone knew that about you, in fact, you ought to be rejected by God, but grace comes and says, I trump the sin, I conquer the sin, I justify the sinner, I

destroy the old man, I raise him to newness of life, I give him a new life here, I give him a new hope in eternity. And all those things that you are afraid of your friends knowing about you, grace deals with. Not because God somehow didnt know that you did them or didnt know that you were that way, but he knows you better than you know yourself. In fact, He knows some of those things that you dont know yet about yourself. And in grace He comes to you, and He says, "Child, I know exactly who you are. I know exactly what youre like, and My grace is sufficient to conquer that sin."

Now dont run to your obedience for salvation, because your obedience is the problem. Dont run to your heart for salvation; your heart is your problem. Dont run to your deeds for salvation; your deeds are the problem. Dont run to making a new start in new start in life by making some new resolutions. Thats the problem, your will is the problem, your heart is the problem. You are the problem. Dont run to you, run to Me, run to Christ. Run to My grace, I am the solution. Thats what Paul is saying. Grace is greater than all our sin.

My friends that is so comforting, not only because it teaches us why salvation is by grace alone, but it also teaches us that no sin is greater than Gods grace. Now you hunt around some dedicated Christians from a little bit of time. You scratch around a little bit, and you talk a little bit. Theres going to be one of them somewhere struggling with something they just cant let go of because they think that that sin is a little special, its just a little beyond Gods grace. Paul is saying, "No, youve got it the other way around. Grace is greater than all your sins." But Paul, you dont know what Ive done. "Oh yes, I do. Im the chief of sinners, and youve got a ways to go before you catch up with me." Paul says, "I am the chief of sinners, and I can assure you that grace is greater than all your sins. Thats what Paul is saying here. Thats why you dont run to yourself, you run to grace, you run to Christ, and you will find that grace will triumph over sin. May God grant you the faith to believe. Lets pray.

Our Lord and our God, we bow before you, and we ask the grace to believe. And then we ask, oh God, that grace would change us, transform us. In Jesus name, Amen.

Grace Reigns in Righteousness

Grace Reigns through Righteousness

Romans 5:21

If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to Romans, chapter 5. Before we hear the scripture this morning, I want to do two things. I want to remind you where Paul has come in his overall, and then I want to walk you through the five points of his argument that begin at the end of verse 20 and run through verse 21. You will remember that in Romans, chapter 1 and 2, Paul has told us about our predicament. He has told us about the fact that we know God, and we ought to worship and adore Him, but we don't, and He makes clear that that predicament is universal. No one is righteous, no, not one. In Romans, chapter 3, he tells us God's solution to that particular predicament. In His mercy He grants through His Son's atoning grace to those who trust in Him, and He accepts them as righteous because of Him. In other words, he teaches justification by faith in Romans, chapter 3.

Then in Romans, chapter 4, he defends that doctrine from Scripture, that is, from the Old Testament. He wants to make it clear that this is not an idea that he thought up, it's one that's rooted in God's redemptive design as far back as the covenant made with Abraham. And so he shows from the Old Testament, both from the life of Abraham and from the life of David, that this has always been God's way of saving. There's one of salvation in all days, in all ages, and that way is grace. He defends that in Romans, chapter 4.

Then in Romans, chapter 5, in the first eleven verses he wants to talk about some of the implications of this truth of justification by faith, this salvation by grace that he has been talking about. And so he tells us some things. He says justification by faith results in our having peace with God. He tells us that it enables us to rejoice even in sufferings. He tells us that it results in our communing with God. He tells us that it results in our security. The believer has a certain hope of future glory all because of justification. He wants us to sense something of the significance,

something of the impact of this glorious truth of justification, this glorious reality of justification for all those who trust in Jesus Christ.

Then, in Romans, chapter 5, from verse 12 all the way to the end of the chapter, where we find ourselves today, we see Paul step back and say, I want to tell you one more time why it is that salvation can only be by grace alone, and why it is that your righteousness is not the vehicle of your reentering into a pleasant and blessed relationship of communion with God. Why it is that only through Christ can you be brought into a relationship of communion and blessing with God. And so by paralleling Adam and Christ, he says all who are in Adam under the reign of sin, the law condemns them, God condemns them for their disobedience. The result is death and final condemnation. But all who are in Christ, all those who have been united to Him by the Holy Spirit by Faith, what do they find? They find instead of condemnation, justification. They find instead of death, life. They find instead of separation from God, communion with God. And so he makes it clear that everyone who is in Adam, everyone who is still under the bonds of sin, there is nothing that they can do in their own righteousness to reenter into a relationship of blessedness with God, because they are the problem. You are the problem is what Paul is saying once again. But all those who are in Christ have turned away from themselves and looked to Him for their only hope of salvation. And thus Paul again shows us the glorious importance of salvation by grace alone by faith alone in Christ alone.

And that brings us to [Romans 5:21](#), the end of His argument. But to pick up the full argument, in this verse, you need to look at the last phrase of verse 20. So lets look at that verse together. The last phrase of that verse is grace abounded all the more. That phrase is very important for the first part of verse 21. Grace abounded all the more so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness. Pauls argument in the section that we are going to look at today has five parts. Its very simple, but because Paul uses so few words to explain so much more to his truth, lets just have clear in our mind the five parts of his argument.

His argument is first, grace abounded. Thats argument party one. Grace abounded. Heres part two: Grace abounded so that grace might reign. Thats the second part of it. The reason that grace abounded is so that

grace might reign. Third part of His argument: Grace abounded so that grace might reign through the righteousness of Christ. Now youre looking down at your passage, and it just says through the righteousness of Christ. And youre saying ,where did you get this through the righteousness of Christ? Well, Ill defend that in a minute, but just wait. Fourth part of the argument: to eternal life. The result of this reign of the righteousness of Christ will be eternal life for all those who believe. And then the fifth part of the argument: through Jesus Christ our Lord. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ our Lord. And again, you are saying what is that mediation thing? Ill defend that in a minute, but heres the five parts of Pauls argument: **Grace abounded so that grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.** Get that outline and youve got the whole thing. So lets hear Gods word here in Romans, chapter 5, verse 21:

"That as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Amen, and thus ends this reading of Gods holy, inspired and inerrant word. May He add His blessing to it. Lets pray.

Father, this is Your Word, and we ask that by the Spirit You would open our eyes to understand it. We pray, O God, that all those who are believers on the name of the Savior, Jesus Christ, would be strengthened by a deeper understanding of the workings of the operations of the purposes of Your grace. And we pray that those who are not believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, would be so stung by a sense of their sin and need, that they themselves would be compelled to flee to the only one who can help them, Jesus Christ. And find in Him more than they ever imagined. These things we ask in Jesus name, Amen.

The function of Pauls words in this little verse, [Romans 5:21](#) is to tell you the purpose of super-abounding grace. In other words, Paul, in [Romans 5:21](#) is going to tell you why grace abounded. Why did it much more abound? Why did grace super-abound in comparison to sin? Paul is going to answer those questions in two parts in this one little verse. The first part focuses on the reign of sin. The second part focuses on the reign of grace. Id like you to see three or four very important things today.

I. The reign of sin is an ugly thing.

First, let's look at the first little phrase in verse 21, "So that as sin reigned in death, even so grace." Paul is reminding us again in [Romans 5:12](#) through 21 for the last time that the reign of sin is an ugly thing. The reign of sin is what Paul is referring to one more time in contrast to the reign of Christ in grace, and He is telling us again that sin reigned in death. Sin dominates us when we are in Adam. Sin dominates us when we are under the law, when the law is our enemy. Paul characterizes life before Christ, he characterizes life apart from Christ in terms of the reign of sin. In other words, he is saying, "Sin's relationship to you is like the reign of an absolute monarch. It completely controls you. You don't stand a chance. It has its way. If you could picture sin as a weight, many times the weight of your body, so much greater than the weight of your body that you could never lift yourself. You are flat on your back, and the weight is on you. You can't get it off. That's the picture of sin that Paul paints for you. You are totally dominated by it. There's nothing that you can do. And Paul is saying that because that's the problem, of course, your works can't fix the problem, because you can't lift the weight. It's too much for you. Sin totally dominates you. Don't tell me about you helping yourself in that situation. The whole point is you can't. You are totally morally dominated by this force of sin. It's not a pretty picture.

But then Paul goes on to say the result of this reign of sin is death. Death is both the natural consequence of sin, but it is also the express judgment of God against sin. Sin so often paints itself as something desirable, something liberated. "Ah, go on and do what you want. Don't let those fundamentalists ruin your life," perhaps you have said to you. Perhaps somebody's whispered that in your ear or perhaps someone has whispered that in your heart. Sin presents itself as attractive but it always results in the reign of death.

First there's the law of diminishing returns. As you go the way that you want to do and suddenly you find that you have to do more and more to satisfy, and then finally you get to a point where you can't be satisfied. And then there's that law of self-destruction which is woven into sin itself. Where sin, though it presents itself as something that is going to enrich you, eventually destroys you, it takes you apart, limb from limb; and it

finally results in death. William Plumber, a great Southern Presbyterian commentator on the book of Romans describes it this way: "Look at how sin has reigned unto death in history. It is written in every graveyard, in every hospital, in every disease, in every groan, in every tormenting apprehension awakened by a guilty conscience, in every prison house of despair." So Paul for one more time has drawn attention to this reign of sin.

But the reason that he draws your attention to the reign of sin is because he wants to contrast it. The reason that he has brought this subject up again is not for you to fixate on it, but he wants to point you to a contrast. His purpose is to show you, look at the first verses, the first words of the verse, "So that as sin reigned in death, even so grace." In other words, Paul wants to draw your attention to the fact that God did something good even with the reign of sin. That's how awesome it is. That He was able to do something good even with the reign of sin? What was it? He made it to serve the interests of the exultation of His grace.

Think about it. No man was ever more miserable than the prodigal son when he realized what he had done and been to his father. And when he came to the realization of the reign of sin in his life, it crushed him. But precisely because he realized the reign of sin in His life. Do you realize the impact of the sight of the outstretched arms of his father upon him? A man who finally knew that they he didnt deserve a father like that. Suddenly being welcomed back. You see the reign of sin taken away as the Holy Spirit came and granted the peace of repentance in that mans life, became the very thing that accentuated the grace of God. He suddenly realized, "This is mind-boggling. My fathers welcoming back me back as a son, and hes welcoming me back with a celebration. This is mind-boggling."

And think about that repentant publican, that repentant tax collector, hated by the Jewish people. In the temple, a betrayer of his own people, and suddenly he is struck by the Holy Spirit with the weight of his sin, and he sees the reign of sin in his life, and what does he do? He lifts up this prayer. God have mercy on me, a sinner. While meanwhile the self-righteous Pharisee is saying, "Lord, I thank you that Im not like that man." And you see, that Pharisee could never know the reign of grace,

because he had never seen the reign of sin in His own heart. But precisely because that publican, that tax collector had seen the reign of sin, the reign of grace was far greater in his eyes. And so God has turned that reign of sin to His own purposes and those in whom He is working the work of faith and repentance, God delights in turning curse into blessing. He delights in liberating us from sin into the freedom of holiness.

And let me say that when we come to the Lords Table, we are being reminded of just what He has done to break the power of sin, to destroy the reign of sin: The death of His Son. How great must the Fathers love must be that He would break the power of sin at such a cost. How great must the power of sin be, that it required such a cost that grace might reign. We celebrate that as we come to the table. Thats the first thing that Paul draws to our attention. The reign of sin is an ugly thing. But the reign of grace is greater still.

II. By the Law, sin reigned in death, by Christ, grace reigns in eternal life.

Now Id like you to look at the second part of the verse for a few moments. "Even so, grace reigns through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Paul is saying that by the law, in Adam, sin reigned in death but by Christ, grace reigns in eternal life. Hes saying that the work of Christ resulted in the reign of grace expressed in eternal life.

Paul tells you something that is four-fold about the reign of grace in the second part of this little verse. He tells you four things about the reign of grace. He tells you that grace reigns over sin, through the righteousness of Christ, in eternal life, and by Jesus Christ. Grace reigns over sin, through the righteousness of Christ, in eternal life and by our Lord Jesus Christ. Lets look at each of those four things as we consider this four-fold reign of grace.

Paul tells us that grace reigns over sin. The whole purpose of the reign of grace is the complete domination of sin in our life. Paul is telling us that the reign of sin is ended through the conquering work of the grace of God to all those who believe. The purpose of grace is to break the power of reigning sin, as one of our favorite hymns says. The purpose of grace is to break the dominion of sin in our lives not merely resulting in our

forgiveness, but also resulting in our transformation. God doesn't give us grace so that He can sort of equalize for us, He doesn't give us grace so that we can get back to neutral and then earn our way up. He gives us grace that grace might totally dominate sin in our experience, not only so that we are accepted as righteous, but so also that we actually become conformed to the image of God in Jesus Christ. The purpose of grace is the total domination of sin. There is a hymn in our old hymn book written by Phillip Bliss that began like this: "Free from the law, oh happy condition, Jesus has bled and there is remission." And every word of the stanza of that hymn is true. By the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we have been granted remission, we've been forgiven of sins. But that is not the whole story of grace. There's more. It's a package deal, and God does not have in view our forgiveness, He has in view our transformation. And the sad thing is that some evangelicals rewrite that verse of the hymn, and they sing it like this: "Free from the law, oh happy condition, I can do as I please now that I've got remission." You see, they want forgiveness, but they don't want transformation. They want the grace of God to set things right, to put them back to the neutral base, but they don't want the transformation of life that comes from grace. But the reign of grace reigns everywhere.

God doesn't forgive us and then leave us in bondage to our sin. He breaks the power of reigning sin. He sets the prisoner free, so that we are forgiven. And the process of transformation is begun. It's not perfect and never will be in this life. It begins, and incessant war with sin in our lives. In fact, it's so incessant, and it's so universal that you can say Christian, if you're not fighting against sin somewhere, you're not a Christian; but it breaks us free from the dominion of that sin, so that it has mastery over us no more. So this is the first thing the reign of grace is a reign over sin. Grace reigns on account of the one righteousness of Christ, righteousness is imputed to us, and has been imparted to us. We are forgiven based on His righteousness, we are credited as righteous on His behalf, and then God begins this glorious work of transformation. Grace reigns over sin.

Secondly, grace reigns through righteousness. Notice it's God's righteousness that is being spoken of here, not our righteousness. Paul made it clear. Grace can't reign through our righteousness. Our

righteousness is the problem. Grace reigns through righteousness. The reign of grace over sin is made possible by, its made actual by, the righteousness of God. And there are two things to be said about that.

First of all notice that God saves us by His righteousness, not our own. It is the righteousness of God that puts us right with Him again. If our problem is that we are under the weight of sin which has mastery over us, how cruel it would have been if the Lord would say, "Okay, work your way back into a relationship with Me." Thats the very problem - we cant. And so he emphasizes that its His righteousness, not our own by which grace reigns.

Secondly, notice that the way that God shows His grace to us in salvation is perfectly consistent with His righteousness. He saves us in such a way that He doesnt just sweep our sins under the carpet and say, "Im just going to forget about that, well just pretend that didnt happen." He deals with us in such a way that every last penalty for our sin is paid, and every last demand for righteousness is observed all through the work of Jesus Christ. So that when God shows you grace, He did not do it at the expense of His justice and righteousness. He does it in fact, in strict accordance with His justice and righteousness. And the beautiful thing about that is that He gives you more confidence than His grace, because now having paid the due penalty of sin, it would be wrong for God to visit condemnation and judgment against those for whom that judgment and condemnation has already been born through Jesus Christ. And so He saves us in such a way that His righteousness is exalted, and in no way mitigated.

Thirdly, this reign of grace is through eternal life, or in eternal life. This results in an eternal life begun in us now. It is life that death cannot invade, a life that cannot be forfeited. If grace reigns through righteousness to eternal life, does that not in and of itself speak of the security of the believer? Sin reigned in death. If grace reigns to eternal life, then who can be against us? And who can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. If the result of the reign of grace is eternal life, does that not speak to the assurance of the believer, security of the believer, the perseverance of the believer. If the purpose of grace for reigning in your life is to give you eternal life, does that not comfort you

that God will bring to completion that which He has begun in you?

And finally, grace reigns by the mediation of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Its almost redundant. Paul has said, what, thirty-nine times in the last five verses? Its all through Jesus Christ our Lord. Paul comes to the end of this chapter, hes getting ready to launch into a new thought, and he cant resist saying it one more time. All of this is by Jesus Christ, our Lord. The supreme manifestation of the righteousness of God is in the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is His person and work that has secured our acceptance with God, because His righteousness is credited to our account. It is imputed to us, and, therefore, we are accepted as righteousness. Thats how grace reigns. It reigns over sin. It reigns through the righteousness of Christ. It results in your receiving eternal life, and it is all by Jesus Christ, your Lord. No, my friends, Paul then turns to you and says, "Now explain to me again how it is that you are going to commend yourself to God by your good works. And he says, "Look, thats fine. Go ahead and do this. All you have to do is be as righteous and as perfect as Jesus Christ, and I promise you, Hell accept you. Theres your good news. You just be as righteous as Jesus Christ, and Hell accept you.

But Ive got better news. Theres another way. You run from your own righteousness, and you run from your own deserved condemnation, and you run to Jesus Christ who will give you a supply of all the righteousness you need. And Hell unite you again in communion with your God. Heres what you do. You trust in Him, and it will change everything in your life. It will result in forgiveness, it will result in transformation, it will result in a new communion with God that youve never experienced before.

If thats where you are today, my friend, I want to urge you, theres only way to run. Theres only one to run to, its Jesus Christ, because your righteousness will not do. Unless you are ready to stand before God and say, "My righteousness has equaled and perhaps excelled the righteousness of Your own Son. Any takers? Do I flee to Christ? As Dixon told us so long ago, "I make a heap of all my works, all my good works and all my bad works, and I flee from them to Jesus Christ." That is the way of salvation. May God bless you to understanding and respond. Lets pray.

Our Lord and our God, we thank You for Your word, we thank You for the truth, for the encouragement of this verse, and we ask that You would burn it into our experience onto our hearts. For Christ's sake, Amen.

The Covenant of Preservation Noah and Abram

If you have your Bibles, turn with me to the book of Genesis chapter 6. Genesis 6, beginning in verse 9.

These are *the records of* the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah walked with God. And Noah became the father of three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked on the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth. Then God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence because of them; and behold, I am about to destroy them with the earth. Make for yourself an ark of gopher wood; you shall make the ark with rooms, and shall cover it inside and out with pitch. And this is how you shall make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its breadth fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. You shall make a window for the ark, and finish it to a cubit from the top; and set the door of the ark in the side of it; you shall make it with lower, second, and third decks. And behold, I, even I am bringing the flood of water upon the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life, from under heaven; everything that is on the earth shall perish. But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall enter the ark-- you and your sons and your wife, and your sons' wives with you. And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every *kind* into the ark, to keep *them* alive with you; they shall be male and female. Of the birds after their kind, and of the animals after their kind, of every creeping thing of the ground after its kind, two of every *kind* shall come to you to keep *them* alive. And as for you, take for yourself some of all food which is edible, and gather *it* to yourself; and it shall be for food for you and for them." Thus Noah did; according to all that God had

commanded him, so he did.

Thus ends this reading of God's holy Word, may He add His blessing to it. Let's pray together.

“Our Lord and our God, we thank You for Your covenant initiatives which structure the progress of history and especially of redemptive history. We pray that as we consider Your initiative even in the midst of judgment in the time of Noah, pray that our minds would again be flooded with an apprehension of Your mercy. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.”

I want to talk with you today about the Covenant of Preservation, as Robertson calls it. That is the Covenant which God entered into with Noah. And you may want to open your copies of ***Christ of the Covenants*** to that chapter in which he deals with the Covenant of Preservation. If you have your Hebrew text, you may want to go ahead and open it to Genesis 6, because there is a section in there that I want to take a look at. If you have your Greek testaments with you, there is a passage later on today in Hebrews that I want to look at very specifically and you may want to have your text already poised at Hebrews so that we can take a look at that.

I want to do two things today. I want to show you a little bit of the covenant context of Genesis 6 itself, so that you appreciate what is going on here in terms of the flow of biblical history. And then I want you to see the themes in the covenant with Noah that Robertson himself highlights in his book, ***Christ of the Covenants***. I want to go over those themes with you.

You may know that there is somewhat of a debate over the place of the covenant with Noah in redemptive history. Some people have approached the Covenant of Noah as if it were an entirely Common Grace Covenant, as if it were, in some senses, not part of the flow of the Covenant of Grace. That is, a Covenant of Grace would not necessarily have a saving focus, but more of a focus on the preservation of the normal order of the world. A common grace covenant. Others have disagreed with that. And I want you to see that there are both common and special

aspects of grace displayed in the Covenant of Noah. It is indeed part of the Covenant of Grace, though it does have common grace significance as well as special redeeming or saving grace significance.

The Fall

So, first let's look at Genesis 6 and especially verses 9-22. In Genesis 6 verses 1-8, what you get is basically a summarization of the results of sin in the old Adamic world, and when I say the old Adamic world, I am simply talking about the world as it existed prior to the flood. We see at least three stages of history in the first six chapters of Genesis. We have the pristine unfallen world of the Garden of Eden. Then we have the world after the fall of Adam, the old Adamic world. And then, beginning with the flood, we enter into a new world as it were. So you have these two great barriers, you have the barrier of the fall and the barrier of the flood, before you could even get back to that pristine state.

I would suggest that is one reason why it is very, very difficult to interpret some aspects of Genesis 1 and 2, because we don't simply have one blinder, the fall, but we have two blinders on us. Because biblical history presents twin cataclysmic events in the first the first seven chapters of Genesis. Not only is there the fall in Genesis 3, there is the flood in Genesis 7 and it is presented as a cataclysmic event, as catastrophic as the creation of the world. And the linguistic evidence for that is replete. But let me just give you one example of that. Do you remember that one of the main points in the Genesis 1 narrative about God's creation was God's bringing order to the world and especially His separating day from night, light from darkness, land from sea, the upper waters from the lower waters. That is a theme that is repeated. You have studied Genesis 1 a little, you know what I am talking about. In Genesis 7 as the flood proceeds, we are told explicitly by Moses that the upper waters and the lower waters came back together again. That is a way that Moses is hinting to you that there was a cataclysm so great that the whole order of creation, as it stood, was stood on its head and some of those things that God had brought order to are now brought back together. God had separated the upper waters and the lower waters. Now in the flood they are brought together again. Chaos rules everywhere except inside that ark. That is a way that Moses is hinting to you how incredibly

unparalleled this flood is which God is bringing.

So you have these three stages of human existence. You have Adam before the fall, you've got Adam after the fall. And then you have got the world after Noah and his flood. And so when I refer to Genesis 6:1-8, as giving you a picture of the culmination of sin in the old Adamic world, I am talking about that second aspect, that second stage in world history, prior to the time after the flood, after the fall itself. We have seen from Genesis 3 on, a record of how sin plays out in the world of Adam after the fall. And in Genesis 6:1-8, you get a picture of the culmination of that sin and God's reaction to that sin. And, of course, His reaction is the immediate recognition that justice and righteousness demands that judgment be brought against that world. So the very first thing that we have in Genesis 6 is a recognition of the sinfulness of the world in the time of Noah and its deserving of judgment.

Now, remember that Genesis 6:1-8 is not part of the book of Noah. The book of Noah begins in Genesis 6:9. You remember from Dr. Currid or Dr. Davis or one of your other professors teaching you the various chapter headings that Moses gives you, and they all begin with that repeated phrase, "This is the book of the generation of Adam" or "This is the book of the generation of Noah." And so Moses himself gives you his chapter breakdown. He does not enter into the book of Noah until Genesis 6:9. So what we are really seeing, when you pick up Genesis 6:1-8, are the concluding statements, this is sort of the final word of God about that world that existed prior to the flood.

Why is that God's final word? Because the judgment that He is going to bring to anyone with any sensitivity at all is going to be so overwhelmed by the spectacle of what is going to unfold in Genesis 6:9, all the way to Genesis 9. They are going to be so overwhelmed by that extent and the severity and the brutality of that judgment that unless they understand the extensiveness of sin, the ugliness of sin, the rebelliousness of sin, they are not going to be able to appreciate that what God is doing in the story of the flood is absolutely right.

You know, we all recoil from justice when we see it swiftly and severely meted out. That is a hard thing to see. It is a hard thing to see

because we all know enough of our own culpability that we know that that could be us when justice is meted out. We also have certain kindred bonds of human affection for everyone. I mean, unless you are a twisted person, you don't enjoy seeing anyone endure suffering even if it is judicial suffering. Most normal people don't get a kick out of going to watch executions. It is not a sport that you do. You don't enjoy that type of activity and God knows that there is a temptation for us to look at His judgments and think, "Lord, aren't you being a little severe here? Aren't you being a little unfair? Isn't this a little too much?" And Genesis 6:1-8 is His final word on the way the world was, and He is saying, "You need to look at this world through My eyes and see what I see. And when you look at this world through My eyes and see what I see, then you will be able to appreciate that what I am doing is not more than what is deserved or less than what is deserved. It is precisely what is deserved." And you really haven't gotten to the point of accepting God's justice until you can say, "What God in His providence has done is exactly what should have been done, neither more nor less." And so if you are a person wrestling sometimes with the justice of God in your own experience, that is something really to pray towards. "Lord, help me get to the point where I recognize that what You do in Your justice is exactly what is required. It is not more, it is not less. It is exactly appropriate, the punishment that You have chosen, the penalty that You have chosen is exactly coordinate with the crime that has been committed." And so when we see God's display of wrath in Genesis 6 and 7 and 8, you are seeing God mete out exactly what was deserved.

And that is one reason why God not only closes the book of Adam, but opens the book of Noah, with another description of the wickedness of the world. And if you look for instance in verses 9 and 10, of Noah, Noah is introduced there in Genesis 6—Noah is introduced as a righteous man in contrast to his contemporaries. So the book of Noah opens up with God's declaration that Noah is a man who is righteous in his generation. Notice the words, "these are the record of the generations of Noah," "Noah is a righteous man," "blameless in his time," "Noah walked with God," and "Noah became the father of three sons." So Noah's character was that he was a man who was right with God. And he was right with man. The words that are used to describe him righteous and blameless

indicate that his relationship with God and man was a relationship of integrity. And it indicates when it speaks of him as being blameless we could translate that very legitimately as “whole-hearted.” That is not a claim of perfection for Noah. That is not an argument that Noah had never done anything wrong. It is a claim that Noah was whole-hearted; that is, that his heart was not divided, partly loving the world and partly loving the God that had made him and entered into fellowship and relationship with him. No, he was a man who was whole-hearted in his commitment to God. So he was a man whose actions were just. That was apparent to those around him and he was also a man who was wholeheartedly devoted to the Lord. And then, that third thing that is said about him is that he was a man who walked with God in verse 9. He was a man who was in living communion with God. That phrase is only used of Enoch. That is the only other person where that phrase is used here in the early chapters of Genesis.

This is a significant marker that Moses is giving you about the character of this man Noah. So Noah was a man of God both inwardly and outwardly. He was a man of integrity, of blamelessness internally. And he was a man of justice and righteousness externally. There was a coordination between his inner man and his actions. You could see his inner man very clearly in his actions. He was a man who walked with the Lord. Derek Kidner translates this verse, Noah walked with God, he translates it this way: “It was with God that Noah walked.” So, though Noah was out of step and out of character with his contemporaries, he was not out of step with the Lord. So that is the opening picture of the book of Noah—a picture of this man who was righteous even after God has described this unrighteous world in Genesis 6:1-8.

The second picture that we have in the book of Noah, you find in chapter 6, verses 11-12. There again, God repeats what He has previously said about the condition of the old Adamic world. God sees the judgment, or sees the wickedness and He brings judgment against it. Notice verse 11. “The earth was corrupt in the sight of God, the earth was filled with violence. God looked on the earth, and behold it was corrupt for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth. And then God said to Noah, ‘The end of all flesh had come before me, for the earth is filled

with violence because of them. Behold, I am about to destroy them with the earth.” So God sees the wickedness and He determines to punish it. And Noah stands in total contrast to the picture that the world describes here in Genesis 6:11-12. And in that context, Noah is given instructions for building an ark. Now, as far as we know, just from what we are given in the text, God has not even explained to Noah at this point how He is going to bring destruction. He has only told Noah that He is going to bring destruction. And He tells them, He tells Noah to make an ark of gopher wood at this time. So God gives instructions to Noah but apparently no detailed explanation about the function of this ark of gopher wood at this time.

You see those instructions given in verses 14-17. That is the third section of the book of Noah. The first section of the book of Noah opens up with the description of the man; the second section with a description of the world; the third section with a description of the instrument which God has chosen to be the instrument of salvation for Noah and his family, but without apparently having explained to Noah how it will function yet. Because He hasn't explained to him the nature of the destruction yet.

And then in verses 18-21, we see this very important passage where the Covenant of Grace is inaugurated with Noah. Now, it is this passage that I want you to look at very closely with me for a few minutes, particularly zeroing in on Genesis 6:18. “I will establish my covenant with you and you shall enter the ark. You and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you.” Now again in this passage, *berith* is the term for covenant used. This is the *berith* because it is my covenant and the Lord establishes the covenant with you, singular. He is establishing His covenant we are told with Noah here. As we have said, the very language that is used to explain this covenant which is being established with Noah indicates that this relationship is a relationship *already in existence*. It is confirming this relationship rather than initiating this relationship. Let me give you an example of this from W.J. Dumbrell's book, ***Covenant and Creation, An Old Testament Covenant Theology***. “In the three Genesis accounts, this aspect is not given particular prominence and the issues are left somewhat open, though as we might have expected in each case, each of the three cases, the

respective patriarchs appears to have occupied the more elevated position. Moreover since in the ancient world, covenants were regulative of affairs between man and man and nation and nation, we should most naturally expect that the nature of the parties concerned would be a variable. So in the Old Testament, the reported covenant arrangements included parity, master-servant, and suzerainty types.” So he is saying you had all those kind of relationships. You have some that are between equals, you have some that are between master-servant, you have some which where the lord comes in and lays down stipulations. As McCarthy has pointed out, “what is of extreme importance to know, is the function that the actual covenant conclusion, the making of a formal agreement performs in each episode. The very evident fact in each case is that the role of the agreement is not to initiate a set of relationships. What the covenant does is formalize and give concrete expression to a set of existing relationships,” and that is of course precisely what happens here in Genesis chapter 6. The Lord confirms the covenant with Noah.

And let me quote to you another passage from Dumbrell's book, where he addresses this. The heading of this section, by the way, is called, *Is the Covenant with Noah Established or Confirmed?* “Outside the book of Genesis, the terminology of covenant entry appears to be consistently maintained. Such a consistency may cause us to reflect whether by the use of *heckeem*, with *berith*,” and you will want to look at your Hebrew text at this moment, in Genesis 6:18, the use of *heckeem* with *berith* in the context of Genesis 6:18 and then if you want to flip over to Genesis 9:18, you will see *heckeem* used again with *berith*, all of which refer to covenants as established or given, ”the beginning of a new covenant relationship is being referred to, whether in each case the continuation of some prior understanding is in mind. A decision here is bound up with the way in which the Hebrew word, *heckeem*, is to be taken in these references.” The evidence of this character makes it more than likely that in the context where *heckeem berith* stand, and that is Genesis 6:18, Genesis 9:9, Genesis 9:11, 9:17, Genesis 17:7 and the Covenant of Circumcision there, Genesis 17:9 and 21 also Exodus 6:4 and I could give you other references as well. But the evidence of this character makes it more than likely that in context where *heckeem berith* as opposed, you remember we said the other language was *karat berith*, to cut a

covenant. This is to establish or to make firm or to confirm a covenant depending upon your Bible translation at that point.

What is the difference now? All we are talking about is what is the difference between *heckeem berith* and *karat berith*. Here is what he says. “Evidence of this character makes it more than likely that in contexts where *heckeem berith* stands, the institute of a covenant is not being referred to, the institution of a covenant is not being referred to but rather, its perpetuation.” So what he is saying, when you see *heckeem berith*, it is not saying that for the first time, a covenant relationship is being established. It is saying that it is being preserved. It is being confirmed.

Now that goes right along with the idea that we argued on the very first day of class that a covenant functions in Scripture to do what? *To assure the believer of the certainty of the promises of God to him or to her*. And that is what he argues here. We must now probably surmise that what is being referred to in Genesis 6:18 is some existing arrangement, presumably imposed by God without human concurrence, since it is referred to as “My covenant.” I will establish my covenant with you. So the point, and by the way, if you want those pages from Dumbrell, I don’t agree with everything that Dumbrell does in this book, but it is a very, very helpful treatment of the early chapters of Genesis and the concept of covenant and if you want the pages in which he discusses this, he begins it on page 16 and he runs with this discussion all the way through verse 24. Actually beyond that, to page 26. So from 16 to 26, the book is covenant and creation. Subtitled, *An Old Testament Covenantal Theology*, it is published by Paternoster Press. Dumbrell is Professor of Old Testament at Regent College in Vancouver where Packer was for many years. He taught at Moore College in Sidney, Australia for a number of years. And I think Dr. McIntosh may have taught at Moore College in the past as well.

Well, at any rate, that is Dumbrell’s argument, that what we see here in Genesis 6:18 is not the inauguration of a covenant which had not existed before, but it is the confirmation of a covenant. It is the making firm of a covenant. It is the perpetuation of a covenant relationship.

Now what is the significance of that? There are just two things that I am wanting to press home to you about that. *The first thing is to see that a covenant exists prior to Genesis 6:18.* Maybe the first time that the term covenant is used, the covenant already exists. *Secondly to recognize God's initiative in this covenant.* Noah doesn't come to the Lord and say, "Lord, things are pretty bad, maybe You could do something for me here." Noah doesn't initiate either the perpetuation or the establishment of the relationship. *God takes the initiative here in grace.* God reaches out to Noah. And I think that Dumbrell is probably right. That one of the reasons why God says, "I will establish My covenant with you," you see that nice little pronoun stuck on the end of *berith* there in 6:18. "And I will establish My covenant with you" is to stress that this is the Lord's covenant. He is taking the initiative in this relationship. He has established the boundaries of the relationship.

So we see sin in Noah's world. And we see God confirming the special relationship of grace and favor that He has with Noah and we see Him doing it right in the context in which He has given a command to Noah to do certain things, in this case to build an ark and to prepare to stock it with food and to wait to the animals come to you.

I want you to see that this covenant, though God initiates, Noah has a part to play. There is bilaterality even to this covenant because Noah has what? He has responsibility. God's grace initiates, but Noah has responsibility. Noah must respond to God's favor by what? By obedience. His obedience does not purchase him God's favor. And it is not obedience which got God to notice Noah in the first place.

One of the first things that people will do is they will look at Genesis 6, and you may want to scan it with your eyes, they will look at Genesis 6:8-9 and seeing them back to back, they will basically in their minds reverse the order of the logic of those two verses. And they will say the reason Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord is because he was a righteous man blameless in his time. Now I don't want to be too picky about that because there is no question that the Lord was pleased in the righteousness of Noah, but that is not the chronological order and it is not the literary order of those passages. Because one is the last verse of the book of Adam, one is the first verse of the book of Noah. So if you

argue that God's grace in verse 8 of Genesis 6 was caused by Noah's righteousness or blamelessness in verse 9, for one thing you are ignoring the book divisions that Moses has given you. One is the last verse of the book of Adam. One is the first verse of the book of Noah. Secondly, you are ignoring the order in which God has given you the information. The last word in the book of Adam is that God's favor fell upon Noah. No explanation other than that is given. It is just that God's favor fell upon Noah. And then, you're told in verse 9 that Noah was a righteous man. He was a man of integrity. He was a man who walked with God. Now to say that the reason that God favored him was because of his righteousness is both to ignore the chapter division and to ignore the flow of the logic of the verses themselves. And so I think it is important for us to recognize that there is no indication that God's grace relationship was caused by anything in Noah. That is the nature of God's grace. It falls upon those who do not deserve it. Now is a person shaped by God's grace, so that their character is affected? Absolutely. Every time? Absolutely, every time. Why? Paul tells you. Because grace reigns in righteousness. Grace can make you righteous, but righteousness on your part can't make God give you grace.

First of all, because you can't be righteous apart from God's grace in a fallen world. Second of all, because we are all in sin as we are born into this world, we are in rebellion against God and there is no way that we can initiate righteousness in order to purchase or to obtain grace. So, recognize the significance of the relationship between grace and righteousness even here in the story of Noah.

Now, one last thing that I would like to point to, and that is in verse 22. The response of Noah to God's commands is obedience. Verse 22: "Thus Noah did; according to all that God had commanded him so he did." Now that is the same phraseology that is used over and over in book of Exodus of Moses. "And Moses did all that the Lord had commanded him." And Noah's response to the command of the Lord here is clearly obedience.

Now do you see already the elements of a covenant relationship here in Genesis 6, even apart from Genesis 6:18 in the use of the word *covenant*? You have got sin, judgment, grace, blessings, commands, and

obedience. Those are the first verses of the book of Noah. You get sin, grace, blessing, commands, obedience. Noah in a world of sin. God's favor has fallen upon him. God blesses him by sparing him from the judgment that is to come. Noah responds in obedience to Him. You have all the elements of a covenantal relationship in which there is both blessing and responsibility. And it is all right there for you in Genesis 6. Even if the word *covenant* weren't there in Genesis 6:18, you would again, just like we saw in Genesis 2, see the pattern of a covenant relationship between God and His man, in this case Noah.

God's Covenant with Noah

Now let's look then at these various emphases that we see in the covenant with Noah, all the way from Genesis chapter 5:28 and the story of Lamech and the naming of Noah, his son, down to Genesis chapter 9:29. Six emphases in God's covenant with Noah. The first emphasis that we see or that I want to highlight and I am just going to follow along Robertson's own outline here, is the connection between God's covenant with Noah and the Covenant of Creation.

There is a connection between God's covenant with Noah and the Covenant of Creation. How do we see that connection between the original covenant of God in the Garden with Adam (the Covenant of Works) and this covenant with Noah? Well, first of all, we see it in the very phraseology of Genesis 6:18, which indicates a covenant relationship already exists. This idea of relating to God in this way is not a new thing. It preexists Noah. But there are also interesting parallels. For instance, in Genesis chapter 9:1, Noah is explicitly told to be fruitful and multiply. Now what is that echoing? It is echoing in the exact words the creation ordinance that had originally been given to Adam. So, the creation ordinance, which had been established in the Covenant of Works with Adam in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2, is confirmed in the relationship with Noah in Genesis chapter 9 verse 1. In the same fashion, we are told in Genesis chapter 9 verse 2, that the fear and dread of man will fall upon all creation. Now that echoes the language of dominion in Genesis chapter 1, where it says that man would be given to rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky and of the cattle and creeping things. Over everything, basically. Over the whole of the animal and the inanimate

creation. And so the language of Genesis 9:2 echoes that. That's dominion language. And so that plays a part in man's subduing of the earth.

Let me also mention that in Genesis chapter 5:28-29, that Noah's very name reflects the Sabbath ordinance. You remember Lamech named his son, Noah, for a specific reason. Genesis 5:29. He called his name *Noah* saying this one shall give us rest from our work and from the toil of our hands arising from the ground which the Lord has cursed. Now it is important for you to know that the word *rest* there is not the same word that is used for Sabbath. Okay. It is not the same word. But the concept is the same. The idea is that Noah is going to be the one who gives them the rest from the wickedness and sin which is being perpetrated in the world and so that very idea hearkens back to the Sabbath rest given in Genesis chapter 2. So we see all sorts of connections in the covenant with Noah and the Covenant of Works. We see God reestablishing His creation ordinances in the Covenant of Noah. It is part of the Covenant of Grace but the creation ordinances are still maintained. That is very important for us to recognize. The creation ordinances are perpetual. They are perpetual for every culture for every time, for every people, for every nation. The creation ordinances are perpetual.

The second thing I would like you to see that Robertson talks about is *the particularity of God's redemptive grace in the Covenant with Noah*. From this mass of depraved humanity, God shows grace towards Noah and his family. Out of thousands and thousands and tens and hundreds of thousand and millions of people perhaps. Who knows what the population count was. But out of this mass of humanity, depraved, in sin, under judgment, God saves one man and his family. They experience the blessing of salvation while others continued in their hardened ways.

Now, I think that is one of the points in the story of Noah that makes God want to take so much care to explain to you how wicked the world was. Because, a natural human reaction to this spectacle of this massive humanity on the one side and Noah and his family on the other side is to say, that is not fair. I mean, one little family over here and God saves them and all these other people, and God doesn't save them. That is not fair. He is being too particular.

But what Genesis 6 verses 1-8 sets you up for is to understand that there is no one there who deserves this. So if you have got to complain about fairness, you have to complain that God shows *any* mercy because His judgment is absolutely just. So, towards this particular man, among the mass of undeserving humanity, God shows the richness of His unmerited favor. His particularity, the particularity is absolutely striking here. Derek Kidner says, “If as few as eight souls are saved, seven of these owe it to a single one, and this minority inherits the new earth.” And Kidner goes on to say that the first full scale judgment demonstrates that with God, the truth of a situation prevails, regardless of majorities and minorities. God didn’t look out there and take a count and say, “Well, the majority are wicked, I guess I am just going to have to forgive them.” God brings the judgment upon the majority.

I think the care with which Moses recounts the wickedness (and let me just say a pastoral aside here) is very important when you are struggling or wrestling with a friend who is struggling with the fairness of God in judgment. Now we Calvinists usually face that in two ways. On the one hand, we may be talking to our multi-cultural postmodern friends who don’t think that it is fair for anybody to be sent to hell under any circumstance. And then on the other hand, sometimes we are talking with non-Calvinistic friends who think that our God is extraordinarily mean because He actually chooses some people to go to heaven and He decrees to pass by others. Whatever you say, that is not fair. That is what is said. So in whichever situation of fairness you are dealing with, what is the pastoral hint that Moses tells you to never to forget when you talk to them? Don’t get into a discussion about fairness unless you talk about sin first. Because until a person understands the culpability that is attached with sin, they cannot understand justice. See, if a person has a fundamental disagreement with you about the deserving of judgment of all mankind, then as a Christian, and by the way, not just as a Calvinistic Christian, but as any kind of Christian, you have no answer for them. If a person fundamentally does not believe that people are deserving of judgment, a Christian does not have an answer to their concerns about the justice of God. Only a person that comes to grips with the nature of sin and that sin inherently deserves judgment is able to cope with what

the Bible says about how God handles sin.

So that is where you start. Don't get hung up in the decrees of God. Don't get hung up in predestination or election. You've got to make a beeline for sin. That is right where Moses goes. He knows somebody is going to pick up this book and say, "Wait a minute, this is not fair." And so he builds a case like a lawyer (I won't draw any parallels with Washington right now). Like a lawyer he begins to give you overkill about what was going on in that world. Why is he doing that? Because he wants you to understand that sin brings judgment by its very nature. And that what is going on here, no matter how particular are God's dealings with this one family, you cannot say, "It is not fair, God, You shouldn't have only shown Your favor to them, You should have shown it to more people." You can't make that complaint, having truly listened to what Moses has said.

Now if a person wants to say, "Well, I hear what Moses said, but I disagree with him," where do you go from there? If a person truly wants to listen to what Moses is telling you (and, of course he is speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; he is speaking the very word of God; this is God's word, ultimately, even more than Moses word; you are getting God's perspective on that situation), there is your pastoral advice. When someone is wrestling with fairness, you make a beeline to sin. Because the issue of fairness, anytime someone says that God is not doing something fair, you may be assured that they do not have an adequate understanding of sin.

Now it is interesting that in Anselm's dialogue with his student, Bozo, you remember Bozo, aptly named Bozo in "Why Did God Become Man?" In that book, he has Bozo asking him, "You know, how can this be, you know, it is not fair." And the response of Anselm is, "Ah, I see that you have not rightly understood sin." So we are lost as Christians in terms of explaining the issue of fairness if we attempt to do it apart from addressing the issue of sin. So fundamental to the Christian answer to objections to the fairness and justice of God is a right apprehension of biblical teaching about sin. So that is the first place you make a start in terms of explaining to those who are making objections to a Christian doctrine of justice in God's judgment.

The third thing that we see in the Covenant with Noah is that He zeroes in on this one family and really, He zeroes more in on the one man, and for his sake, brings in the family. Now we have looked at the interconnection between the Covenant of Works and the Covenant with Noah. We have looked at the particularity of God's grace. It is extreme particularity. Then we see, *thirdly, that God deals with families* in the Covenant with Noah. So we see the familial structure of God's covenant with Noah. God deals with family via a representative head, and over and over, the text of Genesis 6-9 indicates God's commitment to deal with Noah and his house. "You and your sons and your wife and your sons wives with you" becomes a repeated theme. It is repeated, you first heard it in Genesis 6:18, but it is repeated in Genesis 7:1, 7:7, 7:13, 7:23, 8:16, 8:18, 9:9, 9:12, and you get the point that God is wanting to drive a truth home here. He is building a theme, a thematic argument here. Noah is set apart as the head of the family. "My covenant with you." He has a unique position in the eyes of God. Genesis 7:1, for instance, "Go into the ark, you and your whole family because I have found you," not ya'll, "you Noah, righteous in this generation." The you is singular, it refers to Noah alone, because the head of the house is found righteous. His house goes into the ark. That is why Hebrews 11:7 says it was by faith that Noah built an ark to save his family. So we see the basic construction of creation's order again finding its counterpart in redemption.

As God said that it was not good for Adam to be alone in the original Covenant of Works, guess what, it is not good to be alone in the Covenant of Grace either. God continues to operate on a family principle. By the way, this is foundational for your understanding of the Church. The Church is not incidental to God's plan. God's plan does not save individuals and, oh by the way, we might do a church as well. The Church is fundamental, it is central to what God is doing in redemption and, of course, this cuts directly against the kind of intense individualism that continues to characterize the western world today.

Fourth, this covenant with Noah concentrates on preservation. Preservation. This is the common grace element in the covenant with Noah. It concentrates on preservation. God commits Himself to preserve the present order of the world so that the work of redemption can be

accomplished. You see it in the language of Genesis 8:22, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease as long as the earth endures. So regularity and order will be preserved in the creation, God says. Regularity and order will be preserved in the creation. And we also see elements of human government in the covenant with Noah which supports this theme of preservation.

Apparently to this point, God has reserved to Himself alone the right of capital punishment, but now in Genesis chapter 9:3, if you will turn with me there, we read this. “Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you. I give all to you as I gave the green plant, only you shall not eat flesh with its life. That is its blood.” Now we will talk about that passage later in the context of Acts chapter 15. It is interesting that when resolution is brought to the situation about whether believers who are non-Jews, that is Gentiles, whether Gentile converts to Christianity must obey the ceremonial law of Moses, in Acts chapter 15, the deliberation that is handed down by the apostles and the elders basically says, “No, they do not have to obey the ceremonial law of Moses. They only have to abstain from food which has been strangled or cooked in its own blood.” And they are going right back to the provisions of the covenant with Noah. Isn’t it interesting that they bounce immediately back to a common non-Jewish covenant expression of the Covenant of Grace. They move beyond the Covenant of Abraham, one step back to a covenant which existed prior to the existence of the Hebrew people. It is an amazing piece of biblical theology being done there. And I won’t say anymore, we’ll come back to it later.

But then He goes on and He says this: “Surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from every man, from every man’s brother, I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man. And as for you, be fruitful and multiply; populate the earth abundantly and multiply in it.” So we see again that repetition of “be fruitful and multiply,” but here see a direct command for capital punishment.

And notice the parallelism there in verse 6 and you can see the little

diagram. It is an a,b,c,c,b,a parallel:

- a. He who sheds
- b. the blood of
- c. man;
- c. by man
- b. his blood
- a. shall be shed.

So you see a nice little Hebrew parallelism here. He who sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, in that first phrase of Genesis 9:6. So this is not a statement of what will just inevitably happen, that when people kill, other people will kill them. This verse is explaining how God *will demand* an accounting for the manslayer, whether he is human or beast. He is saying that life is so precious, human life is so precious. And notice he gives you the reason for it in the second half of verse 6: "for in the image of God He made man," because we are image-bearers of God, therefore those who take the lives of others have just inherited the inalienable right to give their lives in exchange because they have made such an extreme violation on the image of God. They, too, must now be punished in a capital way.

So these self-restraining principles in the Covenant of Noah are of course picked up on with the legislation of Moses, but capital punishment begins here in the Covenant of Noah. That is quite important because a lot of times you will have Christians argue that capital punishment is a provision of Mosaic legislation and we have moved beyond that now and that is part of the Mosaic legislation that we need to drop and we need to drop capital punishment, too. But like so many other principles, capital punishment existed prior to the Mosaic legislation as we see in Genesis chapter 9.

A fifth dimension of the Noahic covenant, of God's covenant with Noah is *the universalistic dimension*. The universalistic dimension. Now, this is important because it balances that emphasis on particular grace that we had seen in the covenant in terms of God's relating to Noah and to his family. The universalistic dimension of God's covenant tells you what to expect in the future. It doesn't mean that every single soul will be saved in the end. The destruction of all the wicked in the flood

waters of Noah makes that very clear. This universalistic dimension does not mean universalism, it doesn't mean universal salvation, but it does mean that a fallen universe can expect a complete restitution in the redemptive plan that God is setting forth, so that God's redemptive work in the Covenant of Grace has cosmic consequences.

Not only will it impact every tribe and tongue and nation, it will also involve a renovation of the world itself. The inanimate creation as a whole will benefit from God's redemptive work in the Covenant of Grace and Paul makes this clear in Romans chapter 8:19-21. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed for the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. It is another connection with the Covenant of Works, the Covenant of Creation. Just as the creation suffered because of Adam's sin, under the Covenant of Works, so also under the Covenant of Grace, creation itself will benefit from God's redemptive work. There will be restoration from that decay and bondage to it. The resurrection of the bodies of believers we know will entail a drastic change for us. And this universalistic element also provides for us the foundation for a worldwide proclamation of the Gospel. Because God has commissioned day and night and sun and moon to proclaim His message of grace everywhere (Psalm 19) and in the bow in the clouds that He places, so also everyone ought to hear the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Gentiles ought to hear since both Moses and Isaiah prophesied of the salvation of those who never sought God. Paul picks up on that in Romans chapter 10.

One last thing as we close: *The gracious character of this covenant with Noah*, this covenant is gracious. God's bow in the cloud reminds us of the judgment that even Noah deserved. And that bow, you remember, reappears in Revelation chapter 4:3, around the throne of glory in heaven. The emerald rainbow is there to remind you of God's gracious preservation.

God's Covenant with Abram

If you would turn over to Genesis chapter 12, I want to begin by taking a look at God's establishing of covenant relations with Abram. Genesis 12:1-3.

Now the LORD said to Abram,
“Go forth from your country,
And from your relatives
And from your father's house,
To the land which I will show you;
And I will make you a great nation,
And I will bless you,
And make your name great;
And so you shall be a blessing;
And I will bless those who bless you,
And the one who curses you I will curse.
And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

I want you to note several elements of this particular relationship between Abram and the Lord. You will note, first of all, that the terminology of covenant is not present here in Genesis 12:1-3, but that what we have here is most certainly the specific establishment of covenant relations between God and Abram. And the very language that is used in Genesis 15:18, as Dumbrell argues, when it speaks of making or confirming a covenant, indicates the relationship has already existed. So here we have the inauguration of the covenant with God and Abram.

Notice that the first thing that is called upon in this relationship, or the first things that are mentioned, are the directives. These are the four responsibilities that Abram has. He is first to leave his country. He is second to leave the predominant company of his family relations. Apparently Abraham is not in violation of this agreement by taking along Lot, his nephew. But you will remember that the presence of Lot gets Abraham into some, at least adventures, if not troubles. Okay. But he is apparently not in direct violation, so we can take this phrase to refer he is going to move away from the environment, from the surrounding, from the predominant company of his relatives. Thirdly, he is told to leave his father's house. And again that has less geographical significance than it does have authority significance. He is coming out from under the influence and control of his father's domain and household. And, finally, he is to go to the land which the Lord will show him. And so all those four directives are given immediately in this relationship.

Again, it is the Lord who comes to Abram. Abram doesn't go looking for the Lord. The Lord goes to him. So the Lord is doing what? The Lord is taking initiative in this covenant. But immediately in this covenant we see responsibilities. Abram has responsibilities. And these are listed before him.

Why do I mention that? Again to stress to you that the Covenant of Grace involves God's initiative in salvation. But that does not mean that there is no responsibility on our part. **So there is both the grace of God and human responsibility involved in this covenant relationship.** And that is very important for us to understand. We have to watch out on the one side for those Christians who want to make salvation something that is obtained by obedience. And on the other hand, we have to watch out for those Christians who want to think that obedience has nothing to do with salvation. On the one hand, there are those who want to make salvation a matter of something that we individually earn. And so they confuse the nature of the way God's favor is obtained. And on the other hand, there are those Christians who think that any time you talk about obedience, your are somehow bringing works righteousness into the relationship that we have with God. And so they are afraid to ever talk about obedience. Because, "Oooh, that is not grace. You know you can't talk about obedience."

That is an appalling misunderstanding not only of the relationship between grace and works, but it is a misunderstanding of the covenantal view of the relationship between grace and works. God clearly takes initiative with Abram. God's favor falls upon Abram and it is not Abram's fault. But Abram has responsibilities in this relationship. Every relationship, by definition, is bilateral. There are responsibilities in any significant relationship in life. There are responsibilities on the part of both parties and Abram's are frankly spelled out first here in Genesis 12.

Then you have the blessings mentioned in verse 2. "I will make you a great nation, I will bless you and I will make your name great." So again, three things are spoken here. He will be made a great nation. What is the significance of that? Isn't it interesting that the very first thing that is said in the Abrahamic covenant is that Abraham will not be the sole

recipient of the blessings that God is going to pour out on him. You know, at the very heart of what God is going to do in Abraham's life is something that extends far beyond Abraham, it extends to his descendants. He is going to be made a great nation. I mean Abraham can't be made a great nation on his own. Do you see yet another hint of the doctrine of the church here? Salvation by its design is meant to be experienced corporately in the context of the fellowship of the family of God. And so the promise from the very outset to Abram is I will make you a great nation, I will bless you, though that blessing is not specified here. The general blessing and favor of God is going to come upon him and "I will make your name great" we are told. I will make your name great.

Now that is so significant because if you turn back to Genesis chapter 11 and you see the words of the men in the Plain of Shinar, they say this, in Genesis 11:3, "Come let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly and they used brick for stone and they used tar for mortar and they said, come let us build for ourselves a city and a tower whose top will reach into heaven and let us make for ourselves a name, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth." Now, there are all sorts of things going on there. For one thing they say that they want to build a city. They are wanting to establish this permanent place for their power and for their influence to be exercised in and they want to make a name for themselves. They want to have renown, they want to be famous, and of course we know what happens to their plans. You know, the Lord utterly rebukes them and refutes their plans. But isn't it interesting, these men sought to make a name for themselves.

And what is said to Abram? "I will make your name great." Abram had not sought to make his own name great, but as part of God's blessing upon him, God said, "Abram, I will make your name great." When man seeks to increase his own name, God will rebuke him. But God in His goodness gives us a name as His children. And so this blessing is poured out upon Abram.

But even by the end of verse 2 in Genesis 12, it is clear that Abram's blessing again is not merely something that he is to enjoy individually. Notice what is said. "And so you shall be a blessing." So Abram is

blessed in order to be a blessing. That is always the way it is with believers. We do not receive the gift of God to hoard it to ourselves, but we receive the gift of God in order to be a blessing to others. And in this passage we are going to find out that that means being a blessing to the nations.

And so we go on in verse three, “I will bless those who bless you and the one who curses you, I will curse.” We see here a recognition that the dividing point in the human family for the blessing of God or for the cursing of God is in their relationship to the family of Abraham. If they are for Abraham, they are blessed, if they are against him, they are cursed. Now this, I think needs to be understood in more than an ethnic, in more than a political or national or even familial sense.

I think this needs to be understood in a religious sense. Let me give you the parallel. Do you remember in the cursing of Noah against Canaan, that Shem is blessed and Japheth is blessed to dwell in the tents of Shem, but Canaan, son of Ham is cursed to dwell away from the tents of Shem. Shem is the line of blessing. Japheth is blessed as he dwells within the tents of Shem. The family of Ham through the line of Canaan is cursed because of Ham’s sin and so dwells away from or in the face of the tents of Shem. The point there being not that there is something magical about living in the household of Shem, but recognizing that Shem is going to be the line of godliness. That is the line of the seed of woman. So if you dwell in harmony with the line of Shem, you are in the way of salvation. But if you dwell in opposition to the line of Shem, you are in the way of cursing. The same thing is happening here. You bless Abraham, you are blessed because in blessing Abraham, it says that you understand the covenant of the God of Abraham. God’s blessing is on Abraham. That is why he is a blessed man. You bless him, you are blessed. You curse him, you are cursed. So this is not just about protection for Abraham, this is telling us something about the way of salvation.

And then finally we are told in verse 3, “and in you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” Now again, this universalistic dimension to God’s covenant relationship with Abram is stressed. God’s design in the Covenant of Grace with Abraham is no less than that that all the families

of the earth would be blessed. Here is the foundation for our commission to go to the ends of the earth. The Great Commission of Matthew is not new news. It is simply a repetition of a principal already set forth in Genesis 12:3: that the purposes of God in the Covenant of Grace is to bring spiritual blessing to all the families of the earth. So from the beginning, Abraham is to be blessed and to be a blessing.

Now, you know the story, and we are not going to go through the details of the two incidents, both with Abimelech and with the Pharaoh. But you know that Abram and Sara, his wife, wait many years for the fulfillment of this covenant promise to be made and if you will turn over with me to Genesis 15:1, and after who knows how long, after many decades, the Word of the Lord comes to Abram in a vision saying, “do not fear Abram, I am a shield to you. Your reward shall be very great.” So notice again what is said, “do not fear Abram.” The Lord speaks. He knows that Abram’s faith is being tested by this waiting. Secondly, “I am a shield to you.” He repeats His protective providence, just like when He had said back in Genesis 12, “I will curse those who curse you,” He repeats to him, “I will be a shield to you.” I am there to be your protector. My providence will protect you. And your reward shall be very great. So He repeats His purposes to bless Abram.

And what is Abram’s response? Verse 2. “Oh, Lord God, what will you give me since I am childless and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” So Abram’s response is, “Lord it doesn’t matter what you give me; my servant Eliezer is going to inherit it. It doesn’t matter how much riches you dump on me, it doesn’t matter what blessing you give to me, I don’t have a son to pass it on to myself.” And so by legal arrangement (and by the way, we have evidence of legal arrangements in the third millennium in the near east, we have examples of this from other cultures), where if the head of a household is childless, he may declare a servant within his household to be the legal recipient of all his wealth upon death, and to be the executor of the estate, etc. And that is exactly what has been done here with this gentleman, Eliezer of Damascus. And again, his location lets you know that this is a Canaanite. This is someone living from within the land. Okay. And so Abram is upset.

He goes on to say in verse 3, “Since you have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir.” So he is reiterating, “This slave was born in my own household, and not born to me, but born into the sphere of my authority and he is going to be my heir, Lord, so it doesn’t matter what You give to me.” Notice that Abram is not interested in experiencing the blessings of salvation in isolation. Abram is not satisfied until the blessings of salvation had been visited upon his family and he had been made a great nation. What a difference in an individualistic attitude which is so often represented in our culture today which basically says, it is me and Jesus and who cares about anybody else—sort of the Lone Ranger Christianity. Abram is not satisfied until he sees the blessing of God fall upon his heirs, his descendants and the covenant is established.

And then so the Word of the Lord comes to him a second time and God says to him in verse 4, “This man will not be your heir, but one who shall come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir.” So the Lord contradicts Abram. He says, “Abram, you will have an heir, you will have an heir from your own body, this servant will not be your heir.” And then he takes him outside, verse 5, tells him to look toward the heaven, tells him to count the stars, and then He says “if you are able to count them, so shall your descendants be.” He says, Abram look at the night sky, perhaps you can see 1500, maybe 2000 stars with the naked eye. If you are able to count them, that gives you an indication of how prolific I am going to make you. I am going to make your descendants as the stars of the sky. He is giving you an idea of the extent of the blessing that He is going to pour out on Abram as a way of strengthening his faith.

And then we are told in response to that, in Genesis 15 verse 6, in that very important verse that Paul goes back to over and over, “then he believed in the Lord and He,” that is the Lord, “reckoned it to him as righteousness.” Abram’s faith is bolstered by what God says. He believes the Lord and the Lord accepts Abram’s faith as righteousness. He reckons it to Him as if he were perfectly righteous and upright man.

Notice again, it is not that Abram is perfect. God has already made clear in Genesis 13 that Abram is not perfect, in his cowardly conduct with Sara. Abram is not a perfect man. But Abram is a man who believes

what the Lord says to him, and as the Lord confirms His promise to Him, Abram believes and God reckons him as righteous.

And then we read this. The Lord goes on and says, “I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldees to give you this land to possess it.” So God has settled him on the issue of descendants and he believes that the Lord is going to fulfill His promise. But Abram is still wondering after many years, he still has no heir and he has no land that he owns. Then the Lord says what, “I am the Lord who brought you out of the Ur of the Chaldees to give you this land.” And so immediately another question pops up into Abram’s mind. “Yeah, and by the way Lord, how will I know that I am going to possess this land?” So the Lord raises this question, and it is because the Lord is already in Abram’s heart. He raises another question. And Abram responds, “How may I know that I may possess it? Lord, I don’t have it yet. You told me that you were going to show me a land. And you were going to give me a land. How may I know that I will possess it?”

So beginning in Genesis 15:9, we have this interesting scenario. We have read it before but let’s read it again.

So He said to him, “Bring me a three year old heifer and a three year old female goat and a three year old ram and a turtledove and a young pigeon.” And then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two and laid each half opposite the other. But he did not cut the birds. And the birds of prey came down upon the carcasses and Abram drove them away. Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him. And God said to Abram, “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve; and afterward they will come out with many possessions. And as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. Then in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete.” And it came about when the sun had set that it was very dark, and behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces. And on that day, the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your descendants I have

given this land, from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates: The Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite.”

And so in that context, the Lord, in order to reinforce Abram’s assurance of the promise that He was indeed going to give him the blessing of the possession of this land, God enters into this covenant making ceremony.

Now as we have said, the symbolism is fairly straightforward. The animals are slaughtered to indicate the sanction of the covenant. That is how serious the covenant is. It is a life and death matter. The slaughtered animals remind us of the consequences of not obeying the covenant. Now be it done to me, as we have done to these animals is what the covenant-maker is saying as he walks between the pieces. This is reiterated, by the way, in Jeremiah chapter 34. Now we have looked at that passage as well. But we need to turn there quickly. Look at verse 18: “And I will give the men who have transgressed My covenant, who have not fulfilled the words of the covenant which they made before Me, *when* they cut the calf in two and passed between its parts—” then verse 20: “and I will give them into the hand of their enemies...” He says in verse 20, “Okay, I will give the men who have transgressed my covenant, who have not fulfilled the word of the covenant which they made before me when they cut the calf into and passed between its parts, I will give them into the hand of their enemies.”

So they will be dealt with even as the animals were ritually slaughtered and notice the words of verse 20: “and I will give them into the hand of their enemies and into the hand of those who seek their life. And their dead bodies shall be food for the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth.”

Now, get the image again. What is part of the essence of the promise that God has made both to Noah and to Abraham? Blessing for the family. He will be brought into a family. There is going to be a family of blessing. You are not going to be saved in isolation. You are going to be part of a people. In a covenant-making ceremony, animals are

slaughtered. In this passage here in Jeremiah 34:20, we are told their dead bodies shall be food for the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth. What is the point? The point is God is saying, “I am going to cut you off from your people. And there is not even going to be anyone to bury your body when you die. You are going to drop down where you die and the birds of the sky are going to pick the flesh off of your body. That is how much I am going to cut you off from your people.” Now that is the greatest curse that there can be, to cut off from the people of God because it is with the people of God where the blessing of God dwells.

So, in the language of the covenant, that ritual of the slaughter of the animals reminds us of the consequences of violating the covenant, not just in death, but being cut off from the people of God. It is severe language. You see the seriousness of what is going on.

Notice that in this passage, the birds of prey are present there in Genesis 15 as well. You remember in Genesis 15:11, Abram spends his time driving away the birds of prey from the carcasses. So they are there, symbolically representing what happens to covenant breakers. But when the sun goes down, Abram falls asleep and God repeats to him, His promise about the land in verse 13: “know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, but where they will be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years, but I will bring them out in the fourth generation. They will return here.” He is telling Abram ahead of time exactly the plan that He has for Abram’s descendants: to sojourn in Egypt, to come out of Egypt, to reestablish the land that the Lord had given to Abram.

And then we are told in verse 17, a smoking oven and a flaming torch passed between the pieces. That is a theophany, God is manifesting Himself in the form of a smoking oven and a flaming torch, not unlike the way He manifest Himself in the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire in the Exodus. It is a visible representation, a visible manifestation of the presence of the Lord. And we are told that the Lord Himself passes between the pieces. Now, this is so striking, because Abram is the servant. Abram is the beneficiary of the covenant, and yet it is the One who has made the covenant, it is the One who has ordered the covenant, is the One who is the Lord of the covenant, who passes between the

pieces. This is signifying again to Abram, “Abram, if I am unfaithful to My covenant promises to you, be it done to Me as we have done to these animals.” So you see God’s complete devotion to making sure that Abram receives the fullness of the salvation which He has been promised. For that, Abram does not make a contribution. For that, God does on His own. So the gracious element of what God is doing here in salvation is overwhelming.

We have said several things here that are striking. In the Near East, there is no example in comparative religion of a god entering into covenant with his people. There is no example in comparative religion. So you have already got in Genesis 2, in Genesis 6, and Genesis 12 and 15, something that you don’t find in any other religion. A God entering into covenant with His people.

Now, you have the God taking the role of the vassal, and saying, “Abram, let me confirm to you that I will fulfill My responsibilities in the covenant. And let me do it by taking upon Myself, a self-maladictory oath. Let me do it by calling down curses upon Myself if I do not fulfill My obligations to you in the covenant.” So we see a picture of just how far God is ready to go in assuring His people of the blessings which He has already promised them.

Now there is an important New Testament passage which addresses this as well. And if you have your Greek text, I would like you to turn to Hebrews chapter 9 and we’ll begin in verse 11. Here, the author of Hebrews proceeds to demonstrate the supremacy of the New Covenant. He is wanting to show why the New Covenant is more effective than the Old Covenant. He tells us in Hebrews 9:11 that Christ is the high priest of the temple not made with hands. So He is the high priest of a heavenly temple, not an earthly temple. The temple that Christ is the high priest of was not constructed by human hands, however talented, in the wilderness. He is the high priest of a heavenly temple. Secondly, we are told in Hebrews 9:12 that “He enters into a holy place not by the blood of animals, but by His own blood.” In other words, He, unlike the high priest of old, did not have to offer a sacrifice for Himself because of His sin before He offered a sacrifice for the people, because He was the sacrifice for the people. He was perfect. He was sinlessly perfect and

therefore He did not have to offer a sacrifice. He entered by His own blood. That is covenantal language there, by the way. So His sacrifice then, we are told, in verse 12 was not repetitious. It didn't have to be offered year after year after year on the Day of Atonement. It was once for all. And His sacrifice, we are told in verse 12, obtains eternal redemption. Then, we are told in verse 13 that if the blood of bulls and goats was effective for ceremonial cleansing, how much more will the blood of Christ cleanse the conscience. So that is His argument in verses 13 and 14. He is piling up ways in which the New Covenant is superior to the Old Covenant, ways in which Christ is a superior high priest. So, in contrast to this symbolic and ineffective and temporary Old Covenant ritual, Christ's priestly work is actual, effective, and eternal.

And then He comes to verse 15, and says something very, very strange. Look at it with me:

“And for this reason, He is mediator of a New Covenant”

He is the mediator of a New Covenant. That is, the basis of Christ's mediatorship of the New Covenant is His sacrificial death. Through His mediation, the better promises of the New Covenant have been effected. So Christ's effectiveness in the offering of the sacrifice is why He is understood as the mediator of the New Covenant.

Furthermore, in the inauguration of this New Covenant, the mediator's death, we are told, in the second half of verse 15, has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under what? Under the first covenant. So His death has taken place in order to bring redemption for sins committed under the first covenant. He has died as a ransom for sins in connection with the first covenant.

And as you know, the normal way that the author of Hebrews uses the term *First Covenant* is to refer to *the covenant with Moses*. He is speaking of the Mosaic Covenant. Why would He speak of First Covenant there? He knows about the Abrahamic Covenant, because He talks about it. Why is he talking about the First Covenant? Because the author of Hebrews is writing to whom? Hebrew Christians. And he is contrasting the Old Covenant which they see optimized in what? In Moses. He is

contrasting that with Christ. So throughout the book of Hebrews, you have this contrast between Moses and Christ. The Old Covenant ritual was established in the time of Moses and the New Covenant reality established under Christ. Okay. This is why he refers to it as First Covenant. He is contrasting the Second Covenant or the New Covenant to that Mosaic Covenant.

Now, the translation of the word, *diatheke* here in verses 16 and 17 has been widely debated. It is a very, very difficult passage. If you look at your English translations, I bet you get two or three different translations of this, if you have the NIV, or NASV, or King James, or New King James or some of the other translations represented in here. They are translated different ways and there is a wide debate over that. The authors precise line of argumentation from Hebrews 9:15 down to verse 18 is problematic, however you render *diatheke* in verses 16 and 17, and so I want to give a brief consideration of this passage because I am going to argue that this passage uses the language of *diatheke* and that this passage actually elucidates what we have just read in Genesis chapter 15.

The RSV reads this way: “therefore He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance” and by the way, the language *kleronomias* is used there for that *inheritance* which is another word that can either be taken as a last will and testament or of a covenant, since a death has occurred which redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant, *diatheke*.

Now here is how the RSV renders it: “for where a will is involved,” that is how they have translated *diatheke*, where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. And the word there for established is *pheresthai*. For a will, *diatheke*, that is the second time they have translated *diatheke* that way, for a will takes effect only at death since it is not enforced as long as they one who made it is alive. “And hence, even the first covenant...” and covenant isn’t repeated there, but it is implied. Even the first was not ratified without blood.

Now, at least two aspects of the context favor rendering your translation of *diatheke* in verses 16 and 17 as a last will and testament.

Now let me, for those of you who are working out of your English, just look for a moment, let me get the English open here. For those of you who are working out of your English, just for a moment, let me point to you what to be looking for. It will help you as you work through this. The problem is, how do you translate covenant in that first clause, in verse 16 and covenant in that first clause in verse 17? Some Bibles translate everything leading up to verse 16 as covenant. Every time *diatheke* appears up to that point, they will translate covenant. Then in verse 16 and 17, they will translate it as will or last will and testament and then they will switch back to covenant again. So that he is talking about covenant, covenant, covenant, and then last will and testament, last will and testament, and then covenant.

Other Bibles will translate this consistently covenant all the way through. If you have a New American Standard Version, you will see covenant is translated consistently all the way through. I am going to argue that that is the correct translation at this point but I want you to understand why people have translated it in different ways. It is very hard to understand the language or the way the language is being used here. Here are the reasons why some people favor translating *diatheke* as last will and testament here.

First, they argue that the mention of an inheritance, the *kleronomias* in verse 15 can be easily correlated with the idea of a last will. I mean, we are familiar with that. Last will and testaments usually mean inheritance, you know. If you are fortunate enough to have family and a little bit of money left over when it was all said and done, there is usually an inheritance along in there.

Secondly, the idea of a *diatheke* being activated upon its maker's death, and notice that language, in the RSV, the second verse is translated this way. For *diatheke* take effect only at death. Now that is not true of a covenant. But it is true of a testament. A testament is effected at death. And so that kind of language strongly suggests that this means testament, and not covenant. And so the usage of *diatheke* by those who argue that it needs to be translated as testament here and covenant elsewhere is something like this: You are saying it is like an ad hominem argument.

The argument is, he is speaking in Greek, these people are familiar with contemporary Greek usage of *diatheke* to refer to last will and testament and it is kind of an ad hominem argument. It is saying, this is why the New Covenant is superior to the Old Covenant but it is a play on words because *diatheke* means both covenant in the Bible, and it means testament in secular Greek, and so what he is doing is switching the word meanings and saying, this covenant is almost parallel to the way we do a contemporary testament. So that is the argument that is put forward by people who want to translate it as testament. It is an ad hominem argument designed to capitalize on the common legal meaning of the terms. And it is argued that you can find testamentary analogy to the work of Christ in some early Christian writings. Nevertheless, there are a number of difficulties involved in translating *diatheke* as testament in verses 16 and 17.

First, verse 15, views Christ as a covenantal mediator. He is explicitly called *mesites*. And testaments do not have mediators. They may have executors, but they don't have mediators. Second, the introduction of verses 16 and 17 comes with the Greek, *omou gar* For, you know the idea is that suggests that the covenants that are being talked about in verses 16 and 17 are the same things that are being talked about in verse 15. It is a "therefore" kind of argument.

So how can you switch from one to the other when you are doing a "therefore" kind of argument? Verse 15 is manifestly talking about a covenant. He is the mediator of the New Covenant.

Third problem with translating this as testament: The whole of Hebrews 9 verse 15-20 is concerned with a covenant inauguration ceremony. And verse 18 draws the conclusion from verses 16 and 17, "Hence, even the first covenant was not ratified without blood." So you have these two verses captioned by linking phrases. With *omou gar* you have got the for on the front end and then you have in verse 18, the *othen oude*. You have the connecting language, so the whole argument is connected and that fact argues against connecting covenant in 15, testament in 16 and 17, and then coming back to a covenant again in verse 18.

Fourth, if the singular *diatheke* means a testament in verse 17--see it there: *diatheke gar epi nekrois*. Now think about that phrase for a minute, Greek scholars. And think about the tense of that. Look at it. *diatheke gar* for the covenant, singular, *epi nekrois bebaia*. If *diatheke* means testament there, why is the plural phrase *epi nekrois* used? One covenant, many bodies. In favor of covenant in verses 16 and 17, we can argue that by rendering *diatheke* here consistently throughout the passage, each of these difficulties is resolved.

And in response to the contextual argument that inheritance in verse 15 implies that we are talking about a last will and testament, we can point out that the idea of inheritance does not rule out the meaning of covenant, because the Bible makes it clear that the covenant entails an inheritance.

What is Paul talking about in Galatians 3? I know that is another disputed passage, but the idea of inheritance is linked to the concept of covenant in the scripture. The real challenge for us making sense out of this passage and translating it covenant in verses 16 and 17 is to relate covenant to death, particularly with regard to its role in the activation of a covenant, since a covenant inauguration does not require the death of the covenant-maker. And that would be the end of the covenant. The covenant inauguration doesn't require the covenant-maker to die. It is easy to understand how a last will and testament relates to a death. It is effected by the death of the one who has made the last will and testament. It is harder to understand how the covenant relates to the death spoken here in verses 16 and 17.

Now there are two ways in which a covenant may be linked with death. First of all, there is the symbolic representation of the death of the covenant-maker in the slaying of the animals in the covenant ritual ratification. Okay. Those slain animals symbolically remind the covenant-maker of the consequences of breaking the covenants. That is one way that death relates to a covenant inauguration ceremony. The other way, of course, is the death penalty that in fact results from a person breaking the covenant stipulations. And those are the two ways that death relates to covenant.

Now bearing that in mind, covenant fits well with at least two features of verse 16 and 17. First of all, look at verse 16 and the word, established, or *pheresthai*. That word can bear the meaning represented. It can mean represented. Listen to what B.F. Wescott said: “It is not said that he who makes a covenant must die, but that his death must be brought forward or presented or introduced upon the scene or set in evidence, so to speak.” So the point of this is that we would then render instead of saying, in verse 16, something like this: “For where a covenant is there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it.” We would say, we would render it this way: “Where a covenant is there must of necessity be represented the death of him who made it.” The author’s point here would be to draw attention to the symbolizing of the oath of self-malediction, which was of course the sine qua non of the covenant-making ritual.

Second, using or translating *diatheke* as covenant makes sense of the phrase *epi nekrois* in the first half of verse 17. *epi nekrois*, how should we translate that? Over dead bodies. Look again at your English translations for a moment. For a covenant is valid, and here is how the NASV tries to wrestle with it, the covenant is valid only when men are dead. But the literal translation is the covenant is valid only over deaths. You know, supply “the body.” The covenant is only valid over dead bodies.

So why a covenant valid over dead bodies? That phrase, if so translated, “a covenant is made firm over dead bodies,” would be an allusion to the slain animals of the covenant ceremony, not to the person making the covenant, but to the animals that are slain in the covenant ceremony. It is made firm over dead bodies. Whose dead bodies? The dead body of the covenant maker? No, of the animals in the covenant-making ritual. And so this phrase would serve as a further elaboration on verse 16, reminding the reader of the precise symbolism of the pledge to death involved in ratifying the covenant.

Whereas, if you translate this passage, testament, in 16 and 17, then verse 17 ends up being more or less redundant. I mean it just says the same thing again as has been said in verse 16. So, there are good reasons for consistently translating *diatheke* as covenant in Genesis, in Hebrews 9

verses 15 through 18.

The one difficulty, the one difficulty that remains is what in the world do you do with verse 17b, the second half of that verse. Which reads, “for it is not in force,” or “it is never in force while the one who made it lives.” What do you do with that? For the meaning covenant to be sustained in this context, the reference to death here would have to be taken as having in view the symbolic death involved in ratifying the covenant. This is what Robertson says, you will find this on page 144, note 13 in ***Christ of the Covenants***. “The greatest difficulty with this interpretation of verse 17b is that it requires the reference to the death of the covenant-maker to be interpreted as a symbolic rather than an actual death. This problem could be resolved by suggesting that the writer has assumed a violated covenant. Given the situation in which the stipulations have been violated, a covenant is not made strong so long as the covenant-maker lives. In this case, the death envisioned would be actual rather than symbolical. This line of interpretation contains some commendable features, but the strong contextual emphasis on the covenant inauguration points in the direction of the symbolic rather than the actual death.”

So however we take *diatheke* in this passage, and I think we have a better argument for covenant than for testament here—however it is taken, one point emerges clearly from the author’s argument: the connection between the inauguration of the covenant at Sinai by Moses and the inauguration of the New Covenant by Christ. The first covenant’s mediator, Moses, inaugurated his covenant how? By the sprinkling of the blood of calves and goats. That is what is spoken of in verses 18-20 here in Hebrews 9. The New Covenant’s mediator inaugurated this covenant by the shedding of His own blood. That is stressed in verse 12, verse 15, and in verse 26. So the superiority of the New Covenant sacrifice of Christ is manifest in that it brings cleansing from sin, which the sacrifices of the first covenant could not, as the author will later argue in Hebrews chapter 10 verse 4. And its effect is permanent in duration. You remember he uses the phrase over and over, once for all, once for all. It is permanent in duration. It does not have to be repeated. The author reiterates this in his next usage of *diatheke* in Hebrews 10:16. And again

there, he quotes from Jeremiah 31 verses 33 and 34, emphasizing the covenantal promise of the law written on the heart and the forgiveness of sins.

And he concludes, Hebrews 10:18, “now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin.” Now that the forgiveness of sins has been realized in the New Covenant, there is no longer any need for the sacrifices of the Old Covenant in the termination of the repeated sin offerings. The finality of the sacrifice of Christ, and the New Covenant which it inaugurated, is confirmed.

Now, why look at that ceremony, why look at that passage? Because it confirms along with Jeremiah 34 that the people of God understood precisely what that weird ritual in Genesis 15 meant. You see it referred to again in Jeremiah 34. The understanding of those slain animals is perfectly clear to everyone who reads that passage and you see it again right here in Hebrews chapter 9. But even by the time you have gotten to the New Covenant in the context of a Greek-speaking culture, still there is an understanding of the significance of the slaughter of those animals. And when we come back next time, we are going to pick up with the covenant with Abraham, and we are going to continue on through with its confirmation in the Covenant of the Circumcision in Genesis 17.

The Abrahamic Covenant – Covenant Signs

Covenant Sign Implications

If you have your Bibles, I would invite you to turn with me to Genesis chapter 17, Genesis chapter 17. In Genesis chapter 17, in verse 1, we read,

Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; Walk before Me, and be blameless. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you, And I will multiply you exceedingly.” And Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying, “As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, And you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, But your name shall be Abraham; For I will make you the father of a multitude of nations. And I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come forth from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. And I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.” God said further to Abraham, “Now as for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised. And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you. And every male among you who is eight days old shall be circumcised throughout your generations, a *servant* who is born in the house or who is bought with money from any foreigner, who is not of your descendants. A *servant* who is born in your house or who is bought with your money shall surely be circumcised; thus shall My covenant be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. But an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.”

Thus ends this reading of God's Holy and inspired Word. May He add His blessings to it. Let's pray.

“Our Lord and our God, we bless You that we again have the privilege of coming aside from the world for these hours to devote ourselves to the study of Scripture. We thank You for the faithful men and women who have gone before us living the truths of this passage and indeed of all the truths of your Word. We thank you, O God, for the faithful teachers who have gone before us who have labored many hours and years in order to explain with great clarity and precision the meaning of these words. We recognize that we are very dependent upon their faithful labors and as we attempt to grapple with these truths and set them forth in a logical order that we might comprehend them and meditate upon them and eventually communicate them. We ask you, O God, for Your grace. Give us the grace of understanding as we attempt to absorb many things in a brief period of time. But help us most of all, O Lord, not to fail to wonder and to praise and to worship at the truth we learn. Cause our breath to be taken away. Move us to worship and to obedience through all that all we learn. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.”

Today, I want to look at this aspect of the Covenant of Grace in the life of Abraham which teaches us a good deal, not only about the Abrahamic covenant, but teaches us about covenant signs. We have already begun our study of Abraham. We have seen God's dealings in little vignettes with Abraham in Genesis 12 and 15. In Genesis 17, God comes again to confirm His promises to Abraham. He is not initiating a new relationship with Abram. He has already had that relationship with Abram. Now He is going to confirm them by giving him a sign in his flesh and by renaming him. You notice how God, as Abraham's patience is continually tested over the years, is kind to give continuing encouragement to Abram so that he will believe. You know early on, God comes to him in Genesis 15 to reassure Abram of His promises. And now He comes again in Genesis 17, and He not only gives an external sign to assure him of that covenant promise, by He gives him a mark in his own flesh to assure him of that covenant promise.

Now, in the process of looking at Genesis 17, I want you to key in on

two things in particular. Very often our Dispensational friends like to categorize Old Testament covenants, in particular, into two categories: One, they will call conditional, and the other they will call unconditional. In other words, they will say there are basically two types of covenants in the Old Testament. Some are conditional. And some are unconditional. And naturally they will pick for instance the covenant with Moses as a conditional covenant because of the stress of the law there, and then they will pick the covenant of Abraham and they will call it an unconditional covenant. But I want you to see that in this aspect of the Covenant of Abraham, and you catch it even in your English Bible just reading through Genesis 17, there is a lot of stress on Abram's responsibility.

I am not attempting to take away from the grace of this at all, you understand. This does not distract from God's grace one iota. But there is a tremendous stress on the mutual obligations of Abraham in embracing the gracious promises of God given to him in this covenant, because God reminds Abraham that he needs to walk before Him in integrity.

Now understand again that God is not saying Abraham, the stipulation for My blessing you is that you are perfect. Okay, your translations may confuse you there. "Walk before Me, and be blameless." God is not asking Abraham to be perfect there. But He is asking Abraham to walk before Him with a whole heart; that is, to be wholly devoted to following Him and to believing the promises that He has given him in Genesis 12 and reiterated in Genesis 15. He is asking Abraham to be a wholehearted man. A man who loves Him from the inside out. A man of integrity.

And you are used to that language from the book of Job. You know, over and over, Job protests, "I am a man of integrity, Lord. I have never lost my integrity in this whole process." Now is Job claiming to be sinless? No. But what he is saying is, "I have never lost trust in this whole process." Now, of course towards the end of the book, Job loses it. And he has to eat his crow by the time you get to the final encounter with the Lord at the end of the book. But through much of Job's suffering, he could say, with legitimacy, "I have kept my integrity." You remember his wife early on encourages him to abandon his integrity, curse God and

die. But Job hangs on to that. In other words, what he is saying is, “I have remained wholeheartedly committed to You, O Lord; in faith I have believed You, I have trusted You even though everything in my world was falling around my ears. I have continued to trust in You.” And so God opens the reiteration of the covenant here with the words, “Walk before Me and be whole, be blameless, have integrity.”

And that is the language of perfection there. Don't mix that up. Don't think that God is calling on Abram to be sinless. That is not what is going on. But even that having been said, isn't it interesting that in this gracious covenant, the opening parlay of a chapter which is designed to assure Abraham of God's grace, there is a command to Abraham: “Walk before Me and be blameless. Walk before Me and have integrity.”

Are you following what I am saying here? We immediately see a stress on Abram's responsibility in the covenant. So is it a gracious covenant? Yes. Is it an unconditional covenant? Well, that depends on what you mean by that. Is God's grace, is His love towards Abraham conditioned upon Abraham's love towards Him? **No.** Otherwise, we are all undone.

But is there responsibility in this relationship? Are there mutual obligations in the relationship? Absolutely. You can't get away from it in this chapter. In fact, even the sign which God gives for the purpose of assuring Abraham of the promise that He has made to him has another side to it, and you saw that in the last few verses that we read: “Abram, if you fail to apply this sign, to yourself and to your descendants, you are cut off from My covenant. It is such an act of deliberate rebellion and disobedience that you are cut off from My covenant by the very fact that you have refused to apply this sign.”

So this whole chapter reeks of mutual obligations. Is it a gracious covenant that God has established with Abraham? Absolutely. Does that mean then that there are no obligations on Abraham's part? **Absolutely not.**

Now that is a wonderful paradigm to remember because it will help you keep from misunderstanding Paul. You see, there are scads of people who think that if they embrace Paul's doctrine of grace, that it means that

there are really no obligations in the Christian life. It goes something like this. "God saves you by grace and so you don't have to obey Him, it is just that you want to obey Him." You will hear that distinction. You don't have to obey God, but you will want to obey God. That is not the Pauline ethic. The Pauline ethic does not say you have no obligation to obey Him, you just do it because you want to. You just do it because you love Him, etc. No. There is still obligation in the Pauline ethic. Because the Pauline ethic is the Old Testament ethic. The Pauline ethic is the Abrahamic ethic. Grace and obligation are not opposites. That is what I am pressing at here. Grace and obligation are not opposites. In fact, Paul makes it very clear in Romans chapter 5 that one of the most important functions of Spiritual grace, capital "S" Spiritual grace, grace that is worked in us by the Holy Spirit, that one of the most important functions of Spiritual grace in us is to do what? To enable us to perform our obligations. And that is why he says that grace reigns through righteousness. That is, by the way, his response to the Judaizers' attack against him that says, "Paul, your doctrine of justification by faith leads to disobedience. It leads to passivity on the part of people who believe it, because then they say, 'Well, if I am justified by faith, it doesn't matter what I do. It doesn't matter how I live.'" And the apostle Paul doesn't argue, "No you have misunderstood my doctrine of justification." He pulls back and he basically says, "No, your misunderstanding at that point is at a deeper level than my doctrine of justification. You don't understand what grace is for."

Grace is for, among other things, the enabling of the believer to do what God has called the believer to do. So it is not that there are obligations for believers under the New Covenant, but in Christ there are no more obligations. That is not the contrast of Old Covenant to New Covenant. It is that those who are under the law, that is, those who are under the Covenant of Works, outside of Christ, whether they are in the Old Covenant or the New Covenant, are condemned by the law. The law is their judgment. The law is their condemnation. But when they are brought under Christ as their federal head, whether they be under the Old Covenant, or under the New Covenant, the grace which reigns in them, enables them to say with David, "how I love Thy law, O Lord." So the law no longer is their condemnation. Okay.

Now, that having said, I want to zero in on a couple of things in this passage. I want to zero in first of all on **the nature of this covenant sign**, how it functions in the covenant with Abraham. And I want to zero in on **covenant signs themselves**. We didn't say much about Genesis 9 and the covenant sign of the bow in the clouds when we were studying Noah. And that is because I want to look at covenant signs here in a sort of semi-consolidated state, so that you can see how covenant signs function in the Old Testament. It will help you tremendously with your sacramental theology in the New Testament if you understand how covenant signs function in the Old Testament. It will get you out of all sorts of problems that various theological groups have gotten into.

And let me just mention a few of those problems ahead of time so that you can see a little bit of where we are going. Obviously, the most distinctive difference from a Protestant view of sacraments is a Roman Catholic view of sacraments. They have seven sacraments as opposed to our two sacraments. How does the Catholic church get to its number of sacraments? How does it define its sacraments? And how does it get to its view of how sacraments work? My contention is that they get there because the Roman Catholics doctrine of sacraments have absolutely no point of contact with a biblical view of covenant signs. It grew up in a context in which that theology was ignored for the sake of other things. And I can tell you a little bit about what those other things are later on.

But there are even differences within Protestant churches on signs. Many of you will have come into contact and maybe some of you have come out of a background like the Church of Christ which argues that repentance, belief and water baptism by a Church of Christ minister (by immersion of course, because that is the only baptism that the Church of Christ recognizes), is necessary for salvation. Particularly if you have come from a Baptist background, my guess is that you have really butted heads at some point in your life with that Church of Christ teaching, because one of the distinctive things about Baptists is that Baptists do not believe that water baptism is necessary for salvation. The Church of Christ, the Campbellites, various groups like that that appeared in the 1830's and 40's and have existed ever since here in America, they really butt heads on that. They both believe in immersion. They both believe in

adult believer baptism only, but Baptists don't believe that water baptism is necessary for salvation; Church of Christ folk do.

Now how does the Church of Christ get to that point? Again, I would argue it is because they do not understand the nature of covenant signs. What about our Seventh Day Baptist friends? Or our some of our Adventist friends, or some of our Mennonite friends? Folks who are into the "sacrament of foot-washing"? Now why is it that we don't foot-wash in our particular circles in general? Let's all pretend like we are together on this. Why is that we don't practice foot washing? Didn't Jesus institute that in John 13? Why don't we do that?

The answer is that it is related to your doctrine of covenant signs. And I think I can explain all of the issues related to those questions simply by giving you a grounded understanding of what a covenant sign is. So those are my goals today: to show you a little bit about the nature of the Covenant of Grace with Abraham and also to talk about Covenant signs.

Sacraments

Now let me start off by defining a sacrament for you, and then we are going to refine and specify this definition several times in class today. We will start off with a basic definition and then we are going to refine it as we go on. Now, our Reformed Baptist friends don't like to use the term *sacrament*. It sounds a little too Catholic to them. So they will use the term *ordinance*, which is a perfectly good term by the way. And by using that term, they are simply trying to distance themselves from misunderstandings of the word *sacrament* in the Roman communion and they are emphasizing that it is an ordinance in the sense that it was something commanded by God. So when you see the word *ordinance* used, that is why that word is being used.

A sacrament is an action designed by God to sign and seal a covenantal reality communicated by the Word of God. The weakness or the frailty of human faith welcomes an act of reassurance. Understand again that the signs of the covenant all function to reassure believers of the promises that God has made to them in the covenant. Nowhere in the Bible will you find a covenant sign which *effects* a relationship. A covenant sign always **reflects** a relationship. Covenant signs do not

effect a relationship, they reflect a relationship.

Now, what do I mean by that? I mean that God, by giving Abraham this covenant sign of circumcision, did not enter into covenant with Abraham *by virtue of* that covenant sign. No, it is the other way around. God was in relationship with Abraham and in order to *reassure* Abraham of the promises that He had made to him, He gave him the covenant sign to confirm that promise. Now, right there you automatically see a polemic against a Catholic view of sacraments. The idea that the mere application of the covenant sign actually saved somebody would have boggled the mind of any self-respecting Hebrew, because that is never how a covenant sign ever functioned. That is a concept utterly alien to the thought-world of the Old or the New Testament. Now, our Roman Catholic friends are really defenseless in this particular area. The covenant signs do not *effect* a relationship, they *reflect* a relationship. Their function is to reassure us in the weakness of our faith.

Now, let me just mention in passing, there is a wonderful passage in Calvin's commentary on Isaiah 7:14. You remember that glorious passage—it is the passage about Immanuel. It is the promise of Immanuel, that Isaiah gives to the King, despite the fact that the King refuses to ask for a sign. Turn with me briefly to Isaiah chapter 7. Ahaz had been preparing to go to war against the Assyrians and everyone in Judah was fearful that Judah was going to get wiped out. God sends Isaiah to Ahaz to assure this wicked King that the Assyrians were not going to wipe out Judah. And as an added bonus, God says to Isaiah, "Tell him to ask Me for a sign, I will give him a sign to assure him." So Isaiah goes in and he says, "Ask a sign." Look at verse 11 –

“Ask a sign for yourself from the LORD your God; make *it* deep as Sheol or high as heaven.’ But Ahaz said, ‘I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD!’”

Now, Calvin on this passage gives a beautiful discussion of why what Ahaz did was not in fact pious, but rebellious. It might initially sound to you like Ahaz is saying, “I won't test the Lord. I mean I am not going to ask for a sign from the Lord.” As if that is pious when the prophet has come to him and says, “You ask for a sign.” And the King says I am not

going to ask for a sign. And Calvin comments that God had determined that Ahaz and Judah needed a sign, and by golly, when God tells you, “You need a sign,” you need a sign. So there is nothing pious about saying, “Well, Lord, I am not going to ask for a sign,” when the Lord says you need a sign. And Calvin applies that to baptism. Many people say, “Why do we need to do baptism or why do we need to observe the Lord’s Supper? Why can’t we just dispense with Baptism and the Lord’s Supper and just do the preaching of the Word?” And Calvin says, because when God tells you, you need a sign, you need a sign. Because that sign is there to buttress the weakness of faith. Okay. So again, read that passage, it is a good treatment by Calvin. Pick up his commentary on Isaiah, look at the area right around Isaiah 7 say roughly from verse 10 on down past verse 14. It is a good treatment.

Now, let’s pick up in Genesis 15 to give a little context. Let me begin by talking with you a little bit about the context of the institution of the sign of circumcision. As you remember, God has covenanted with Abram in Genesis 12 and 15. And in Genesis 16, what has happened? What happened in Genesis 16? Abraham grew weak in faith. And what did he do? I mean Abraham basically attempted to bring about the promises of God through human designs. He said, “Well, you know Lord, I have been waiting for a long time, and I don’t see any children. My wife came to me and suggested that I sleep with her maid, Hagar, and that we have children through her.” It was a common custom of the day, and perfectly socially acceptable. This is Abram’s strategy. He had attempted to bring about the realization of God’s promises through sinful human designs and it, of course, resulted in disaster in his family life, and would continue to be a disaster in his family life for many years to come.

And so in the context of that failure of Abraham, that deed reflecting a lack of faith, God institutes an abiding mark for Abraham and his descendants: Circumcision. He gives it to remind Abram of His covenantal promises and to remind Abram that He Himself will bring them about. God renews the previous promises that He has made to Abram and He reiterates them.

Let’s look at those promises. There are at least five of them, and we will look at them as they appear in the passage. In Genesis 17:2, (1) He

tells him again that He will establish or He will make firm His covenant. In Genesis 17:7, He says that He will include Abram's descendants in the covenant. So He has reaffirmed His covenant commitment. (2) He has reconfirmed that Abraham's descendants will be entailed in this covenant. (3) He reiterates the Immanuel principle in Genesis 17:7-8, when He says, "I will be a God to you, and to your seed, and to your descendants." So He reiterates, I will be your God, you will be My people. (4) In Genesis 17:8, He says that He will give that land to Abraham and his descendants. So the land promise is renewed. And (5) then He reiterates this: that Abram's seed will be multiplied so that he is the father of many nations and kings. And He does that several times. He does it in verse 2, verse 4, verse 5, verse 6.

Now in that context the sign is instituted. The promises have been reiterated. Now as I have said before, notice also that along with these promises, there is an emphasis on Abraham's obligation. And that is seen in at least two ways. First of all, it is seen in God's Word to him in verse 1. "I am God Almighty, walk before Me and be blameless." Now think again, how significant that statement is in light of his failure in Genesis 16. Again, that is not a call to perfection. It is not that He is saying, "Okay, Abraham, you sinned in chapter 16, don't do that again," although that might be implied. The point is not that you sinned then, be sinless from now on. The point is, "Abram, what you have just done, is showing Me that your heart is struggling, so be wholehearted, be a man of integrity. Continue to walk with Me. Continue to trust Me. Continue to believe in Me." This is a command, it is an exhortation. It is an imperative for Abraham to respond to God's covenant promises in faith. So that is the first part of the responsibility you see here.

But the second part is that Abram is to be faithful in having the covenant sign applied to himself and to his descendants. So Abram is to show his responsibility in the covenant, both by believing God's promises and by obeying Him about applying the sign that God gives, and we see this in verse 9. Look with me there. "And God said to Abraham, 'My covenant you shall keep, you and your seed after you and their generations. This is My covenant which you shall keep between Me and between you and your seed after you to be circumcised every male among

you.”

Now that is interesting language. The covenant is the relationship which exists between Abraham and the Lord and it has existed since Genesis 12. And yet now, in Genesis 17, God is saying, look at the words again, you can look in your Hebrew text there, especially in verse 10, this is the covenant. “This is My covenant, which you shall keep between Me and between you and your seed after you. To be circumcised every male among you.” Isn’t that an interesting way to define the covenant. God says first in verse 9, you must keep My covenant. And then He defines the covenant, not in terms of the relationship that He has with Abram, but in terms of the sign of circumcision. Isn’t that an interesting way of speaking? In this context, the closest possible identification is made between the sign of the covenant and the covenant itself. The closest possible identification is made between the covenant sign, which is circumcision, and the covenant relationship. In fact, they are so closely related that the sign is said to be the covenant and the covenant is said to be the sign. This is My covenant that every male among you shall be circumcised.

Well, I don’t think that it would be improper at all to translate it by the way of dynamic equivalents, “This is My covenant sign, that every male among you be circumcised.” But the literal language is, “This is My covenant, that you be circumcised.” So what we have here is a relationship between a covenant and the covenant sign in which God is stressing the closeness between those two things. To be in the covenant is to be in the covenant sign. To reject the covenant sign is to reject the covenant.

The closeness of the identification of the covenant and the covenant sign is evidenced in the strange story of Moses in Exodus 4:24-26, when the Lord comes and meets Moses on the way and seeks to kill him. Okay, here is Moses, the herald of the covenant, the lawgiver of Israel, he is on his way to meet and challenge Pharaoh as the representative of God, but Moses himself has disobeyed the injunctions of Genesis chapter 17. And the Lord meets him on the way and seeks to kill him. And we are told that the moment that his wife throws the foreskin of their son at his feet, the Lord relents. Now Moses is giving you a hint as to what the nature of

that altercation was about in that passage. And apparently the Midanite wife didn't want her little boy being circumcised. But immediately when the Lord seeks out Moses, she knows what is going on and the circumcision is performed hastily, the foreskin thrown at his feet and the covenant herald is spared. So the seriousness of this injunction is seen there.

The Function of Covenant Signs

The sign provides an outward sign of entrance into the external covenant community. To receive circumcision, God makes clear in Genesis 17, is to be considered part of the covenant community. Now again, notice, receiving the sign of circumcision does not in and of itself make you even part of the visible covenant community. It confirms the fact that you are already part of the covenant community, whether you are an adult or child.

So, when someone converts to Israel as they did in Esther chapter 8, it is not the receiving of the sign of circumcision that affects their entrance into the covenant community. No. That seals their entrance into the covenant community. You make your entrance into the covenant community as an adult by faith in the Old Testament just like in the New Testament. And, of course, under the Old Covenant, not only adults were seen as part of the covenant community, but their children were seen as part of the covenant community.

But again, it is not the applying of the sign to the child that makes that child part of the covenant community. No, the sign seals that child as part of the covenant community. In other words, it confirms; its purpose is to assure. Now, that having been said, the reverse is also true: that to refuse to receive the sign of the covenant, was what? It was a repudiation of the covenant community. Not because the sign is a magical thing, but because repudiation of the sign represents rejection of the Lordship of the Lord. If the Lord says, "Circumcise," and you say, "Well, I don't want to be circumcised," you have just repudiated His Lordship. And so the idea of being part of His community and repudiating His Lordship are mutually exclusive. By the way, there you have a wonderful argument against anti-lordship salvationists. There are people who say you can have God as Savior, but not as Lord. Well, try that on somebody in

Genesis 17. I want to be part of Israel, but none of this circumcision stuff. No. The Lord is Lord, and when He says “Be circumcised,” repudiation of the sign gets you cut off from the covenant, not because there is something magical about the sign, but because in repudiating the sign, you are repudiating the rule of God. Is that clear as mud?

Secondly, **what does the sign do?** It signifies the need for cleansing from sin and the availability of that cleansing. Blood is obviously used throughout the Pentateuch in the process of atonement rituals, propitiation rituals, expiation rituals, and the bloody nature of the sacrifice reminds of the necessity of cleansing in the covenant relationship and the provision of that by the Lord as you enter into relationship with Him.

What else does the sign do? The sign also has the significance of sealing the elect for the possession of eternal life. The elect are sealed into the certainty of ultimate possession of the promises. Now immediately, by introducing the word *elect*, I have raised a question that will really only become apparent as the story of Isaac and Ishmael plays out, and as the story of Jacob and Esau plays out later in Genesis. There is a sense in which I am speaking anachronistically here about Genesis 17, but let me point that the family line has already been introduced in Genesis, in Genesis 3 and 4 particularly. Eve is the mother of Cain and Abel and Seth and they are two different types of boys amongst those three boys. Cain is one type of boy. Abel and Seth are another type of boy. And they are of entirely different lines. And Moses makes that crystal clear, not only in Genesis 4, but in Genesis 5 and then again in Genesis 10 and 11. So the idea of having a godly line and an ungodly line out of the same family is not unheard of in the book of Genesis. And that theme is going to be developed in the life of Esau and Jacob. It is going to be developed in the lives of Ishmael and Isaac to a lesser extent. So though this may not be being highlighted in this specific passage here in Genesis 17, Ishmael is circumcised. Isaac will only later be circumcised. Okay. Though this theme is not highlighted here, it is very important.

What is the function of a covenant sign? It is to confirm, right? It is to assure. It is, in short, to seal (if I can jump ahead), because the language of sealing in the Reformed tradition comes from Ephesians

chapter 1, and what is said by Paul about the sealing of the Holy Spirit.

What is a seal, according to Paul? It is a deposit guaranteeing the full payment of that which is promised. It is a mark, a stamp, an official seal guaranteeing God's fulfillment of His promises. That language there in Ephesians apparently very much reflects what was done in Paul's time with regard to commercial seals and guarantees. It is like the seal that would have been on a document stamping and confirming that the person who had made the pledge in the document was going to carry out his obligation like we would do with a notary public today. I just got a thing in the mail, we just refinanced the house because the house rates are so low. But, the people who are refinancing the house want to make sure that termites don't eat my house up. And so we had to have a termite inspection and after the termite inspection came in, they said fine, there are no termite problems here but there are conditions which could allow for termites to eat up your house. And so, you must sign a sheet with a notary public acknowledging that, so that you take the rap if you don't do something about that. We own more of this house than you do, and so we want you to take care of this. I mean they are putting us over the barrel here. They are saying we want you to take care of those conditions that might lead to termites. And so we want a notary to sign that thing so that you are obligated to do your side.

Well, this is a little bit of the other way around. This is like a sign where someone says, "I have promised you a million dollars, here is your down payment of \$1,000, and here is my seal, saying you can take me to court if I don't give you the rest of that million dollars." Or it might be, the seal may actually refer to the deposit itself. It was used both of those ways in Paul's day. So a covenant sign functions to seal the promises of the covenant. Are you with me so far?

Now, the minute you say that, you have the question, "What about those in the covenant community who turn out to be rotten eggs? What about the Esaus, what about the Ishmaels?" Actually, what you are asking about is, "What about the reprobate? What about those who do not believe? What about those who do not embrace the covenant?"

Well, by saying what we have just said about what the covenant sign

does, when we say that the covenant sign has the significance of sealing the elect for possession of eternal life, we are emphasizing that because the covenant sign does not work just because you applied it to somebody; the covenant sign works in those who by grace believe. The covenant sign only brings with it condemnation for those who repudiate the covenant. **But for those who believe, it is a means of grace whereby the elect are assured of their possession of eternal life.**

By the way, at this point, we still haven't gotten to an issue that separates Reformed Baptists and Reformed paedobaptists—that is people in the Reformed community who don't believe that you baptize children and people in the Reformed community who do believe that you baptize children. In the visible covenant community, there are always going to be some who are elect and some who are non-elect. Or to put it in a less Calvinistic way, there are going to be some who believe and there are going to be some who merely profess to believe and yet do not in fact believe. There are going to be false professions, in other words. The people who appear to be part of God's people on the outside, but who are not, in fact, part of that covenant community.

Now, the sealing function of the covenant, in its beneficial aspect, only benefits the elect, only benefits those who believe. The *Westminster Confession* gets this so right. Isn't it interesting that the Confession talks about justification and sanctification and adoption and perseverance before it talks about assurance, because you can't be assured of what you don't have. So since covenant signs function in this area of confirmation, their beneficial effect is totally contingent upon the reality of faith in the one who has received it. Because you can't assure somebody of something that they don't have.

Fourth, because the sign signifies and seals inclusion into the external community of God's Covenant of Grace, circumcision does not lead to presumption but to personal responsibility. In other words, the sign does not make you passive, it leads to responsibility based on the principle of grace. The sign and the seal itself does not bring covenantal blessing. The sign evidences covenantal blessing and assures covenantal blessing. But the fact of a covenantal relationship always entails responsibility to the one who has covenanted. The covenantal relationship may be

fulfilled in either blessing or curse. If the person who has received the sign of the covenant rejects the covenant, by not being a person who believes and repents, by refusing to truly embrace the covenant in the heart, then that person, by the sign of the covenant, by the sign of circumcision, is sealed to a double curse. Not only is that person cursed unto the Covenant of Works, they're cursed for a false application of the Covenant of Grace. And hence, Paul's words in I Corinthians, don't eat or drink of the table of the Lord if you do not discern the Lord's body, lest you eat and drink unto yourself condemnation.

We have talked for a few moments about what the covenant sign does. We have talked about the context of the institution of the sign of circumcision. We have talked about the giving of the sign of circumcision. We have talked about what the sign does. Now, the reason that I raised this question of what the sign does is so that when you are talking with those who do believe that covenantal signs actually convey saving grace elementally, if you are talking to a Roman Catholic who believes that the application of water to a child actually washes away original sin and initiates them into a sacramental system whereby grace is conveyed, then you need to be aware that that bears no relation to how the Scripture views covenant signs.

But I am also talking about it because all of us in the Protestant tradition who are in polemic against a view that says that giving of a covenant sign or the taking of a covenant sign in the Lord's Supper actually elementally conveys grace, all of us who are in polemic against that particular point of view have the question posed to us by our congregation members: "Well then, why do you do it? What does it do?" I mean, if say it doesn't do this, expect for someone to say, "Well, what does it do and why do we do it?" That is why I am taking so much time on this, because you will have the question asked to you if you haven't already, now I am just trying to get you ready for it.

Circumcision

Now, we have talked about what the sign itself does. But let me talk about what this sign of circumcision is not first. The sign of circumcision is not a sign of entrance into manhood. I mean it is true that, for instance, Ishmael was circumcised at 13. And it is also true that other

cultures around Israel practiced circumcision, but that they tended to do it to their male children at the time that they would have been considered to have become men. But the covenant sign of circumcision instituted here in Genesis 17 is to be applied to those who are eight days old. So it is very clear that this sign, though it may be similar to some of the practices of other nations around Israel, was very different in the content of its meaning.

Now, an interesting aside—and I have no idea of its theological significance whatsoever—many of you may have seen a book by S.I. McMullen and the book is called *None of These Diseases*. It has gone through several editions. I think it is out in a second or third edition now. But he points out something very interesting. There is an element in our bloodstream, in the male bloodstream, and it is a part of the blood-clotting mechanism. On the eighth day of a male child's life, he has 100 more times of this element in his system than on any other day. And McMullen shows on these charts how this all works out. Now whether that was God's reason for choosing the eighth day or not, I don't know. It is interesting, isn't it, that the Lord would have commanded eighth-day circumcision and this blood-clotting agent is especially present on that day. I mean the Lord did make the body, He did know what He was doing.

Secondly, let me go on to say, that the sign of circumcision was not merely a sign of Jewish ethnicity. This is made clear from Genesis 17. Who is to be circumcised? Everyone who is a male in the household is to be circumcised. And does that include even those who have been bought with money by the head of the household and who dwell within the tents? Oh, yes it does. If they're Midianites, yes. If they are Moabites, yes. No matter who they are. If they are under the headship of the covenant head of the household, they are to receive the sign of circumcision if they are male. That is very clear in Genesis 17. The sign is to be applied to Abraham, to his seed, to his descendants, and to those who dwell within his tent.

So the sign is not merely a sign of ethnicity and I want to remind you that this was understood even at the very end of Israel's national experience. When you go to the book of Esther, and you remember after Haman's

plot has been exploded, and Mordecai wins in the end and even though the king cannot repeal the law that he had made allowing people to go plunder the Jews, he did make another law that said the Jews would be allowed to defend themselves against anyone who attacked them. And furthermore, if the Jews were attacked by somebody and the Jews defeated those people, the Jews would have the right to plunder them of every thing in their family. They would be allowed to take it legally for themselves. And in Esther chapter 8, what are told? That because of that decree, there was a fear of the Jews in the hearts of the people and many of them became Jews. So, here you are under the rule of the Ahasuerus. Here you are under the rule of non-Jewish, blatantly idolatrous Gentiles. In the book of Esther, Israel is scattered amongst the nations. And yet, here are people becoming Jews. So the idea of circumcision only being applied to a pure bloodline was not the case in Genesis 17, and it wasn't the case at the end of Israel's national history in the book of Esther. So very clearly, this is neither a sign of entrance into manhood, nor is it a sign of ethnicity.

And finally, let's make it clear that the sign itself does not bring about salvation. The sign confirms the covenant promises. How are those covenant promises received? By faith. And so if you will flip quickly in your Bibles to Romans chapter 4, you will see this. Paul is talking about Abram's being reckoned as righteous by God. Romans 4, verse 10. And he says, "How then was Abram reckoned righteous? While he was circumcised or uncircumcised?" And his answer: "Not while he was circumcised, but while he was uncircumcised." Why is Paul saying that? Because Genesis 15:6 happened before Genesis 17. Abram was declared righteous in Genesis 15:6 by the Lord **before** circumcision was ever instituted. So this is part of Paul's polemic. So he goes on to say, he received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness of faith. So the sign of circumcision was for the purpose of confirming the promises which had been conveyed to Abraham and received by how? By faith.

It is important to see that that element of faith is a significant aspect of the Old Covenant too. Because oftentimes, when we get into an argument about whether you baptize babies, or whether you baptize covenant

children or not, the argument is in the Old Testament, you know, faith wasn't the issue, it was just being part of the external covenant community. In the New Testament, faith is the big issue. Well, here is Paul in Romans 4 saying that the whole function of covenant signs is to seal the promises of God made to us in the covenant. Signs which are received by faith alone. Paul argues this adamantly in Romans 3 and 4 and elsewhere.

But Isaac when he was eight days old could not exercise saving faith. So, does that make null and void the command of Genesis 17? No, it doesn't. We will come back to that in a minute.

Now, what are the implications. My point for mentioning the Romans 4 passage is to make it clear that the sign itself having been applied does not bring salvation, because faith is the instrument used by the Spirit to convey saving benefits to God's people. And therefore, Ishmael can receive the sign of the covenant in Genesis 17, but that doesn't mean that Ishmael is truly a member of God's elect. Esau can receive the sign of the covenant and yet Esau, by his failure to exercise faith, can repudiate the covenant. So just merely having the covenant sign applied doesn't save you—this idea that some people have that by giving people covenant signs, they are saved. And you know this is abroad in a lot of churches. It is not just the Roman church, but also the Mormon church. Not only do they think that the sign has a saving effect on you, they think that you can go back and be baptized for your dead ancestors and get them into heaven too. Baptism for the dead. This idea is alien, however to the context of Genesis 17.

Covenant baptism

Now, what are the implications of covenantal baptism then? We have said what the sign is not. And we have said a little about what the sign does, but what are the implications of the covenantal sign of circumcision? Let me mention at least three implications. First, it is apparent from the immediate history of circumcision in Genesis 17 through 25, that physical descent does not make children of God. So just being part of the physical lineage of Abraham and just having received the sign of the covenant, doesn't mean anything if the reality of faith is not there. That is clear from the story of Ishmael. It is clear from the

story of Esau. It is clear from the story of Joseph's brothers. This is a theme in the book of Genesis. And it reappears throughout the Old Testament. People in the same family, godly parents, some righteous, some wicked. So, the covenant sign itself doesn't make you a child of God. It doesn't in the very applying of it effect its blessings universally.

Now, early on, in the Christian church, there was a similar issue with the Lord's Supper. There were people who began to think that by the very taking of the Lord's Supper, grace was conferred, universally, to all who took it. In fact, it was argued relatively early on by some, for instance, that in the Lord's Supper, Christ was actually physically, tangibly present in the elements of the Supper. And that because of that, everyone who fed upon the host, was in fact, feeding upon Christ by definition, and therefore, grace was conferred to everyone who fed upon that host. This was a view that said by the actual partaking of the Supper, one is *ipso facto* partaking of grace.

Now, why did view come about? Let suggest three reasons why that view came about. Again, why am I giving you all this? Because we do live in a day where Protestant kids grow up in Protestant churches and they don't know what justification by faith means. They go off to college, they meet with a charismatic Catholic guy who is just bubbly and enthusiastic and such, and he tells them that the Protestants have always misunderstood the Catholic position on justification and boom, the next thing you know, the kid comes home, and he has joined a Catholic church.

So we have lots of kids who don't know anything about doctrine. I was talking to a RUF minister yesterday who had worked with a PCA young person, one who had grown up in a PCA church, and converted to the Catholic church last year. Why? Because he didn't know up from down doctrinally. If that isn't an argument for youth directors teaching the Bible, doing expository ministry, and teaching Christian doctrine, then I don't know what is.

We live in a day and age where nobody knows any doctrine, and they don't think it really matters. And we do live in a day and age where people fluctuate denominationally, and they make huge jumps. They go from Protestant to Catholic or Protestant to Orthodox or this or that.

And we need to be ready to answer questions to that regard.

Source of erroneous views.

Now, we need to take time here, because I think it will help you to understand where the Catholics got their ideas. First of all, I think it is very clear that there was not a covenantal understanding of the doctrine of the sacraments in the early Christian church. Especially the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. There was not a covenantal understanding of the whole of Scripture. When you are immersed in the thought-world of the Old Testament, and you know about the Passover meal, and you know that covenant meals are the way that you visibly demonstrate that you are in fellowship with a person with whom you have made a covenant, and then you read the Last Supper and the Passover narratives, and you see Jesus' heavy allusions to Exodus 12 and Exodus 24 and Isaiah 53 and Jeremiah 31 and you hear and feel the covenant language and you remember that the only place where Jesus uses explicitly covenantal language in all of the Gospels is where? In the Lord's Supper narratives. Those are when the words, *diatheke* come out of His mouth in our Gospels.

Now does that mean that He never spoke about it anywhere else? No. It doesn't mean that. But it is interesting that God, the Holy Spirit, determined that that would be the place where He would highlight the covenantal link between His dying work and the Old Covenant. And right there in the narratives you see this incredible connection with the Old Testament theology of covenant. But the early church did not pick up on that. And I could walk you through the fathers and show you how so many of them missed that particular element of the Lord's Supper. So problem number one is that very few of the church fathers knew Hebrew. You need to know this. Origen knew Hebrew. Clement of Alexandria knew a little Hebrew. Jerome knew Hebrew. Augustine, the greatest theologian of the early church, especially in the west, knew neither Hebrew nor Greek. And you can watch him. You can watch Augustine get into trouble and every time it will be related to the places where he doesn't know his Hebrew and Greek. Now there is a good argument for knowing the original languages. Learn your languages. So we have got a problem. We don't have a covenantal background for the Lord's Supper

here.

Secondly, the early church, in both the east and the west, was teaching its theology and doctrine in a context, especially for the first four centuries, where the most widespread and dominant philosophical school was the Platonic School. Now, you know that there were many different kinds of Platonism. There was early Platonism. There was middle Platonism. There was Neo-Platonism. And it was Neo-Platonism that was dominant in the time that the early church was doing its work. And Platonism, of course, advocates an epistemology that is called realism. Now there is a sense in which all Christian epistemology is some form of realism. All Christian theology advocates some form of realism. But one of the weird things that Neo-Platonism did as early sacramental theology was being developed, is that it took the idea that in every particular there is an actual manifestation of the form. Does this conjure up anything from college philosophy or high school ancient literature? Do you remember the forms and the particulars? Why is it, Plato says, that when you see an object like a chair and know that it is a chair? Because the chair possesses *chairness*. And the form of the chair is reflected and manifested in a real way in the particular expression of that in our reality. Now the form is more real than that reality, but it is reflected and manifested in some part in that particular reality of the chair. And that is why you just instinctively know chairness. You instinctively know cowness and horseness and treeness and all those things.

Well, you can see how easily that might be applied to sacramental theology. The host, the form of Jesus Christ, is present in the particular. So a little Platonizing philosophy comes along and pushes us in a direction of seeing the elements of the Lord's Supper in that kind of category, in that kind of philosophical category that believes that the reality is present in the particular.

And then add one last thing on top of that. Do you remember that one of the first Christological heresies in the early churches was the Docetic heresy. Remember, *docetic* comes from the Greek and means *to seem* or *to appear*, and the docetic heretics argued that Christ was not truly man, He only appeared to be human. And over and over from the time of Irenaeus and Tertullian on, in response to the docetic heretics, the early

church fathers would argue that if Christ only appeared to be flesh and blood, then what are we partaking of when we eat the Lord's Supper? And I believe that later Catholic writers have gone back and they have read more into that argument than is in fact there. I think that the early church fathers, especially like Irenaeus and Tertullian, may have been a little bit uncaredful in the way that they spoke. However, I think theologically they were absolutely hands down correct in choosing them.

I mean you can see the argument if taken in its proper way, is a powerful argument. If Christ says, "do this in remembrance of Me, represent the meaning of My atonement, the meaning of My giving My body and My blood, represent that through this covenantal meal, this body, this bread represents My body, this wine, it represents My blood, do this in remembrance of Me." If He did that, why did He do that if He really wasn't flesh and blood? That is a good argument. That is a sound argument. If you know that Christ wasn't flesh and blood, why did He institute the Lord's Supper which emphasizes His human nature in its function in the total atonement which His person offered?

Now, there is no question that the humanity of Christ is emphasized by the nature of the signs, but later, Catholic writers go back and say, "Ah hah, you see what they are arguing there is that the elements themselves are actually the body and blood of Christ." However, I am not sure if you couldn't have set Irenaeus down and said, "Now is that what you are saying?", I am not sure he wouldn't have said, "What? What are you talking about? I am arguing against docetic heretics." And he couldn't have anticipated a doctrine of transubstantiation being developed 900 years later. So he is a little bit unguarded in the language that he uses and perhaps he overreacts a little bit in his language because of the docetic heretics, but you see already with the lack of Hebrew, and the lack of understanding of the covenantal background of the sacrament, and with Platonic philosophy, and with this unguarded language against the docetic heretics, how you can suddenly have Christ being physically elementally present in the sacrament and the sacrament actually conveying saving union with Christ by the very taking of it.

So, where does sacramental realism come from? I suspect there. I suspect that that is where it came from. And if you are dialoguing with a

Roman Catholic and you want to sit down and talk with me further about that, I would be happy to sit down with you and let's expand on that particular thing. Because I think that one thing that helps us when we talk with Roman Catholics is to respect their history; the more intelligent the Catholic, the more respectful they are of their own history, and if you show that you know their history and that you respect it, but that you respectfully disagree, you will get a lot of mileage in discussion.

A second implication – God deals with families.

A second implication of the covenant sign of circumcision: Certainly we have to say that one of the implications of this covenantal sign of circumcision is that God deals with families. God deals with families in His covenant signs. The created order of families is not ignored in God's redemptive provision. The family was part of the creation ordinances and it is part of the redemptive promises in the covenant with Noah and, surprise, surprise, here it is again in the covenant with Abraham. God has committed Himself to the restoration of family units in His plan of redemption. That doesn't mean that we trust natural sense as the basis for our hope of redemption, but it does mean that this has something radical to say about how we do youth ministry in the church and without. You do not evangelize a family through the children. You evangelize a family through the parents. And the Christian community has been doing that backwards for about fifty years for lots of good reasons.

I understand. I am sympathetic, I feel your pain, okay. But let's say a child is converted, and then you send the child back into the home. Now, what does everybody, Christian and non-Christian psychologists, and non-psychologists, say is the most formative factor in the rearing of child? It is not just the instruction of the parent, it is the model of the parent. And you know, when you send a redeemed child into an unredeemed unit, you are inviting spiritual and developmental schizophrenia. And there have been a lot of well-meaning folks that say, okay the way we can get to these parents is through the kids. Uh uh. Upside down. Upside down. And by the way, this is the new wave in youth ministry. I mean this is hitting everybody. If you haven't read Mark Devries' book, ***Family Based Youth Ministry***, you need to go out and pick it up now. Printed by Intervarsity Press. Lots of people are

recognizing this. What do you do? Do you get to the parents through the kids? No. You minister to families. You minister to parents simultaneously as you minister to the children and you look at this as a covenantal unit. This is almost the view of counseling that Jim Hurley has been pushing for many years in the wilderness. It is seeing that for the life of the body in terms of evangelism and discipleship, whether we want to believe it or not, we are not isolated individuals, we are part of a connected covenantal unit. And the rest of that unit cannot be ignored without there being a problem somewhere down the line. We must evangelize the whole family. So youth ministers, you just got another job helping parents parent, calling parents to what is their responsibility in the covenantal rearing of their children. And suddenly, instead of you being the surrogate, you know the one who steps in to do the job that is really their job, suddenly, you are a helper, you are an assistant, you are a resource to help parents to be equipped to do their responsibilities in rearing children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. It is radical. Especially if you view church structures and parachurch structures for the last fifty years as how we have gone about it. But it is the biblical way. So food for thought.

The third implication of covenant circumcision

The third implication of covenant circumcision, the sign of the covenant, reminds us is that this is not merely inclusion in the nation of Israel. This sign is not merely a national sign, it is a religious sign, it is a spiritual sign. Paul emphasizes this in Romans 4. He does not say that circumcision was a sign that Abram was the father of the nation of Israel. He doesn't say that circumcision was a sign of this national entity that had developed and of your inclusion in it. He says that circumcision was a seal of the righteousness of faith. Paul makes it very clear that this sign is a religious sign. It is a spiritual sign. Now that, of course, invites parallels with baptism. And I would like to do that for a few minutes.

Circumcision has become baptism in the new covenant.

First of all, remember the phraseology of Genesis 17—look back again at Genesis 17 and look at the three levels of inclusion in the covenant. Genesis 17:7, “I will establish my covenant between Me and you and your descendants.” And then that phrase is repeated numerous times. And

then we get down to verse 10: “This is My covenant which you shall keep between Me and you and your descendants after you. Every male shall be circumcised. It shall be a sign of covenant between Me and you and every male among you who is eight days old shall be circumcised throughout your generations, a servant who is born in the house or who is bought with money from any foreigner who is not of your descendants.” So who are the recipients of the covenant sign? Abraham. Covenant head of the house. This is adult circumcision here folks. For his descendants, normally infant circumcision is entailed, but in this chapter it is going to be young men who are circumcised, as in the case of Ishmael. So it is covenant circumcision and it covers all the males who are under the authority of Abraham in his household; but it extends not only to his flesh and blood, it even extends to the servants who are within his tents even if they are of foreign blood. They have been bought from foreigners, it says, so you, your descendants and even foreigners who are within your tents.

Now in light of that, take a look at Acts chapter 2. We have been stressing all along how missiological the formulation of the Abrahamic covenant is. Abram is blessed to be a blessing. And he is not only blessed to be a blessing, he is to be a blessing to all the nations of the earth. Listen to Peter repeat the language and phraseology of Genesis 17 and Acts 2:38-39.

“Repent and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, for the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off.” The promise is to you, to your descendants and even to the foreigner that dwells within your tent. “As many as the Lord, our God shall call to Himself.”

So in the very opening proclamation of the New Covenant era, the language of the covenant of Abraham in Genesis 17 is reemployed in the Gospel proclamation of Peter and is linked directly to baptism.

Now, another evidence of the linkage between circumcision and baptism is found in Colossians chapter 2, verses 11 and 12. Remember that in Colossians chapter 2, especially in the first fifteen verses or so, the apostle Paul is wanting the Colossian Christians to understand the implications

of their union with Christ. And in verses 11 and 12, he is talking with them about the implications of their union with Christ with regard to their fellowship in the death of Christ. In verses 11 and 12, Paul reminds Christians that they need to remember the specific benefits which flow from being in Christ with regard to the fellowship that they have in Christ's death. That is the argument of 11, and 12 is connected to that. In 13 and 14, he wants them to consider that forgiveness flows from their being in Christ. And then in verse 15, he wants them to see that freedom flows from their being in Christ. So, we see at least three benefits highlighted here: fellowship in the saving benefits of His death, forgiveness and freedom. All these things are part, Paul argues, of being in Christ. And in verses 11 and 12 he argues,

"In Him, you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God who raised Him from the dead."

And notice the logic there: "In Him, you were circumcised, having been buried with Him in baptism." If you take out the subordinate clauses, that is the flow of logic. In Him, you were circumcised having buried with Him in baptism. And so here we have an explicit Pauline linkage of the language of circumcision and the language of baptism.

Now, I understand, when I discuss baptism, I try and zero in generally on Reformed Baptist arguments rather than non-reformed Baptist arguments, because Reformed Baptist arguments are texturally and exegetically stronger. I would rather answer a stronger argument than a weaker argument. Most of the time, Reformed Baptists will argue at this point, "But look, Paul is not talking about physical circumcision here. He is talking about spiritual circumcision. He is comparing spiritual circumcision to water baptism, not physical circumcision to physical baptism." And Reformed Baptists often think "Well, by saying that, you see, I have gotten myself out of this idea that Baptism and circumcision are the same thing. Paul is not really talking about fleshly circumcision here, he is talking about spiritual circumcision here."

Well, David Kingdon, a good Reformed Baptist, in his book, *Children of Abraham*, admits the futility of that argument. Because the minute you have linked circumcision and baptism, whether you are talking about spiritual circumcision or physical circumcision, and whether you are talking about spiritual baptism or physical baptism, you have just linked the concepts of baptism and circumcision and what does physical circumcision set forth, but the reality of spiritual circumcision. Moses knew that and he talks about it in Deuteronomy 10. Don't circumcise your flesh, he says, he says, circumcise your hearts. So it wasn't that Moses introduced the idea of fleshly circumcision and the prophets thought up spiritual circumcision. Moses knew about those things from the beginning. So there is this linkage between the concepts. What Paul is saying is these things convey the same meaning. They reflect the same realities. That is his argument, and that means with regard to the issue of covenant baptism in the New Testament, it is really a pretty simple argument as to whether you do or do not practice covenant baptism.

The two questions

And there really only two questions that you have to ask and answer in order to get the great question answered, which is: "Do you baptize children or not?"

The first question that you have to ask is this: Is baptism a covenant sign? Some Baptists want to argue that baptism should not be understood as a covenant sign. And they attempt to blunt the force of a covenantal argument by arguing that way. But again, David Kingdon, and a goodly number of Reformed Baptists will argue and accept that Baptism is indeed a covenant sign, and there is reason for accepting it so. The language of the New Testament indicates that baptism is understood by the writers of the New Testament to be a covenant sign. One example of that is right here in Colossians chapter 2, verses 11 and 12. Paul parallels baptism with a covenant sign of the Old Testament and he says in effect, these are the same things. These represent the same things. These set forth the same things. But he makes a similar kind of argument in Romans chapter 6 and he uses the language of covenantal realism in Romans chapter 6.

But perhaps, the best example of that kind of covenantal realistic

language is found in I Peter chapter 3, if you would turn with me there. I Peter chapter 3. This is a much discussed and controverted passage. Beginning in verse 18.

“For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits *now* in prison...”

You never preach that text without stopping to explain what in the world is he talking about there. That is a tough passage.

“...who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through *the* water.”

Now, he has just introduced the idea of the flood and then boom, here it comes, verse 21.

“And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—...”

This is a favorite passage of our Catholic friends and our Church of Christ friends. How do you respond to that? “Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you.” Now don’t read ahead. Peter is going to explain himself but before he does that, let’s stop for just one second and remember the language of Genesis 17: “This is My covenant in that you are circumcised.” Now let’s think about Peter’s language so far. This is salvation that you are baptized. You are seeing Peter, the Jew, using covenantal realistic language about baptism, just like Moses used about circumcision, and Moses would never have dreamt that circumcision saves you. In fact, in Romans 4 and in the book of Galatians, Paul has already engaged in an extended polemic against the idea that circumcision saves you. So Paul has already done your theological footwork for you. Then what is Peter doing? He is doing the same thing that the Lord does in Genesis 17. He is showing that closeness of connection between the covenant sign and the covenant itself. Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you. Now look at what he goes on to say.

“...not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ...”

So Peter, immediately says, “Look folks, I am not talking about water removing dirt from the flesh. I am talking about that inner baptism of the Holy Spirit of which external physical water baptism is simply a sign, corresponding to that, real baptism and by that I mean holy spiritual baptism, in regeneration and justification and sanctification, that saves you, water baptism is only a sign of it.” Why? Because it is a covenant sign.

Now you see, if you don’t understand the sacraments in the New Testament, as covenant signs, you are really in a fix, when you come to passages like Romans 6 and I Peter 3, because whatever Peter and Paul are talking about in those two passages, it does save you. Whatever it is, it does save you. Peter makes that clear. Whatever he is talking about here is something absolutely essential for salvation. And if he is talking about water baptism, abstractly from Holy Spirit baptism, then he is talking about water baptism saving people.

But if you understand the language of covenant signs, you see how ludicrous a construction that is. And then when you look at what Peter himself tells you in verse 21, he is doing everything he can to point you away from the physical act of water baptism to look at what it symbolizes. The deeper reality. That is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. So that is the first question that you have to ask. Is baptism a covenant sign? And we argue from various principles, from Colossians 2 from I Peter 3, from Romans 6 that baptism is a covenant sign. And in each of those passages, we have an example of the language of covenantal realism, where the sign is called the covenant and the covenant is called the sign, okay. Just like we saw in Genesis 17. So there is the first question that you have to ask. Is baptism a covenant sign?

The second question that you have to ask is, “Are the children of believing parents in the covenant under the New Covenant like we know that they were under the Old Covenant?” Are the children of believing parents in the covenant, speaking of the Covenant of Grace here, under the New Covenant, like we know that they were under

the old? And again, we can point to several lines of evidence. The apostolic preaching of Peter in Acts 2:39, “The promise is to you and to your children.” The same language as in Genesis 17. We can point to the pattern of water baptism in the book of Acts and in Corinthians. There are at least four or five examples of household baptism given us in the book of Acts, and in I Corinthians; out of seven baptisms described, perhaps five of them are household baptisms.

Now what am I arguing is this: it doesn't matter whether there were infants in those households, although it would be exceedingly unlikely that there would not be young children. What matters is, is that the Old Covenant pattern of family solidarity in this great time of evangelistic revival is still obtained. Cornelius believes, and his whole household is baptized. The Philippian jailer believes, and his whole household is baptized. And Luke goes out of his way in Acts 16 to make it clear that it is the Philippian jailer who believes and the household is baptized. And then again, Lydia believes and her household is baptized. So we see this pattern of household baptisms.

What does this pattern of household baptisms mean? It simply means that God is using the same pattern of dealing in families in the New Covenant as He did under the Old. Does it mean that everybody in every family where the head made a profession of faith is ultimately going to be saved? No. It never meant that in the Old Covenant. Think of Esau and Ishmael.

But does it mean that God's same plan obtains under the New Covenant as it does under the old? That is exactly what it is pointing to. I think Geoffrey Thomas, the great Reformed Baptist preacher, wrote an article for the *Banner of Truth* a few years ago, and he said, “We can all wish that there was a verse in the New Testament that said either ‘go ye therefore and baptize babies’ or ‘go ye therefore and don't baptize babies.’” But he says, “there is not one of those.” So, we have to figure this out some other way.

Well, what I am suggesting is, yes, there may not be a verse that says, “go ye therefore and baptize babies,” but when you ask the question, “Is baptism a covenant sign?” and you give the answer, “Yes,” when you ask

the question, “Are children of believing parents under the covenant in the New Covenant like we know they were in the Old Covenant?” And there is no debate as to whether they were part of the covenant community in the Old Covenant. Are they still part of the covenant community in the New Covenant?

When you give the answer of “Yes” and “Yes” to those two questions, and then you ask the question, “Should then, covenant children be denied the sign of covenant initiation? The sign of covenant inclusion?” Then the answer is simple. Two yeses to the first two questions, gives you your answer to the third. Should children be denied that covenant sign or to put it positively, “Should children receive the covenant sign of initiation?” Well, the answer is simple, “Yes.”

The argument from silence

Now, let me talk just a second about a couple of interesting matters. It is interesting to me, that given that one of the biggest controversies in the New Testament was the transition of Old Covenant forms that passed away and the early churches’ adjustment to New Covenant forms, and one the great examples of that is the ceremonial code including the food laws. When the ceremonial laws and the food laws are abolished, what happened in the early church? Controversy. There were always some people within the early church who thought that those ceremonial laws ought to be obeyed by every believer, Gentile or Jew. And there was tremendous controversy because of the passing away of those ceremonial codes.

Isn’t it interesting to you that *nowhere on the pages of the New Testament is there a controversy over children receiving the covenant sign of baptism?* You see, if in the New Testament, the apostolic teaching had been that children were to no longer receive the covenant sign, wouldn’t you have expected there to have been pages of argument and discussion as to why that was? Let me put it this way. If on the morning of Pentecost, children were part of the covenant, and on the evening of Pentecost they were out of the covenant, wouldn’t you have expected there to be somebody to raise an objection? So there is a thunderous silence. You know if we grant the idea that children were not to receive baptism as a covenant sign in the New Testament, is there not a

thunderous silence as to a transition of that magnitude?

You see we know that Proselyte Baptism had been practiced in Jewish circles for at least five centuries. So the idea of baptizing converts to Judaism was not a new thought. And we also know that in proselyte baptism household baptism occurred. So the idea of telling Jews, “Okay, no longer are we going to practice household baptism,” surely that controversy would have showed up somewhere on the pages of the New Testament. There is a thunderous silence there in the New Testament.

And the practical implication of this is really at the level of understanding whether children are a part of a covenant or not. Do you teach your children to pray, I mean if they are not part of the covenant, why would you do that? Do you teach them to pray to their heavenly Father? Well, if they are not part of the Covenant of Grace, why would you do that? On what basis may a child pray to God the Father, if she is not a daughter of the covenant? So there are practical issues.

The argument from the point of doctrine of the church

Now let me pull back and just say, for one moment, from the Baptist side, the biggest point of issue between the Baptist position on baptism and the Presbyterian or the paedobaptist position on baptism is not in our doctrine of the sacraments. It is in our doctrine of the church. The fundamental text for the Reformed Baptist view of baptism is Jeremiah 31:31-34. The Baptist understands the makeup of the church differently than the paedobaptist understands the makeup of the church. And therefore, because of that understanding of the church, he views the issue of the sacraments differently. Now I am going to give, when we get together again, I am going to give you a Reformed Baptist, a five-point Reformed Baptist argument for why they view baptism the way they do, mode, recipients, etc. And then I am going to give you the counter argument from a paedobaptist perspective so that I can try and give you, as best as I can a fair presentation of both views side by side. Because I want us to at least understand the genius of the two positions. Let's shoot at the very best arguments we can find, rather than the weakest ones. Thank you for your patience, let's pray.

The Reformed Doctrine of Baptism & New Testament Practice

If you have your Bibles, I would invite you to turn with me to Colossians chapter 2, Colossians chapter 2. We will begin reading in verse 8.

“See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us *and* which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.”

Thus ends this reading of God’s Holy Word. May He add His blessing to it. Let’s pray.

“Our heavenly Father as we continue to study your word together today and especially as we think about the signs of the covenant, we pray that you would flood our hearts with a scriptural understanding of truth. We pray that our own outlook, our own world view would be changed by it. More than that, we pray O Lord that our hearts would be changed by it, that we would be drawn willingly under Your sovereignty to rule in our lives that You would change us, that we might share the truth with Your people. Teach us Your truth. Teach us Your

Word. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen."

Last week we looked at the sign of the covenant under the administration of God in the time of Abraham and specifically we looked at, of course, circumcision as it fits into the scheme of the Lord's assuring Abraham. We said that God had entered into a covenant relationship with Abraham which was expressed in Genesis 12 and in Genesis 15 and elsewhere, if we had time to look at it. But we noted that in Genesis 17 a confirming sign was given in order to assure Abraham of the sturdiness of the promises that God had given to him. And so we talked a little bit about circumcision itself, and what that sign means, and then we began to talk about parallels between circumcision and baptism. As you approach the subject of Covenant Theology, one of the things that people always want to talk about is the theology of the sacraments, because, naturally the covenant and the sacraments fit naturally together.

Why? Because sacraments are, simply defined, covenant signs. That is what a sacrament is. It is a covenant sign. A sacrament is a covenant sign. So Covenant Theology and the Doctrine of the Sacraments do indeed belong together. And there have been various controversies about the issue of Christian baptism that have raged in our circles.

In the Reformed community, since the sixteenth century, there has been a hardy debate going on over the mode, the meaning, and the recipients of baptism.

Since the sixteenth century, there have been those within the Reformed tradition who have argued that the mode of baptism must be immersion. They have also argued that the meaning of baptism, because it symbolizes our spiritual union with Christ, that the meaning of baptism requires believers-only baptism. And their argument is three-fold: mode, meaning, and recipients. At the level of *mode*, the argument is that it must be by immersion only. At the level of *meaning*, it is because it symbolizes our spiritual union with Christ, our regeneration, therefore, it must only be applied to those who have actually experienced spiritual union with Christ. And that means, believers only.

Now, in addition to Covenant Theology, your doctrine of the church plays

into that issue. And I would suggest to you, if you have a good healthy dialogue between a Reformed paedobaptist, whether that paedobaptist is a Presbyterian or an Anglican, or a Congregationalist, someone who is Reformed and believes in covenant baptism or infant baptism, and you have a discussion with a person who is Reformed and does not believe in covenant baptism or infant baptism, but in believers baptism only, then one of the areas that you will discuss will be your doctrine of the church. Because there are certain aspects of the Baptist doctrine of the church that impact on how they view the issue of baptism itself. And so, your interpretation of Jeremiah 31, not only in light of Covenant Theology but in light of your doctrine of the church, factors into a discussion.

In fact, I would wager if you have really had a thorough discussion of baptism between yourself, if you are a Reformed paedobaptist and a Reformed nonpaedobaptist or anti paedobaptist, Jeremiah 31 and its interpretation in light of the New Testament doctrine of the church has been one of the key points on which you disagreed.

Arguments for mode and recipients of baptism. The Baptist position.

What I want to do now is look at the arguments that are out there for mode and recipients of baptism. And I want to start with the Baptist side on that and give you a little bit of an outline of their argumentation for the mode of baptism and then the recipients of baptism and then I want to give you a Reformed paedobaptist response to those arguments, and then perhaps we can go back and look at a few other things about the doctrine of the sacraments in general.

We are departing from our chronological textual approach for a moment to look at a specific topic and issue because it is of standing importance in our churches. It is not a distinction within the Reformed community which we see as the grounds for the breaking of evangelical fellowship but it is one of great significance on both sides.

Historically, Baptists have not acknowledged other baptism than immersion. And therefore if you have received some other form of baptism, and you desire to join a Baptist church, and especially a Reformed Baptist church, immersion will be required. Now that is not

because Reformed Baptists are just being mean and nasty and picky. It is because of their very theology of baptism that that is required, so there are definitely ecclesiastical divides on this issue. And it is an important one to study.

Now that is not the only controversy that is out there with regard to the sacraments and baptism. One of the other issues that is out there today, which I will have an opportunity to take a look at later on, is within the Reformed community with regard to what baptism actually does or accomplishes, and the whole issue of covenant succession and the implications of persons receiving baptism and their standing with regard to the Lord's Supper. Many of you have perhaps come into contact with people in Presbyterian and in Anglican circles who believe that not only should children receive the sign of baptism, they should also participate in the Lord's Supper from the earliest capable age. And so the issue of paedocommunion is one that is out there on the charts and we will talk about that in some detail later on in the course. So there are lots of controversies around the subject of the sacraments, and it pays us to pull back and from a covenant perspective to look at some of these issues and chart the arguments out as best as we can.

I have drawn this basic argument from the Baptist position from the works of a Reformed Baptist minister, so as not to misrepresent in any way the case and also to try and put forward the strongest case I can possibly put. The argument for mode of baptism is where we will start. The mode of baptism. And we will start with a Baptist view of the mode of baptism. The Baptist argument for the mode of baptism is basically four-fold.

First of all, the Baptist argues that baptism ought to be by immersion because the meaning of the Greek word, for baptize is to immerse. So the argument is to baptize is exactly synonymous with the word, "to immerse." That is the first point of the argument. That to baptize means to immerse. And therefore, for a Presbyterian to come along and say, well we are going to baptize by sprinkling, is to say, from the Baptist perspective, okay, you are going to immerse by sprinkling. And that makes no sense to the Baptist. If the word *baptize* means to *immerse*, then that is the way that it is supposed to be done. And so every reference

then to baptism in the New Testament, from the Baptist perspective, is a compounding argument for baptism by immersion. So the argument is that when the Lord said, “Go ye therefore and baptize,” what He meant was “Go ye therefore and immerse.” So the mode was significant and was specified by the usage of the very word, and in popular circles, this argument that baptism means immerse will often be carried out this way. Well, just pick up your *Arndt-Gingrich Greek Lexicon* and see what the first meaning of baptism is. It is immerse. And you know that is the sort of argumentation that you get.

But there is a more sophisticated kind of argumentation for it. You know, we all know that as you work through your Greek New Testament you can't just take the first meaning of a word every time, otherwise, you are going to be a horrible exegete. You have to look at context to determine meaning in a number of places where the proper meaning or the precise meaning is more difficult to tell. But there is a more sophisticated argument for this perspective as well. In other words, there is an awareness that there are multiple uses of the Greek words, *bapto*, and *baptizo*, which are the most common verbal forms of the command *to baptize*. But the argument is that even in the context of the New Testament, the preferable understanding of those words ought to be to immerse, both contextually and lexically. So that is the first line of argumentation. Now obviously, if I were presenting this from a Baptist perspective, I would be piling up verses and examples and such. But if we did that, we would be here all semester. So what I want to give to you is the skeleton of the argument, which will then enable you I hope to engage more constructively as you discuss.

Secondly, the argument that you will receive from Reformed Baptist perspective on baptism says, that what baptism symbolizes, confirms the idea of immersion. Baptism, it is stressed is a sign of spiritual regeneration, death to the old nature, and resurrection to newness of life. And therefore the best sign for that is to be immersed. And you see the picture, and if you have ever been at an immersionist service, you have seen the minister, speak about the person being buried in Christ as they go down into the water, and being raised again to newness of life. Okay. So the argument is the very mode of immersion best symbolizes, or

reflects, or represents what baptism means. So you notice there again your understanding of the meaning of baptism impacting both mode and then later in Baptist arguments, it also impacts recipients.

The third line of argumentation coming from the Baptists is that the New Testament practice of baptism affirms immersion as the proper mode. And there are various verses appealed to. The language of the prepositions in the New Testament, *eis*, *en*, and *apo* are appealed to as language that actually we should not translate to baptize with water, but rather to baptize into or in water as the proper New Testament language. And there will be an appeal to the baptism of Jesus, as He and John go down into the Jordan River, or an appeal to Phillip and Ethiopian Eunuch in their going down into the river in order to be baptized. So there will be argumentation that the practice, that the examples of baptism in the New Testament confirm, baptism by immersion.

And the final plank of the argument is that the practice of the early church affirms immersion. The practice of the early church affirms immersion. So in summary, the argument is the meaning of the Greek word *baptizo* points to immersion. The picture of death, burial, and resurrection, in Romans 6 points to immersion. The testimony of the New Testament passages themselves point to immersion. And the testimony of the early church points to immersion. You will also hear this: the Greek Orthodox church baptizes by immersion, and the Greek Orthodox church obviously understands Greek better than anybody else; therefore immersion is the proper understanding of the Greek term for baptism. So there will be appeals to the New Testament as well as to history on these accounts.

Now what I am going to do in a moment is to give a four fold response to these things. But before we do that, perhaps I could just outline for you some data from the Old Testament which impinges upon our understanding of mode of baptism in the New Testament. As you know, baptism is not a unique, New Testament phenomenon. There were Old Testament baptisms, and that is very important. We are not just talking about proselyte baptism which was mandated in the Old Testament; there were actually mandated baptisms in the Levitical code. Let me walk through with you some of the information for these.

First of all, let's talk about unrepeatable Old Testament baptisms.

Unrepeatable Old Testament baptisms. You remember in Hebrews 9:10, there is a reference there to various washings, or various baptisms. The Greek word there is βρώμασιν, or baptismoy, and it is a word found in the Septuagint version, the Greek version of the Old Testament. The writer in Hebrews 9:10 has in mind the various ritual baptisms, or ritual washings, by which ceremonial defilements were removed in the Old Testament.

If we investigate the Old Testament, we find that there were two unrepeatable baptisms in the Mosaic law. First, there was a blood baptism, and second, there was a water baptism. And then there were at least eleven subsidiary repeatable baptisms which are associated with the sprinkling of blood. There is also evidence of purification rites prior to Moses. For instance, you find purification in Genesis 35 verses 1-5 in the life of Jacob.

Now, what about the basic unrepeatable washings, the blood washings, and the water washing. They are found respectively in Exodus 24 and in Numbers 8. In Exodus 24, we have the sprinkling of the blood of the covenant at Sinai. That is something that we are going to look at the next time we are together a little more closely. That passage, by the way, is referred to in Hebrews chapter 9 very directly. It is also referred to in all the synoptic Last Supper accounts. Exodus 24, the sprinkling of the blood, the unrepeatable blood baptism.

Then there is the water baptism. It is found in Numbers 8 and involves the consecration of the Levites. Now we looked in detail earlier at that passage in Hebrews chapter 9 where the definition or translation of covenant is difficult, and I want to remind you of that passage again, but this time, focusing on a different set of verses, verses 18-20 of Hebrews chapter 9, where we read:

“Therefore even the first *covenant* was not inaugurated without blood. For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of the calves and the

goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, "THIS IS THE BLOOD OF THE COVENANT WHICH GOD COMMANDED YOU."

So this particular Old Testament unrepeatable blood baptism is actually mentioned in the New Testament, and it is highlighted by the author of Hebrews, in chapter nine verses 18-20. This sprinkling of blood qualified the Israelites to enter into the presence of God. Exodus 24, subsequent to verse 8, goes on to record that Moses and the representatives of the people met and ate with the Lord. So this sprinkling of blood confirmed that God was the God of Israel. And that Israel was the people of God. Israel had been adopted into the family of God and enjoyed appropriate fellowship and this was because of the blood that pointed to atonement for sin.

Now in light of that Old Testament ritual and its New Testament reality, because you remember in all the synoptic cup words, especially in Matthew and Mark, the language of the cup words, that is the words of institution that Jesus gave when He was explaining the cup to the disciples. What is their form? It is identical to the Greek Septuagint translation of Exodus 24:8 with one change. The impersonal form, *the* is replaced by the personal pronoun *My*. We read, "This is the blood of the covenant," in Exodus 24:8, but in Mark and Matthew, we read "This is My blood of the covenant." So Jesus goes right to that Exodus 24 passage to explain His atoning work.

In light of that Old Testament ritual and the New Testament reality in the death of Christ, it would not be surprising if the New Testament used baptismal language in reference to the death of Christ. And that is precisely what we found. For instance, in Mark chapter 10 verse 38, Jesus says, "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" And in Luke 12:50, we read, "I have a baptism to be baptized with and how I am constrained until it is accomplished." This usage confirms the position that the purifying rituals, using cleansing agents other than water, can come under the classification of baptism in the Old Testament. You know, if someone comes and says, "Well you can't count these blood rituals in the Old Testament as a baptism," Jesus thinks you can. Not only from what He

says from Matthew and Mark in the cup sayings, but in these passages here in Mark 10:38 and in Luke 12:50.

So the question is then, “How do you relate the Old Testament covenant with sprinkled blood with the ratifying of the New Covenant by Christ’s death?” Clearly the correlation is not because of the mode of the administration of that baptism. In other words, though we know, that baptism, in Exodus 24 was by sprinkling, it is not the sprinkling that connects that with its New Testament realization. Nor, is the link to be found in the manner in which Christ died.

Now, this is the point: The ritual in its connection with the New Testament fulfillment is not linked by the external mode, but by its internal meaning. It is the meaning of the ritual that links it with the New Testament fulfillment.

The Old Testament ritual of sprinkling of blood was an initiation or confirmation of a relationship. The death of Jesus was likewise an initiation. It meant the inauguration of a new state of affairs for Christ, as well as those for whom He died. And so His death is termed as a baptism. Now that is the blood baptism that I wanted to look at. The unrepeatable blood baptism. Let’s go then to the unrepeatable water baptism.

Now, a question: Where do you find that reference to Jesus’ death described as in baptismal language? We could go on to Romans 6, couldn’t we, but we will just stick with the Gospel accounts. There are two references, Mark 10:38 and Luke 12:50, in which Jesus refers to the experience of suffering and of death that He is going to undergo as a baptism.

The second basic and unrepeatable washing in the Old Testament is connected with the first. In Exodus 13, we read that all the first born males of Israel were dedicated to the Lord, in testimony to the fact that Israel was indebted to God for all that He had done for her. So the first born, were to be, as it were, living sacrifices by which the people expressed their gratitude towards God. Paul, of course, takes up that imagery in Romans 12:1, and he says in the New Covenant, you are all

living sacrifices, not just the first born. All of you are to be living sacrifices to the Lord.

But in the Old Covenant, in Numbers 3:11-45, God specified that He would take one tribe of Israel instead of the first born. And instead of all the cattle, He takes the Levites' cattle. And that the Levites would have no inheritance rights in Canaan. We learn that in Deuteronomy 10:9. Why? Because the Lord was going to be their inheritance. And then the Lord makes arrangements for the Levites to be given over to Him in a public ceremony, a confirmation of their being given over to the Lord.

Before the Levites could be given to the Lord, however, they had to be purified. How did the purification happen? By the sprinkling of water and the shaving and washing of their clothes. And then the representatives of Israel laid their hands upon them, identifying the nation with them, and they were offered to the Lord as a wave offering. And then before the beginning of their service, they offered an atonement offering for their sin in Numbers 8 verse 12.

Now this baptism has a connection with a New Testament as well. You will remember that in Matthew 3:15, Jesus' baptism is called baptism to fulfill all righteousness. In other words, to meet all the requirements of God. As such, Jesus' baptism indicated His identification with His people, the true Israel. He is consecrated for them, on their behalf in baptism. He is baptized at the age of thirty years, Luke tells us, in Luke 3:23, because that was the age necessary before the attainment of priesthood, according to Numbers 4:3 and verse 47. The spirit is pledged to Him to uphold Him in His office of mediation and as our true high priest, Christ is set apart to the Lord's servant.

So again, this sprinkling of the Levites is an example of unrepeated Old Testament baptism. And it is not that we call the purification of the Levites a baptism, because of the way that they were baptized, by sprinkling, but because of the meaning of the baptism.

Let me summarize briefly. Two unrepeatable baptisms involve the sprinkling of the cleansing agent so that it falls upon those who are thereby cleansed as a ritual cleansing. The mode of the baptism is not at

the forefront. The meaning is. These rites of purification speak of a new position or relation that has been obtained by the ones who are cleansed.

In the first case, Israel's unique relation to God as His people. In the case of the Levites, they have been consecrated and constituted as God's priests. So what is being held out in that purification ceremony is not so much the mode, as it is the meaning of what they are doing.

The repeatable Old Testament baptisms.

Now, let's look then at the repeatable baptisms in the Old Testament. There are I said before, eleven subsidiary and repeatable rituals of cleansing in the Old Testament found in the ceremonial laws. They were given for a definite purpose, and that purpose was to instill certain truths about purity and holiness on a spiritual level, by material means. If you broke these laws, it could put you into the category of being unclean. And of course, more importantly, the unclean person was excluded from the place where God met with His people in a special way, that is, from the tabernacle and later, from the temple.

Now, this kind of exclusion from the privileges of Israel because of ritual impurity was designed to result from serious sins of the heart. This wasn't just an external sort of formalism. This was designed to symbolize serious sins of the heart. So for instance, after David was convicted of his lust and adultery and murder and concealment, he said, in Psalm 51:7, "purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow." What is hearkening back to? Those purification rituals set forth in the law of Moses. From these words, we see that David recognized the meaning of sprinkling blood with the hyssop plant in the ceremonial ritual. He saw that it pointed to the need for the defilement of the heart to be removed by the atoning sacrifice provided by God's covenant love.

Now as the New Testament undoubtedly uses the word baptism in reference to many or all of these ritual washings, it appears clear that *baptizo* cannot mean only immerse when applied to such rituals. Rather, it refers to washing in general, which always involves the idea of removal of disqualification, bringing a person or a thing into a new relationship. The quantity and manner of the water in its application is not prominent. Although in the promise of cleansing in Ezekiel 36 verse 25, the clean

water is explicitly referred to as sprinkled.

Let's look at these repeatable baptisms. I will give you names for them, I will give you a reference for them, and I will give you an indication of what kind of coverage or washing they involved.

The first kind of repeatable baptism under Moses was at the investiture of priests. Exodus 29, verses 4-6, Exodus 40:12, Leviticus 8:6. In the investiture of priests, the washing was to entail the whole body. Their whole body was to be washed.

The second kind of repeatable baptism was the priestly purification before entering the tabernacle. You find it in Exodus 30 verses 18-21. In that case, what was to be baptized, or ritually purified, was only the hands and feet.

The third repeatable baptism. Purification on the Day of Atonement. You see this in Leviticus 16 verses 4, 24, 26, and 28. In this case, the body was to be washed and the clothes were to be washed.

The fourth purification or ritual baptism or ritual cleansing was on the occasion of the purification of the red heifer sacrifice. Numbers 19, verses 7-8. In this case, again, the body was to be washed and the clothes were to be washed.

The fifth repeatable baptism was for the priestly purification before touching or eating the holy offerings. This is referred to in Leviticus 22, verses 1-7, especially verse 6. Here again, the body was to be washed.

The sixth repeatable baptism, was for purification if you touched something unclean. Purification for those who touched something unclean. Whether you were touching a dead body, a corpse, bones, the dwelling place of the dead, a graveyard or cemetery, prisoners of war, or body. You find this in Numbers 19, verses 11-22 and Numbers 31, verses 19-24. This purification was to be accomplished by sprinkling ash, a mixture of ash and water. It involved the washing of the clothes and the washing of the self.

The seventh repeatable baptism, was the baptism of Leviticus 14, verses 1-9. It was the purification for the infection of leprosy, and it was to be done by the sprinkling of blood. It involved the washing of the clothes and the washing of the self.

The eighth repeatable baptism was required if you had eaten meat with its blood still in it, Leviticus 17, verses 14-16 addresses this. Again, the clothes are to be washed, the person or body is to be washed.

The ninth repeatable baptism is connected with unclean human discharges. If you have been made unclean by virtue of a particular discharge from your body, Leviticus 15, verses 1-13 describes the purification that occurs by the washing of clothes and the self.

In connection with that, also in Leviticus 15, verses 16-33, the discharge connected with sexual reproduction whether it be semen or the menstrual cycle, purification was to be accomplished by the washing of all the body.

And then finally again, the repeatable baptism as a result of coming into contact with the dead or objects which had come into contact with persons who are dead. You find this in Leviticus 11, verses 25, 28, 32, and 33. Again, sometimes objects that have come into contact with a dead person were to be cleansed by water, other times they were just to be thrown away and clothes of the person who had done this were to be ritually cleaned.

Now, what can we conclude from this? Let me summarize briefly. First there is an absence in all of these examples of specification of mode in these washings, and I would invite you to go back and look them up and work through them. The emphasis is not on the manner in which these washings are done.

Secondly, though the Pentateuch makes it clear that the whole person is defiled by uncleanness, the principle behind these washings indicates that only that part of the body or only that object effected by uncleanness requires the application of the cleansing agent. That is interesting, isn't it in light of Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet and the exchange with Peter. "You are never going to wash my feet, Lord." "If I don't wash your

feet, then you are going to be unclean.” “Well, then wash all of me.” “No. This is enough.” It follows an Old Testament pattern. Even though the whole person becomes unclean by certain ritual acts of disqualification, specific purification rights are often applied to part of that person, the hands, the feet, part of the body, etc. Only on one occasion did we see a specification that the complete body had to be involved.

Thirdly, in every single one of these repeatable baptisms the emphasis is on the application of water to the person, rather than the action of putting the person into the water.

Fourth, water in motion is aimed at in several rituals involving illness and death caused uncleanness. So fresh or running, or flowing, or living water is specified with the sixth, seventh and ninth of those eleven repeatable baptisms that we find in Moses. No doubt that is because the water symbolizes life in contrast with corruption and uncleanness and death. So flowing or living water is to be used.

Fifth and finally, all these washings were private, all the washings which could have been total, in other words, involving total touching of every part of the body with water were private, involved the removal of the clothes and were self administered. So there is no precedent for administering a total immersion to another person found in the Levitical ritual whenever a total washing is involved, it is always self administered.

So *baptizo* in the Old Testament has the idea of application of a cleansing agent with a view to removing that which disqualifies us from acceptance with God. The mode of applying the cleansing agent varies in each of these baptisms. But the predominant mode is sprinkling or pouring.

Now in further considering the Old Testament background of Christian baptism, we need to look at the word *baptizo* with regard to how it was used in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, the Septuagint, and if you don't want to write Septuagint out every time, remember it is normally abbreviated “LXX” and that is a lot easier than writing “Septuagint.”

The standard lexicons recognize that *baptizo* is an intensive and

prequintative form of *bapto*, the word which means *to dip*. And so apparently the earliest meaning in the Greek language of *bapto* is dipping. And from that root, the word came to be used in many connections. It was used when people talked about dying cloth, the materials being immersed in the dye. It was used off tempering iron, since the metal was plunged into the water.

And there are only two places in the Greek translation of the Old Testament where baptizo is used. The first is in Isaiah 21 and the second is in II Kings 5:14. In the first it has to do with Isaiah's vision of the fall of Babylon, in which he said in Isaiah 21 verse 4, my heart pants and fearfulness baptizes me, or overwhelms me, or horrifies me. It is used in a figurative sense. The second reference is in II Kings 5:14 and it is a description of Naaman's washing in the Jordan. The common English versions, of course, indicate that he dipped himself seven times and the flesh was restored. The Hebrew uses the word, *tabal*, which had the idea of dipping though it does not always express mode, and it does not mean total submersion. But the Greek translation uses *baptizo*.

Now in the Apocrypha, those non canonical, intertestamental books, the word baptizo appears. In *Ecclesiasticus*, the wisdom book known as the Ecclesiasticus, Jesus ben Eleazar ben Sira(ch), we read something that sounds a lot like Numbers 19. "Be baptized after touching a dead body and then touch it again, what have you gained by your washing?" Again this refers back to that ritual of water purification that we saw. There is also a reference in the book of Judah.

As we move into the New Testament, looking at passages connected with purification, Hebrews 9 is important. The writer is contrasting water purification and the putting away of sin accomplished by Christ with the Mosaic regulations. Again, at the marriage feast of Cana, there were six stone water pots, each able to hold about 25 gallons. And these were used, John tells us in John 2:6, for Jewish purification rites. There was a ritual of washing your hands before you entered in, before eating, and that ritual purification was done by pouring a quantity of water over the cupped hands and then bringing the water into contact with the surface of the entirety of the hands.

In Mark 7 verse 2, and following, we have the incident where the Pharisees are pressing for the disciples' compliance with that kind of purification, especially in verses 3 and 4. And there is archeological evidence in the first century that Jews in Palestine practicing ceremonial washings in cisterns.

Josephus, the Jewish writer of the first century is useful, because he uses the word fifteen times in his writings. He uses it once to refer to plunging a sword into an enemy, ten times of sinking or drowning, twice in destruction of cities in war, once in intoxication, and once in reference to the purification rituals of Numbers, especially Numbers 19. And these are consistent with the uses of *baptizo* by the pre-Christian classical writers. He says this of these writers: "These use baptizo, baptize, to describe the sinking of a ship, the drawing of water or wine by dipping one vessel into another, of bathing, in a metaphorical sense of a person being overwhelmed by questions or doubt, in addition to the more general usage of dipping or dying in any matter." It is interesting to note that in this latter usage, this verb soon ceases to be expressive of mode.

So, the evidence that we have reviewed as we have looked at scriptural and extrascriptural usages of *baptizo*, prior and contemporary to the writing of the New Testament, indicates this: **baptizo** was used for a literal washing with a view to ritual cleansing. It is a washing which brings a change or which represents a change. And in that context, or in a religious context, that means a ritual purification which removes disqualification in the sight of God.

It is interesting to note that the Latin Vulgate, completed by Jerome in the late fourth century, early fifth century translates *baptizo* by the Latin term, *mergo*, this being the Latin for immerse or submerge or dip. And our English translators, by transliterating *baptizo* as baptize instead of trying to render it in a strictly English term referring to mode, may have been wiser than anyone else, because they have kept the attention from being on the mode itself. It remains to determine whether *baptizo* in reference to religious ritual necessarily carries the idea of a literal immersion. But the examples, texturally from looking at the Old Testament, the New Testament, and extra biblical literature, make it clear that you cannot linguistically preclude all reference to nonimmersion

forms of this washing. So all of this is piled up evidence to say that the argumentation that the language of *baptizo* settles the case just doesn't do justice to the realities there in the literature, either in the scriptural literature or in the extrascriptural literature.

So having said that, let's look at our four responsive arguments to the Baptists on immersion. These are the Reformed paedobaptist arguments for effusion or pouring or sprinkling. You remember we said the Baptist argument for immersion was that the meaning of the Greek word was *immerse*, that the meaning of baptism is best symbolized by immersion, that the New Testament practice of baptism affirms or confirms immersion, and that the practice of the early church affirms immersion. Here is my response.

The Reformed position

First of all, as we have already demonstrated the meaning of *baptizo* or *bapto* or their various derivatives, the meaning of *baptizo* is much broader than immerse. And indeed there are places in the Old and the New Testament where it cannot mean immerse. Let me just reference a few of them. In Leviticus 14 verses 6 and 51, the Levitical sacrificial system called for a bird to be slaughtered and to be *baptized* in the blood, called for a bird to be *baptized* in the blood of a slaughtered bird in of the same kind. Clearly, simply by virtue of the volume of the blood in two birds of similar kind, there could have been no total immersion and yet the terminology of *bapto* was used in that context. Again, it is just one of those typical ceremonial rituals in which actually the sprinkling is the more significant thing.

In Acts chapter 1 verse 5, a New Testament example, the *baptism* of the Holy Spirit spoken of by the Lord Jesus in Acts 1 verse 5 was fulfilled in Acts 2 and that *baptism* was patently not a baptism by immersion. The Holy Spirit came upon them as they were baptized. They were not immersed into the Holy Spirit, but rather the Holy Spirit was poured out.

A third example, I Corinthians 10 verse 2. We are told there by Paul that the Israelites were *baptized* into Moses in the sea during the Exodus, but as you remember, the Israelites crossed the sea on dry land. So there was no immersion for anyone but the Egyptians in the Exodus. So here you

have an example of *baptizo* being used in a metaphorical sense or a symbolic sense in the New Testament.

In Hebrews 9 verses 10-23, we have already looked at that reference to the various baptisms, or the various washings. And again, we have indicated that those washings were the washings done by the Levitical priests. Those were the ritual washings and in all the ritual washings, the water is applied to the body, not the body introduced into the water. So there is our first line of argumentation. We don't argue that baptism never means immerse. In fact, that is not our argument. All you have to indicate is that baptism does not always mean immerse. At that point it becomes contextual.

Secondly, the New Testament practice of baptism confirms effusion or sprinkling or pouring. The New Testament practice of baptism confirms effusion. Appeals to the Greek preposition *en* or *eis* as determinative as the mode of baptism are inadequate. A golfer may go in or into a sand trap. That does not mean that the golfer is emerged into the sand trap, although many golfers may wish they were sometimes when they were in the sand trap. So the word in or *eis* can naturally express, but the golfer goes into the area of the sand trap without being immersed in it. And that is in fact how those terms are most frequently used.

For instance, in Matthew 3:16, where Jesus and John are said to go down into the Jordan. First of all, it is not a reference to the mode of baptism at all. It is a reference to the fact that they left the bank and they went down themselves together into the water. So if *eis* in that context means that they were immersed, then they were both immersed. But clearly the reference is simply that they left the side of the river and they both went down into the river. It is not a reference to immersion.

There are places in the New Testament where immersion is extremely unlikely. For instance, you remember when Saul of Tarsus was baptized, he was baptized where? Yes. In a house, in the house of Simon the Tanner. And it would have been extremely unlikely that there would have been any facility in a house large enough to immerse a person. Even in the ritual purification fountains which have been found in Jewish homes from that time, they would only allow you to baptize "parts of the body"

such as the feet or the legs. There was no Jacuzzi option in most of the homes at that particular time.

In Acts 10:47, Peter uses some interesting language, you remember after he has seen evidence that the Holy Spirit has come upon Cornelius and his family and he then says, can anyone refuse the water necessary to baptize these brothers? And that is an interesting way of speaking. The water necessary to baptize that entire household would have been significant. It would have been very significant for servants to have to go and gather that much water up. And so one could see plausibly how Peter's rhetorical question which clearly assumes that the answer is going to be no, of course we couldn't refuse the water necessary. He assumes a negative response to that rhetorical question. If in fact, it was going to require immersion, then I could see someone very reasonably saying, "Well, actually Peter, it is going to take us about six hours to get that water, you know. You know, go over to the well, and find some utensils that would allow us to fill up whatever you are going to fill up to do this." I mean, Peter's question indicates, this is going to be easy. Just get a little water and we'll start baptizing here.

In Acts 16 verses 32-33, the Philippian jailer and his family are baptized with the water which had originally been fetched to clean Paul's wounds, which surely would have not been a quantity of water necessary for immersion. Another passage that you will hear appeal to is the passage in John 3:23 which speaks about the many waters of Aenon, do you remember that passage where John goes to Aenon because there are many waters there and the translations deal with it differently. Some translations will say, he went to Aenon because there was much water there. And then others say, there were many waters there. And it has often been argued that John went to Aenon because there was a significant amount of water, significant enough that he could do immersions all day long. But the languages of that passage, as well as the archeology and the geology of it, indicate that many waters is a good translation of the Greek in the passage and that it refers to a collection of small pools rather than to a great amount of water. There were many pools or there were many waters there. So again, that does not provide some sort of definitive indication that the baptism of John was

immersion.

In the Gospel of John chapters 2 and 3, Old Testament purification was related specifically to baptism. We have already seen this in the phrase about the baptism of the Lord Jesus in John 3:26. That clearly relates to Old Testament purification. In Numbers 8:7, you remember in those Levitical purifications, the immersion comes when the priest dips his hand into the water. But, the actual act of purification involves the sprinkling or the throwing of the water on the subject which is to be purified. So the major act is the effusion in the ritual. If the priest just dips his hand in the water, then the ritual cleansing does not occur. He has to apply it to the subject. So there is evidence in the New Testament for the practice of effusion. And, in John 2:6, there those six stone water pots we have already mentioned were used for Jewish purification. Each of them contained about thirty gallons each, and again, that would not have been enough for immersion, to say the least for the wedding guests and of course, that is not how the ritual purification was performed. So there is evidence in the New Testament of the practice of effusion. And of course the most significant of that evidence, for those in the Reformed tradition, is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. That is the fundamental reason why we pour rather than immerse, because we see baptism as a sign of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. Spiritual union with Christ and the Spirit is always pictured in the New Testament as being poured out onto and into God's people, not God's people being immersed into the Spirit, but rather the Spirit being poured out into them or onto them.

Thirdly in response to the Baptist argument, the Reformed paedobaptist points out that the symbolism or significance of baptism confirms effusion. I have already hinted at that in the words I just spoke. Water baptism signifies the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Now, that is not only seen in the book of Acts chapters 1 and 2, it is also seen in Jesus' baptism. What happened on the occasion of Jesus' baptism? Both Matthew and Luke tell us that the Spirit in the visible form of a dove descended upon Christ so that the picture of the spirit being dispensed from heaven is present there, not only in Acts chapter 1 and 2, but in Matthew 3:11, and in Luke 3:16. And of course, the distinction between John's baptism and Jesus' baptism is set forth in the Gospel. John

baptizes with water but Jesus will baptize with what? With fire and with the Spirit. And of course, that comes to place. That is actualized in Acts chapter 1 verses 4 and 5 and also in Acts chapter 11 verses 15 and 16. So baptism fundamentally signifies the work of the Spirit not our faith, not our decision, not our loyalty, not our obedience, but the work of the Spirit.

Finally, with regard to the testimony of church history. Both Reformed Baptists and Reformed paedobaptists agree on this point. Church history should not be determinative. Church history doesn't determine what we do; Scripture does. But, church history can help us understand how the early church and their successors understood the Scripture. And the fact of the matter is, in church history, there is evidence of immersion and of effusion as far back as we can go. Both forms of baptism were used in the earliest days of the church, post New Testament as far as we can tell. Scripture demonstrates the pattern of effusion from our perspective, from a Presbyterian perspective, as the way baptism is to be performed and Christian history does not contradict that. In other words, there is no evidence in the early church of the prescription of effusion as the form of baptism. In fact, it is not until the sixteenth century that someone argues that immersion is the only biblical way of baptism. It is not until the sixteenth century that someone argues that immersion is the only lawful mode of baptism. The original Anabaptists of the Reformation, in fact, practiced effusion. It was only the English Baptists, the general English Baptists in the 1640's who widely popularized immersion, and it was only in their second Confession of Faith that they specified immersion as the proper or only form of baptism.

Now, let me just address a few practical things. I realize that mode is not the most important thing here. I recognize that for Baptists the whole issue of recipients is more important. For example, I once sat next to Al Martin and had a discussion with him about baptism and Al was ready to say, "Look, mode is not the thing. What I am upset with you about Duncan, is that you baptize babies. That is what I am upset about." So he was ready to make peace in the church over the issue of mode. It was those babies that he was concerned about. So I recognize that. But mode is significant and it is significant at a pastoral level at the local level,

because this is something, especially for lay folk, that causes considerable consternation within families. I have a friend right now who is in the process of moving from a Baptist church to a Presbyterian church, and boy, her pastor is giving her up one side down and one side down the other, not only on doctrinal issues, but on issues like baptism. And that is not uncommon, so there are practical issues involved with this whole debate over mode.

You understand that the reason why orthodox Baptists, whether they be Southern Baptists, or Reformed Baptists, or whatever else, will not recognize other modes of baptism as legitimate is because they believe that mode is of the essence of baptism. Whereas for paedobaptists, and that is everybody else, we do not believe that mode is of the essence of baptism. So if you come to First Presbyterian Church of Jackson, and you were baptized by immersion, or believer's profession when you were fifteen years old, no one is going to ask you to be rebaptized or to be rebaptized, because we acknowledge that as legitimate baptism. So there is a difference there between the two traditions. One of the traditions says, "Mode is of the essence of baptism." The other says, "Mode is not the essence of baptism." We argue for a preference for that mode. We have biblical reasons for why we prefer a particular mode, but we do not deny the legitimacy of the other mode.

Question: Why would you ask somebody to be rebaptized?

Once again, in both the Reformed and in the Presbyterian tradition, just to speak of those two traditions, we neither of us would ever ask anyone to be rebaptized. Now there might be cases where a person had received heretical baptism. Let me give you some examples. Maybe from a "Jesus only" group, a Pentecostal group that does not baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit because and denies the doctrine of the trinity. Or, perhaps someone who had received Mormon baptism. And we would ask that person not to be rebaptized, but to be baptized because we don't recognize what they received as Christian baptism, so the standard position for both the Reformed Baptist and the Presbyterian standpoint is that if a person has received Christian baptism, they are not asked to be rebaptized. So even our Reformed Baptist friends, if they said to me, if I were coming to join their church,

“Ligon, you are going to have to be baptized,” and I said, “Oh, no, I have been baptized before,” they would simply say, “No you have to be rebaptized,” they would say, “because what you had before wasn’t baptism.” That would be their response. And that is basically the Presbyterian response to those who have received heretical forms of baptism, whether it be from a cult that denies the doctrine of the trinity, or doesn’t use the words of institution, so practically speaking, that would be the only circumstance in which we ask a person to be baptized who had been previously received something prior to that, that had been called baptism.

Question: In my own family, my brother-in-law has recently become a Christian and we had this discussion, I guess about a month ago, and I have had it with several other people as well. So that is why I am seeing this. One of my friends is from the north and so they have come from Catholic families where they now recognize that neither their parents are believers nor probably was the priest who administered baptism to them. How do you respond to that?

Good question, and thank you for raising it. This question was raised last century especially and you need to understand that even under Old School Presbyterians there were two views. In the northern Presbyterian church, Charles Hodge argued that all Roman Catholic baptism ought to be accepted as legitimate Christian baptism. In the southern Presbyterian church, James Henley Thornwell argued that it should not be accepted as Christian baptism. And in the PCA, in order to avoid the controversy, we have left that up to local sessions, so we split the difference as usual. Basically what we said is, that we will leave that up to the local session to determine on a case-by-case basis.

Now what was the rationale? - because that is more important. It gets, not only to this issue of what about parental belief, and so forth, but to other issues of Ecclesiology. You need to understand that the view that Roman baptism was illegitimate was tied to the Puritan view that the Roman church was that it was not a church. That by the Declarations of the Council of Trent, and the continued public proclamation of those particular declarations which anathematized anyone who believed in justification by grace through faith, that the Roman Church had in fact

excommunicated herself from the body of Christ by those declarations, and therefore the Puritans did not recognize any of the rites of the Roman Church. As the Puritans came to America, some Puritans continued to hold that particular view, while other theologians held to different views.

However, there are only two views you can have on that: that it is either baptism or not, and of the need to be rebaptized or not. So in the North, Charles Hodge argued that the Roman Catholic church baptizes in the name of the Father, the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, so it ought to be recognized as Christian baptism. But in the south, Thornwell argued, A. the Roman Church wasn't a church, and B. since the Roman Church was not a church, therefore the Roman Priesthood was not ordained clergy. And, in a very colorful debate at General Assembly with Hodge, he said, "Mr. Hodge, you believe that any Tom, Dick, or Harry, can apply water in the name of the Father, the Son, and of the Holy Spirit and it is baptism." And he argued against that. So, those are the two views that have been held in the Reformed tradition in America in the last hundred years, mostly focusing on the issue of the status of the Roman Church rather than the more particular question of were the parents true believers? That question, I think, ought to be decided within Protestant boundaries on the basis of professed belief or we really get ourselves into a mess. We have recently had some converted Roman Catholics join at First Pres, who strongly felt that on a theological basis that they had not received Christian baptism and they wanted to receive baptism in the Presbyterian church and on that basis, the session honored that particular request.

The Proper Recipients of Baptism

Now, the proper recipients of baptism. Reformed Baptists and Reformed paedobaptists agree that baptism is sign and a seal of the Covenant of Grace. Furthermore, we agree on the unity of the Covenant of Grace. There is a single Covenant of Grace, from Old Covenant to New Covenant, the Mediator is the same, the requirements are the same, and the blessings are the same. And some Reformed Baptists even agree with Reformed paedobaptists that baptism replaces circumcision. That baptism is the New Covenant form of circumcision. David Kingdon in his book, *Children of Abraham*, accepts this view. So they would argue that to experience the circumcision of Christ, in the putting off of the

body of the flesh is the same thing as being buried with him and raised with him in baptism through faith. They would argue, then, speaking now of both Reformed Baptists and Reformed paedobaptists, that to experience the circumcision of Christ, I am using Paul's language here, that to experience the circumcision of Christ in the putting off of the body of the flesh, is the same as being buried with Him and being raised with Him in baptism through faith. So they would acknowledge that both of those were spiritual realities. The circumcision of Christ is a spiritual reality, baptism into the death of Christ is a spiritual reality. If that is so, the only conclusion that can be reached is that the two outward signs, circumcision and baptism, symbolize the same inner realities about which Paul speaks there in Colossians 2.

I think that many times, Reformed Baptists think that the Presbyterian argument from Colossians 2 verse 8-15 is that Paul is speaking of external water baptism and comparing it to external circumcision. And what they normally do is they say, "No, no, no you have missed Paul's point. Paul is talking about spiritual circumcision being illustrated by water baptism. And you guys think that he is correlating physical circumcision with water baptism." But the fact of the matter is, Paul is comparing spiritual circumcision and spiritual baptism. And the reason he can do that is because those two inner realities are correlated Old Covenant to New Covenant, and their external realities under both covenants also correlate. So Paul is speaking spiritually at that point consistently, but the external signs are outward signs of those inward spiritual realities. And that is clear, as we have said before in the Old Testament, even with circumcision. Moses could say in Deuteronomy 10, circumcise your hearts, not your foreskins. Moses knew that circumcision was more than a mere external reality.

So, we can agree that far. But, but, Reformed Baptists differ from Reformed paedobaptists on two crucial issues. Regarding the inclusion of children in the covenant community under the New Covenant manifestation of the Covenant of Grace, they believe in the unity of the Covenant of Grace, old to new, but they would say in the New Covenant there is a different constitution for the covenant community. The covenant promises belong to the real covenant community, to those who

have been spiritually united to Christ, and to none other.

And in conjunction to that view, Reformed Baptists in their doctrine of the church, based on their understanding of Jeremiah 31 argue that Jeremiah 31 indicates that in all the covenant community, there will be experiential knowledge of God. And that requires a “believers-only” church. So when they define the *church*, they define it as those who have professed faith in Jesus Christ, as opposed to the historic Reformed paedobaptist position that views the church as made up of professing believers and their covenant children. So it is those two points which constitute the difference between Reformed Baptists and Reformed paedobaptists on the issue of who are the appropriate recipients of baptism.

And we argued the last time as follows: baptism is a sign and seal of the Covenant of Grace; that is made clear in Romans 6 and in Galatians 3. Children are included with their parents as part of the Covenant of Grace in both the Old Covenant and the New Covenant and we saw this in the formula of Genesis 17 and Acts 2. The New Covenant Promises are extended to believers and their children in Acts 2:39 and therefore the sign of the covenant, especially the sign of covenant initiation belongs to professing believers and their covenant children. Because the Covenant of Grace of which we are members today, is the same Covenant that God instituted with Abraham and because baptism has now replaced circumcision, as the sign of initiation into that Covenant of Grace. Any questions so far?

Question: At what age do covenant children join the church?

Well, you are going to have to use sanctified common sense in that particular setting, but here at First Presbyterian, that question is solved for us because the session has set a minimal age of discernment with regard to church membership: age twelve. And so that helps you a little bit. Say you have a family coming with a one year old child, a three year old child, and a nine year old child. And the nine year old child, and this has happened several times since I have been there, the nine year old child made a profession of faith at a local Baptist church when she was five, or hasn't made a profession of faith publicly, but has told her mommy and daddy that she believes in Jesus, so should she receive

believer's baptism and or should she receive covenant baptism? We have handled that uniformly with covenant baptism. And simply on the household principle. But we slightly misname it when we say infant baptism. The real meaning behind the right is covenant baptism. The child is under the authority of the householder and as long as that obtains, then you have a biblical principle. I do think that you can have situations where an older child is indifferent and even antagonistic towards the faith in the household, and at that point, I think you have got to have discussion, not just with regard to the ritual of baptism, but with lots of other things too. That is just part of the reality of covenant family life in a fallen world.

Question: How does our view of baptism effect our view or the Reformed Baptism view of the Lord's Table?

That is something that has only recently changed in Baptist circles. Closed communion would have been the norm amongst Baptists and that again, is another reason why in the Presbyterian tradition we have tended not to practice closed communion. Even if closed communion is practiced, where non members are examined in some way or questions prior, they wouldn't have a totally closed communion because of the view of the connection with believers and the requirement of covenant fellowship with the Lord. Yes, all of these are just examples of how your doctrine of church impacts this particular issue. So it is just a good reminder to all of us that we need to spend more time working ourselves in the area of doctrine of the church, because most of our upbringing, no matter how good, how profoundly biblical the preaching was in our local churches, I will bet you that we had an under representation of preaching on the subject of the church in the context of that preaching. It has just been ignored. Thank you for your patience today. Lord bless you.

The Covenant of Grace with Abraham, Fulfilled

Dr. Derek Thomas: Let every creature in heaven and earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them say, “To Him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might, forever and ever.” Let us worship God.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, our God, Lord Jesus Christ: we worship You. We worship You in all the glory and majesty of who You are and who You have revealed and disclosed Yourself to be. We mingle our praises at the outset of our worship with the voices of angels and archangels, and cherubim and seraphim, and the church triumphant on the other side.

We thank You for the gospel. We thank You for the sweet assurance that in Christ alone there is forgiveness of all of our sins. We thank You, O Lord, for justification. We thank You for adoption into the household and family of God. We thank You for the certainty that we shall be with You for all eternity. We thank You this morning that we enter into an aspect of that even as we worship You this morning, mingling our voices with the church on the other side.

We are pilgrims passing through this world. Come down, O Lord, and mingle among us, walk among us, by Your Spirit. Minister to us. May Your word come home to us this morning—the word sung, and the word preached, and the word prayed, and the word made visible in the sacrament of baptism. We thank You, O gracious God, that You called us into fellowship with Yourself. Now bless us, we pray. We ask it all in Jesus' name. Amen.

Dr. Duncan: ...with me to Luke, chapter one. We'll begin in verse 67 today as we begin to make our way through the Gospel of Luke. Last Lord's Day, as we were looking at the response to this remarkable scene at the circumcision of John, we ended with the question that was being asked by all those who were gathered and living around, and those who

were in the hill country of Judea. The question that they were asking about John, this boy who had been born into the family of Zechariah and Elizabeth, who we will one day know as John the Baptist, and they ask of him in verse 66, 'What then will this child turn out to be?' And in large measure that question is going to be answered in the song, the prophecy, the prayer of praise of Zechariah in verses 68-79. **In fact, let me walk you through that passage so that you see something of what Zechariah does.**

In verses 68-71, he explains how the birth of John the Baptist, his son, relates to the larger purposes of God's redemption. Then in verses 72-75, he shows how the birth of John (and even more importantly, the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, to whom John would point) fulfills God's promises made to Abraham in the covenant of grace. And then in verses 76-79, he gets around to specifically answering the questions that had been asked by those gathered at the circumcision and by those in the hill country of Judea, 'What then will this child turn out to be?' He says this child will turn out to be a prophet of the Most High who will prepare the way of the Lord, and even describes what will be the heart, the core, of John's message in his life and ministry. And so he gives those answers in this song.

Now we said that in the first two chapters of Luke there are five songs, and this is one of those songs. We've seen Elizabeth and Mary's songs, and now we come to Zechariah's song when his mouth is opened and his heart pours forth blessing and praise to God. This is the content of the blessing which he pours forth.

Now of course, in the context of what Luke is doing in Luke 1 and 2, everything is leading up to the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. Everything's pointing to the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, but along the way, even as Luke's central focus is to focus us on Jesus Christ — who He is, what He's come to do — he also teaches us much about living the Christian life, and so we'll learn both of those things as we study this passage together today.

Now let's pray before we read God's word.

Heavenly Father, thank You for the Scriptures. Thank You that You have

given them to us to equip us for every good work. Thank You that You have made them profitable for reproof and correction, and for instruction in righteousness. Thank You that in them You reveal the way of salvation which is through faith in Jesus Christ. Thank You, O Lord, that Your Scripture is not a dead word, but living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and that it pierces into the very deepest parts of our souls. We ask then that by Your Holy Spirit You would open our eyes to see what the word really is and what it says; that you would open our ears to hear and to accept it; and that You would open our hearts to believe and obey it. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Hear God's word, beginning in [Luke 1:67](#):

“And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying,

‘Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,

for He has visited and redeemed His people

and has raised up a horn of salvation for us

in the house of His servant David,

as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old,

that we should be saved from our enemies

and from the hand of all who hate us;

to show the mercy promised to our fathers

and to remember His holy covenant,

the oath that He swore to our father

Abraham, to grant us that we,

being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
might serve Him without fear,
in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.
And you, child, will be called the
prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to
prepare His ways,
to give knowledge of salvation to His people
in the forgiveness of their sins,
because of the tender mercy of our God,
whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high
to give light to those who sit in darkness
and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.’

“And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.”

Amen. And thus ends this reading of God's holy, inspired, and inerrant word. May He write its eternal truth upon all our hearts.

We have asked the question both of Mary's response and song and Elizabeth's response and song...we have asked ourselves the question, were we in their shoes, what would we say had such an announcement been made to us...had God done such a thing for us? And we ask that same question of ourselves pertaining to Zechariah. Were we in Zechariah's shoes, what would

we say had the announcement been given to us that our child, our son, had been chosen in the providence of God to be the Elijah that would go before the Messiah, to be the one who would prepare His people for the coming of the long awaited one? What would we say? How would we publicly respond to that blessing?

Well, we saw last week that when Zechariah's mouth was finally opened that the first thing that came out of his mouth was praise to God. He blessed God with his tongue. For nine long months he had been silent, he had been mute, he had been dumb, he had been unable to speak. And finally his tongue is loosed, and what does he do? He praises God. Well, Luke tells you what the content of that praise was, and it's pretty extraordinary. One of the things that strikes me is that had I been told that my son was going to be the greatest man that had ever been born of women, save the Messiah, and had I been told that my son was going to be the greatest prophet of the Old Testament, I would have gone on a book tour! There would have been TV interviews, and I would have been telling them how I did it all, and it would have all been about him and me. And one of the things that strikes you as you read this story is that just like we saw Elizabeth's humility reflect itself in John, so also we see the humility of Zechariah reflect itself in John. The first thing that Zechariah wants to talk about is the Lord's salvation. The second thing that he wants to talk about in this song is about how what God is doing is fulfilling a 2,000 year old promise. Then and only then does he get to the third thing that he wants to talk about, and that is what the role of his son is going to be. And when he describes the role of his son, it's all about pointing to Jesus. Just as Elizabeth had pointed to the Savior in her response to Mary, so Zechariah describes his son's ministry as pointing to the Savior. So let's walk through the three glorious parts of *The Benedictus*, of the song of blessing sung by Zechariah, and see what we can learn about our God and about our Savior, and about our salvation, and about the way that we are to walk in daily life.

I. Praise to God for fulfilling His promise to redeem His people.

The first thing I want you to see is this. Zechariah makes it very clear that John the Baptist's, his son's, life and work and ministry and message is going to be set in the context of the

unfolding plan of redemption which the Lord himself is accomplishing.

The first thing that comes out of his mouth (look at verses 68-71) is this: “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel.” It's all about God. See the God-centeredness of this song:

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
For He has visited and redeemed His people
And has raised up a horn of salvation for us
In the house of His servant David.”

In other words, Zechariah is saying to all of those people who were saying, ‘What is this child going to turn out to be? What...? Surely this child has a special role in life. Surely this boy is a very, very unique boy, and he's going to do great things.’ The first thing that Zechariah wants them to know is that it is God who is doing great things. It's God who has visited His people. It's God who is accomplishing their redemption. It's all about God. Yes, his son will be a faithful servant of the Lord. Yes, his son will be used mightily by the Lord to turn the fathers' hearts back to their children, and to cause the people of God to repent and have their hearts prepared for the coming of the Messiah. But the first thing that Zechariah wants all of us to see is that John is just a part of, he's a piece of, a larger thing that's going on; and that larger thing that is going on is that God is preparing to visit His people in the person of His own Son, the Messiah, and He's going to accomplish redemption for His people. In other words, Zechariah wants some perspective put on John's uniqueness. Yes, he's unique. Yes, he's called of the Lord. Yes, he's going to be a prophet of the Lord. But he's only a part of something bigger.

Now it strikes me that there's something for us to learn in the Christian life from that. I understand that John's unique and that the role that he has in redemptive history is unique. Jesus didn't say that never had a greater been born of women about but one person — about John. I understand that he's unique. But it seems to me that there's

something, there's a point of contact between you and me by which we can learn from what Zechariah does in this prophecy. He says that we have to understand John in the context of something bigger: God's redeeming work, God's plan of salvation. Isn't that true for all of us, that we need to understand our persons, our lives, our work, our ministry, our mission in life, the reason that we're on the planet earth...we need to understand that in light of something bigger than just ourselves, bigger than just our talents and bigger than just our desires in the things that we want to accomplish in life? There is something much bigger than that, and it is God's purposes. And even as he begins this song with a God-centeredness that points us away from John and to God, and to what God is doing, so also that's the very context in which all of us must live, realizing that our lives are about something bigger than just ourselves, and bigger than just our families. Our lives are about the kingdom of God displayed in all the glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and we are to bear witness to Him in all that we say and do. That's why Jesus can say that if you're not ready to leave your father and mother and your sister and brother and to follow Me, you're not worthy of Me, because Jesus is bigger than those things. Even as He wants us to care deeply about our families and to love them as He has loved us, so also He wants us to value His kingdom and His person more than anything else. There's a God-centeredness about Zechariah's song here that teaches us the kind of God-centered lives that we're to live.

II. The Messiah's coming is the fulfillment of prophecy given to Abraham.

But there's a second thing as well that I want you to see, and you see it in verses 72-75. The second thing that Zechariah wants us to understand is this. Before we get to knowing what this boy is going to do and what God is going to accomplish through him, Zechariah wants you to understand that **God is filling a two-millennia-old promise before the very eyes of those who have seen the circumcision of John the Baptist, and who will eventually see the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ and His life and ministry, and that two-millennia-old promise is God's promise to Abraham.**

Look at the words of verses 72-75. As Zechariah explains God's plan of

redemption, he says, ‘What is God doing? He's saving us from our enemies (verse 71) “...to show (verse 72) the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant, the oath that He swore to our father Abraham....”

Do you see what Zechariah is saying? He's saying that in the complex of events surrounding the coming of the Messiah into the world (which will of course culminate in the Messiah's death and burial and resurrection and ascension) we are seeing the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham.

Now turn in your Bibles to Genesis 12. And you will remember that in [Genesis 12:2](#), God promised to Abraham that He would bless him, that He would curse those who curse him, and that He would make him a blessing to all the families of the earth. ([Genesis 12:2](#).) And then He reiterated this promise in [Genesis 15:1](#), didn't He? Turn forward a couple of pages to [Genesis 15:1](#). “Do not fear, Abram,” He said. “I am your shield and your reward will be very great.” And He reiterated in Genesis 15 His promise to make Abram a multitude of nations and to be a God to him and to his seed after him, and to give him a land of his own.

And then turn forward two more chapters to [Genesis 17](#), and He reassured Abram of this promise, changing his name to emphasize it—from Abram to Abraham—and telling him that he would make a covenant with him and his descendants after him, and that He would be his God, and Abram and his descendants would be His people, and that He would fulfill His promises to him.

Well, turn forward to Luke 1. Luke, in recording this song of Zechariah, is telling you in [Luke 1:72, 73](#) that the coming of Jesus the Messiah into this world (and of course the coming of John, pointing to that coming of Jesus as Messiah into this world)...that the coming of Jesus as Messiah in this world was in fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham: that Jesus fulfilled the covenant of grace that God had made with Abraham.

Now here's a good Sunday afternoon exercise. Go home this afternoon and look through your New Testament and see how often the writers of the New Testament relate the person and work of Jesus Christ and the

gospel to the fulfillment of the promise that God had made to Abraham. It happens a bunch of times, but Luke is the Gospel writer who gets to that theme perhaps the earliest of any of them, at least in this kind of explicitness and detail. He points to this promise which in the time that it was made was almost 2,000 years old. Now it's almost 4,000 years old. It was sometime around the twentieth century before Christ, in the first part of the end of the third millennium and at the very beginning of the second millennium that God made this promise to Abraham. And here we are 4,000 years later, and we ourselves...the fact that this is a predominantly Gentile congregation, we ourselves are living proof that the promise of Abraham has come not only to the Jewish people who believe in Jesus Christ, but even to Gentiles like us who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are recipients of the promises that God has made to Abraham, and Luke is telling you through the mouth of Zechariah that Jesus the Messiah in His person and in His work has brought about the fulfillment of the promise that God had made to Abraham.

In other words, Zechariah wants everyone to understand that there is something big going on here. As glorious as is the unique role that his son will play, God is about His work of redemption, and He's fulfilling a promise that is twenty centuries old by bringing first the forerunner of the Messiah and then the Messiah himself into this world.

III. The prophecy concerning John — his ministry.

Third, if you look at verses 76 and following, Zechariah gets around to answering specifically the question, **‘What is this child going to be? What role does God have for him?’** And here's how Zechariah answers it: He “...will be called the prophet of the Most High; and [he] will go before the Lord to prepare His ways.”

Now, Zechariah was already an old man when John was born, and I don't know how long he lived. It is entirely possible that Zechariah did not have the opportunity to sit his son down and train him in these things by the time his son had reached adulthood. It's entirely possible that John lost his father and his mother at very early years. I don't know; nobody does. But I do know this. When I read [Luke 1:76-79](#), I am amazed at how the prophecy of Zechariah given when his son was eight days old charts for us

precisely the content of his life and preaching ministry. Look at what he says: “He will be called the prophet of the Most High, [who] will go before the Lord to prepare His ways....” So he will have the responsibility of preparing Israel for the coming of the Lord...His coming in judgment and His coming in grace. And that means that John is going to have the responsibility of calling Israel to repentance, because Israel had strayed from her Lord and God. And John is going to have the responsibility of warning Israel against God's just judgment as he prepares the way of the Lord.

But then look at what else he says — verse 77: “...To give knowledge of salvation to His people in the forgiveness of their sins....” John's not just going to preach repentance, and he's not just going to preach judgment, he's also going to preach forgiveness of sins and the salvation that we have because of forgiveness of sins.

And then, finally, if you look at verses 78ff, “...because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high....”

In other words, John's preaching of sin and repentance and of forgiveness is going to be rooted in an understanding of God's grace and in the gospel of grace and of salvation.

Notice those three things. There's going to be a message of repentance in preparation; there's going to be a message of forgiveness of sins; and, there's going to be a message of God's grace and tender mercy to His people. And when you look through the pages of the New Testament at their description of John's ministry, years later...more than twenty years, more than perhaps 25 years later after these words had been spoken, you find that Zechariah's prophecy is fulfilled perfectly.

Turn forward in your Bibles to Luke 3, and look at verse 4. This is how Luke describes John:

He came preaching, and fulfilled what was “written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight. Every ravine

shall be filled up, every mountain and hill shall be brought low, the crooked will become straight, the rough, smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.””

And notice his words of judgment against the leaders of Israel (verse 7): “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” So there is strong preaching against sin, there is a strong call to repentance, and there is a preparing of the way of the Lord, just as his father had prophesied.

But there is also a beautiful promise of the forgiveness of sins that God holds out in Jesus Christ. Look back at verse 3 of Luke 3. He came preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And it's even better than that. You remember how John puts it? In the Gospel of John, when Jesus comes out into the wilderness where John is ministering, what does John say? “Behold! The Lamb of God who comes to take away the sins of the world.” So John not only preached God's impending and just judgment and the necessity of repentance, he pointed people to the forgiveness of sins that came only through Jesus Christ, and he understood that behind all of this were God's promises of mercy. Why? Well, because somewhere along the line he learned the truth which his father Zechariah unfolded for us in [Luke 1:68-79](#).

Now I want to pause and think with you for a second about John's preaching, because John's preaching has often been characterized as hard preaching — preaching that crushed sinners, challenged sin, demanded repentance, demanded response.

I was with John MacArthur a couple of years ago, and he was talking about some of the principles that have guided his own preaching, and one of the things that he shared with us was this. He said, “It is my conviction that **soft preaching makes hard hearts.**” Soft preaching makes hard hearts. Now what he meant by that was preaching that refused to take seriously our sin and to address us in our sinfulness and in our need of repentance, and in our need for grace. So much of the preaching of our own time is characterized by that.

So often we hear preachers say, “I don't want to talk about sin.” And, my friends, I understand that. I don't want to talk about it either! I'd rather talk about something else, but soft preaching makes hard hearts. And **John's ministry is a glorious example of how faithful preaching makes soft hearts**, because **faithful preaching brings us face to face with our own sin** and our own **need for grace and forgiveness**, and **the provision of that grace and forgiveness in Jesus Christ alone and in the gospel as we trust in Him**. And it makes soft hearts...those who know their own sin and who know God's grace to them are far more ready to forgive others who have sinned against them than those who have heard soft preaching which never addresses the hard reality of what sin can do to us and to others and to what it does to our relationship with God.

We should want faithful preaching that makes our heart soft under the gospel, because in the end the only kind of preaching that will enable us to magnify the grace of God is the kind of preaching that is willing to address the hard issues of our own hearts. It's *us*. We're the problem. It's the sin in our heart that needs to be dealt with. And until you've been brought face to face with that in preaching, you're very ready to find the speck in others' eyes because you can't see the log in your own. And that's why John's ministry is such a blessing to us, because he refuses to let us get away without seeing the log in our own eye, so that, having it removed, we can then look to the grace of the Savior and find forgiveness of sins.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, Your grace is marvelous, but we can't see that until we see our own sin. Help us then, having seen our sin, to bless God even as Zechariah did, for the marvelous grace of our loving Lord. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

The Call of God

The Promises of God (The Life of Abraham) — 1. The Call of God

If you would look with me at God's word in Genesis, chapter 12. We're going to attend tonight to verses 1 through 9. We, of course, are beginning the life of Abraham at this juncture. We have seen the preface to this great book set forth in the first eleven chapters, and specifically from chapter 11, verse 27, which begins the book of Terah of which this part of the book of Genesis is a constituent. The book of Terah beginning in Genesis, chapter 11, verse 27, begins to tell us the main characters in the story of Abraham. And the passage we're going to study tonight is going to continue to fill out for us. It's almost like a listing of the great characters in a Shakespearean play written on the front page of one of those Riverside Editions of the works of Shakespeare so that you know who is who and what roles they are going to play in this great drama of redemption. And we continue to see that in the passage before us, but we also see the very heart of the covenant promises give to Abraham. Lawrence Richards says this: "Abraham stands as the greatest figure to be found in the ancient world. Three world religions, Islam, Judaism and Christianity, revere him as the father of their faiths. But what makes Abraham important to the Bible student is not the reverence in which he is held. It is not even the belief that the The National Geographic once expressed that 'Abraham, the patriarch, conceived of a great and simple idea, the idea of a single Almighty God. (You'll find that in National Geographic in December of 1966, page 740, if you're looking.) Abraham's importance is not even found in the fact that he is today a prime model of saving faith. No, the importance of Abraham in Genesis is that through Abraham God reveals His purpose and goal for the universe. In promises to Abram, God revealed that he had a plan."

If the first chapters of Genesis show that this magnificent universe in which we are set as a very small part is, in fact, not an impersonal universe, but a personal universe created by a personal God who is in covenant relationship with us through Adam, then the story of Abraham which begins to be set forth here shows that that universe is not only personal, it is purposive in the sense of God working out the history of redemption for the sake of His people as we are drawn into fellowship with Him. So, let's turn our attention to God's word here in Genesis 12.

This is the word of God:

[Genesis 12:1-9](#)

Our Heavenly Father, we thank You for the truth of Your word. We acknowledge the power, the might of the promises contained in this passage as we begin to study. We pray, O Lord, that You would open our hearts, that we might attend to the details of the truth of Your word. But more than simply a study of this passage, we seek to yield our hearts to You, and so walk with the faith of Abraham in this world, trusting in the promises of the covenant of grace, trusting in the mediator of the covenant of grace. Help us then to see this truth with the eyes of the new covenant and with the hope of eternal glory set before us. We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.

It has been well said that Genesis 12, verses 1 through 3 is the center point of the promises of the covenant of grace in the history of redemption. Everything before Genesis 12, 1 through 3, is leading up to it. Everything after Genesis 12, verses 1 through 3 in the Bible is fulfilling it. We have here an epitome of the promises of the covenant of grace. The covenant of grace will indeed be spelled out in greater detail, but the covenant of grace is set forth in seed form right here in these verses. The great theme of these chapters focusing on the life of Abraham will be the promised seed or posterity which is given to him by the Lord. And to the lesser extent the promised land to which the little group clings tenaciously and in the final chapter to which they look back on in certainty of return. There is much that we could study in this passage, and so let's focus ourselves on three or four things.

The first one is the covenant of grace itself. I'd like you to look at verses 1 through 3. Let's remember the chronology of this story. Abraham, we are told, was 75 years old when he entered Canaan. We are told that in verse 4. In Genesis, chapter 16, verse 15, we are told that he was 86 at the birth of Ishmael. In Genesis, chapter 17, verses 1 and 24 we surmise that he was 99 when the covenant sign of circumcision was given. And so, a year later in Genesis 21, verse 2, he was 100 when he his son Isaac was finally born. He was at least 115 and perhaps 125 when he was commanded by the Lord to take his son, his only son whom he loved, Isaac, and sacrifice him

in the land of Moriah. He was 137 when Sara died. He was 140 when Isaac was married, and he was 175 when he died. This passage of Scripture, this section of Scripture which we are launching into a study of, covers certain events in the great long life of Abraham. Now of course by definition Moses has to be specific and episodic as he reveals this life. This was a very full life. And this is not really a biography of Abraham. Specific events are chosen under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit by Moses to set forth for us not only the promises of God, but to give us instruction for the living of our own lives. So as we look at this passage, we will have many things that pop into our minds that we might ask. But what about this? Well, what happened here? What about this, is there an answer to that? You're going to have to line up before the Lord in glory to come and ask Him those questions because Moses doesn't tell you all those answers. But he tells a glorious story of God's covenant promises. And I'd like to start off by looking at that covenant of grace which God has made with Abram.

Now let's remember a couple of things. First, God has already spoken to Abram, telling him to leave Ur of the Chaldees. When God's word comes to him here in Genesis 12, it comes to him in Haran. Now by the way, just to be confusing you will have noticed in this passage that in Genesis 11, verse 27 there is a brother of Abram, named Haran, and there is this city that they are now in Genesis named Haran. The two words are really not the same in Hebrew. They are unrelated. But one thing I do want to point out to you if you'll look at verse 26. Verse 26 of Genesis 11 tells us that Abram had two brothers, Nahor and Haran. Now Abram is listed first there and you might think that that meant that he was the first born. But apparently Abram was the youngest of those three brothers. And the reason he is listed first is not for the last time in the book of Genesis, God has chosen the younger to be the line of promise. And so once again we see here the election of grace where God takes initiative and reaches out and takes one that through the law of primogeniture one might not expect to be the line of blessing and makes him, in fact, his choice servant for the work of the Lord.

I. All our happiness is tied up and produced by God's covenant grace.

Now as we look at Genesis 12, verses 1 through 3, and God's promises and God's requirements in the covenant of grace. One thing comes through loud and clear, and that is that all of our happiness is tied up with and produced by God's covenant grace. So often in life Satan attempts to tempt us to believe that walking in the way of God spoils all our fun, and that fulfillment and satisfaction and contentment and life are found only when we deviate from the way of God. But it is crystal clear as you read these promises that happiness and contentment and satisfaction and fulfillment are by-products of dying to ourselves, trusting in Christ and resting in the promises that God has given in the covenant of grace. And that message is just as important for us today as it was to Abram.

Let's look at this passage very briefly. Here in Genesis 12, verses 1 through 3, I want you to see two things. First of all the commands of the covenant of grace, and second of all, the promises of the covenant of grace. We have already talked about covenants and especially in Genesis, chapter 2, where we see the outline of the covenant of works given, and in Genesis chapter 6 when we saw the covenant of Noah. But here in Genesis 12, we see a clearer presentation of God's redeeming covenant than we saw in the life of Noah. But here again we also see that important reality that the covenant is always mutual. There is no such thing as a covenant without mutuality. There may be promises that are made by God and established by God in a gracious covenant, but there is always mutual obligation in a covenant relationship. Remember we defined a covenant using Palmer Robertson's definition. It's a bond in blood, sovereignly administered. It is a relationship which is binding. It is a life or death relationship. It is one which comes with mutual blessings and mutual obligations. And so here in Genesis 12, verses 1 through 3, we see commands even in the covenant of grace. Now I've stressed this because sometimes people will single out the covenant that God makes here with Abram and say this covenant was unconditional, whereas other covenants in the book of Genesis were conditional. That is a false dichotomy, because there are requirements for Abram here in the covenant of grace. Look at the very first words. "Go forth from your country and from your relatives and from your father's house to the land which I will show you." Notice that the first words of the covenant of grace are commands, conditions, or perhaps better, requirements. God gives these

requirements. And by the way, there is not only the requirement of verse one, but if you look further down there is another requirement. If you look at verse 2, the very last clause in verse 2 reads in most of our translations something like this. So you shall be a blessing. Now that looks like perhaps an indicative statement, or a statement of future reality. But, in fact, it is an imperative. There are two imperatives in this passage. Go forth and be a blessing. So those are the commands of the covenant of grace. Abram is told by God to go forth from his country, his relatives and from his father's house. And then he is told to be a blessing. Those are the two commands of the covenant of grace.

I want you to note two things about this. First of all we have been noticing, ever since Genesis 1, a gradual narrowing of God's focus in this great book of Genesis. Starting off with the great universe, zeroing in on the lines of the sons of Adam, zeroing in on the sons of the line of Noah, zeroing in on the sons of Shem, zeroing in on Terah, one of the lines of the sons of Shem, and now zeroing in on Abram. It's like a great funnel and now the focus has been drawn down to the very point of the funnel. But at the same time we have seen a separation going on in the first eleven chapters of Genesis.

And isn't it interesting that the covenant of grace begins with the call of God to Abram to separate himself. Now that call of separation does not mean that Abram is to take himself out of the world, to have no affiliation or association with anyone else in the world, to be utterly repulsed by the world, to hate the world, to not have anything to do with it. Oh, no, because what's the second part of this command? Be a blessing to the nations. So on the one hand he must separate, on the other hand he must be a blessing. Is that not what God calls us to? Is that not precisely what Jesus was telling us when He called us to be salt and light? We must be different from the world in order to be a blessing to the world. Abraham must be separate from the nations in order to be a blessing to the nations. And here God calls Abram to separate himself from his country, from his relations and from his father's house in order that he might be a blessing to all nations. There is so much truth packed into that command of the covenant of grace. Listen to what Derek Kidner says: "The history of redemption like that of creation begins with God speaking: this, in a

nutshell, differentiates Abram's story from his father's." Remember, his father started out with him. Terah went as far as Haran, but Terah went no further, and Abram went on. Why? Terah had not been called by God. Abram had, and that makes all the difference in the world. God had spoken to Abram. That's why Abram went. Terah, in all likelihood, went because his son was going. He may have been aged and in need of his son's care. But at any rate, the difference between Terah and Abraham is in that call. Now Kidner goes on to say: "The call to forsake all and follow." Heard that before? Studying the gospel of Matthew for a long time. "The call to forsake all and follow finds its nearest parallels in the Gospels. And Abram's early history is partly that of his gradual disentanglement from country and kindred and father's house, a that is a process not completed until Genesis, chapter 13." Okay.

So we see here emerging a pattern where Abram is having to separate himself from the nations in order to be a blessing to the nations. And that's a message to us, too. As Christians we must distinctively see ourselves as different from the world. We must think differently from the world. We must have a different world view and outlook from the world. We must have a different set of priorities. We must have a different set of goals. Our agenda is different from the agenda of the world. But we do that not so we can stand over against the world and feel superior to the world. Or despise the world in the sense of not having any concern for the interests of men and women who are not part of the faith. We are distinctive in order that we can be a blessing. In other words, we must say no to the world in order that we can say yes to the world. We must be different from the world and say no, your way of thinking is wrong. Again, not so that we feel superior to the world, but so that we might be a blessing to the world. For our agenda is not something that we have cooked up. It's something that we have received from the call of God. It's His agenda, it's His priority, it's His goal, it's His world view, it's His focus and our desire is to see the world won to that. But we can't do that if we're like the world. And so all of us are called to separation from the world, and all of us are called to be blessings to the world. And isn't it interesting that Christians have a hard time keeping those two things together? They either do a real good job of separating themselves from the thought life of the world so much that they despise the world in an

unbiblical sense of that phrase. Or they so long to draw the world to Christ, and they decide that the best way to do that is to become like the world that they lose their distinctive saltiness. But Jesus calls us to be salt and light. He calls us to be distinct from the world in order to be a blessing to the world. And that is the challenge of the Christian life. And we see it laid forth right here in the story of Abram.

Now we've see the two commands: Go forth from your country and separate and be a blessing. Now let's look at the promises of the covenant. There are many different ways that we could enumerate these promises. Many of them are legitimate. But let me just give you this particular enumeration of the promises. I find here at least six promises in Genesis, chapter 12, verses 1 through 7, zeroing in on verses 1 through 3 and then skipping down to verse 7. I find at least six promises here given in the covenant of grace to Abram. And these are expanded on in the rest of the story of Abram, in the rest of the story of Genesis, in the story of Exodus and throughout the Old Testament all the way up to the prophet Jeremiah in Jeremiah 31.

The first promise is, of course, the promise to make Abram a great nation. Abram's name, of course, meant exalted father. But this is a great irony because Moses has gone out of his way already to tell us that Abram's wife, Sarai, was barren. She had no child. You catch the redundancy? She was barren. She had no child. Well, of course, if she's barren, she had no child. The double emphasis there is emphatic. And God is saying, I will make you a great nation. We see there the promise of the seed for Abraham.

Then, I will bless you. The specifics of this blessing will be spelled out, but Abraham is to be the object of special saving favor from the Lord, and he is being singled out here as the line of promise. A line that we have already seen developing in Genesis 1 through 11.

Thirdly, God says, "I will make your name great." Now we have already commented on this, but let's look back just to remind ourselves. If you'll look back to Genesis, chapter 11, verse 4. Remember what the men of Babel said. Come, let us build for ourselves a city and a tower whose top will reach into heaven and let us make for ourselves a name. So the

agenda of the people of the plain of Shinar was to make for themselves a name. And God brought them to nothing. God humbles the proud, but God exalts the humble. And so what does he say to Abram? I will make your name great.

The fourth promise. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you, I will curse. This is not unlike the promise that God had made to Shem in the prophecy of Noah. And so we see a providential tear for Abraham and the promised line here. Those who bless Abram, they may expect to find blessing. Those who curse him, those who oppose him, God will bring to naught with his curse.

The fifth blessing we see here in Genesis 12, verses 1 through 3, is that in you all the families of the earth will be blessed. Here we see again the focus of the nations in the promises that God has made to Abram. Though this focus of the seed of Abraham's ministry to the nations will almost drop off the charts in the Old Testament in some senses, it is at the very heart of the covenant promises, and it is at the very heart of what the New Testament notices about the ministry of the Messiah and His disciples in the age in which we now live. Now the good news of God is to go to the nations as promised all those years ago by God to Abram himself. You will be a blessing to all the families of the earth.

And then finally, it is hinted at in verse 1, go forth from your country to the land that I will show you. The hint there is, of course, that God is going give Abram a land. But it is made explicit in verse 7, and this is the sixth promise that we see in the covenant of grace, to your descendants I will give this land. And so the promise of the land of Canaan is set forth here to Abram. And these are the six great promises of the covenant of grace which we will see explained and unfolded in the weeks to come.

II. The Covenant of Grace requires covenant loyalty

Now let me notice just two or three other things very quickly. If you will look at verses 4 and 5 you will see here this separation to which we have already alluded being worked out. The call of the covenant of grace is always a call to separation. When we're called by God in His covenant of grace to come after Him, it is a call to separation to put behind us our

worldly agenda, our worldly world view, our worldly way of thinking and to adapt and to adopt what the Lord's plan is for us. A covenant of grace requires covenant loyalty which says, God is my first priority. God is the one who sets the agenda for my priorities and for my preferences, and God is the one who by His word determines my decisions. This kind of covenant loyalty is seen very clearly in the life of Abraham. Look at verse 4. "So Abram went forth as the Lord had spoken to him and Lot went with him." Let me just make a mention here. Abram, of course, is going forth from Haran at this point. They have already left Ur of the Chaldeans, they have made their way to Haran. Abram is responding in obedience to what God has called him to do. And now Abram leaves behind his father and his brother. Because while they are in Ur, Haran, his brother, dies. While they are in Haran, his father, Terah, dies. And so notice how God is bringing about the separation which he called Abram to. There seems to be no faulting Abram in the text. Abram is not aggressive in separating himself from his family. And so God begins to take his family out of the picture.

By the way, that's a hint at how God sometimes works in our own experiences when He calls us to obedience and we're sluggish in it. He speeds up the process through His direct divine providence. At any rate, Abram apparently takes Lot along as his potential heir because as we've already observed, Abram had no physical heir at this point. And so Lot, his nephew, is taken along for this purpose. But at this point it is Abram, Sarai, his wife, Lot, his nephew, and those that are now a part of the household of Abram. They've separated themselves now from his father's house. They've separated themselves from his father's country, and he's almost separated himself from all his relations. And so we see this process of separation unfolding.

III. The pilgrim declares the Lord's dominion in the shadow of idols.

If you look at verses 6 and 7, again, we will see a glorious passage in God's covenant of grace with Abram. By grace, in verses 6 and 7, this pilgrim, Abraham, a stranger in a strange land, declares the Lord's dominion in the shadow of idols. What in the world am I talking about? Look at this passage. "Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem."

Now the phrase "the site of Shechem" seems to indicate that there was a Canaanite shrine there. The place was a term that was often used to describe Canaanite shrines. Now God takes Abram right to Shechem, and they get there and we read this. Verse 7: "The Lord appeared to Abram and said 'To your descendants I will give this land.' And so he built an altar there to the Lord who had appeared to him."

Now this is a tremendously important site in the history of redemption. You remember it was at Shechem that the people of God had to make the choice between the mountain of curse and the mountain of blessing, Ebal and Gerizim in Deuteronomy. It was at Shechem that Joshua gave his final address to the people of God. And it was at Shechem that Solomon's kingdom was divided. And here God brings Abram to Shechem in the very shadow of this Canaanite shrine, and what does God do? He gives his promise to give the land to Abram in the shadow of the Canaanite shrine, and Abram builds an altar there in the face of the pagan worldliness of his day. Abraham, the man of faith, sets up a place of worship to the one true God. A defiant declaration that God's dominion extends everywhere. He is the one true God.

IV. Responding to the Covenant of Grace means being a pilgrim.

Then, look again at verses 8 and 9 because we see here the pilgrimage of Abram. Responding to the covenant of grace always means being a stranger in a strange land. It always means being a pilgrim, and there's a hint at it here in verses 8 and 9. "Then he proceeded on from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord." Now we already remember that phrase "called upon the name of the Lord" from Genesis, chapter 4, verse 26. It's a very important term that refers to corporate worship. In Genesis 4, it was, of course, occurring in the line of promise. Corporate worship in the days of Seth. Here Abram is calling upon the Lord in the midst of this pagan land. But I want you to note two verbs that are mentioned here. Notice what Abram did in verse 8. He pitched his tent. But before he worships the Lord corporately, what does he do? He builds an altar. He pitches his tent, he builds an altar. Abram's own living quarters are

impermanent. He lives like a Nomad. But he builds an altar to the Lord which will stand forth as a testimony to the permanence of the promises of God. We can see Abram's priority even there.

You know it was said that it was a custom of some of the early American colonial settlers, many of them are Scotch Presbyterian descent, to first build the house of worship in their little village, and then to set forth in building their individual homes. Abram pitches his tent, but he builds an altar to the Lord. You see to respond to the covenant of grace means to be a pilgrim, in a strange land. And Abram understood that for all his faults. And so over these next few weeks and these next few chapters, as we study Abraham, we're going to see the promises that God made to him about his seed, his posterity. We're going to see the promises that God made to him about the land, and we're going to see the promises that God made to him regarding the nations. We're going to see how those are fulfilled in our Lord Jesus Christ, the great Mediator of the new covenant. May the Lord bless His word. Let us pray.

Our Heavenly Father, we thank You for the thrilling truth of Your word, and we ask that by Your grace you would give us the hearts of pilgrims, that we would long for that city which has foundations, and that we would not be satisfied with the trifles and the temporalities of this world. For we ask these things in Jesus' name, Amen.

Famine in the Land

[Genesis 12:10-20](#)

The Promises of God (The Life of Abraham) - 2 Famine in the Land

Please turn with me to Genesis, chapter 12. We began our study of the life of Abraham last week after a number of weeks looking at Genesis 1 through 11. As we looked at the life of Abram in Genesis 12, verses 1- 9, we said that that section begins a very long section in the book of Genesis, dealing with the life of this patriarch, running from Genesis 12 to about

Genesis 23. And then a number of chapters thereafter still pertain to certain events in the life of Abram, though the focus then turns to Isaac and to his other descendants. At any rate we said last week that many have well said that Genesis 12, verses 1 through 3, is the center point in the history of the biblical promises. Everything that leads up to Genesis 12, verses 1 through 3, is in preparation for it. Everything that comes after Genesis 12, verses 1 through 3 in the Bible is in fulfillment of it. And so this is a real center point for the promises of the covenant of grace.

We also noted that the great theme of these chapters is going to be the promise seed to Abram. And then of course to Abraham as his name is changed. So his posterity is at the very center of these chapters, as well as to a lesser extent the theme of the promised land. This little group leaving the Ur of the Chaldeans clings tenaciously to the promises of God that the Lord will give a seed and the Lord will give a land. And the very final chapter of this section looks back to the certainty of return to the land of promise.

As we looked through Genesis 12, verses 1 through 9 last week, we saw the outline of the covenant blessings given in verses 1 through 3. Then in verses 4 and 5 we saw Abram begin to live out God's commands. You remember we said that in the covenant of grace, God in His grace comes and blesses Abram, though Abram does nothing to earn or deserve that. Nevertheless, God places requirements on Abram, and the central requirement that He places on Abram is to separate himself from his land, his relations and from the headship of his father's house. And so there is a requirement that Abram must fulfill in carrying out this mutual relationship which is a covenant. So even in the covenant of grace, which is established by God's grace, there are requirements for God's people and this is seen in verses 4 and 5 as Abram begins to follow through on the command of God to 'go forth from your country to the land that I will show you.'

Then if you look at verses 6 and 7, we see Abram pausing at the site of Shechem to lift up praise to the Lord as he builds an altar there. And we mentioned that it's very likely that that phrase *the site of Shechem* or *the place of Shechem* indicates that there was a pagan altar there. This was a pagan worship center. And so here is Abram coming into the middle of

the land of promise. Not a stitch of it is his at this moment. It's under pagan control. The Canaanite is then in the land. This is the center of their worship, their idolatrous worship. And what does he do? He builds an altar to the one true God, the Lord, and he worships Him. He proclaims the Lord's dominion over the nations, even when he is a stranger in a strange land.

And then we saw again, as we looked to the very end of that section in verses 8 and 9 that Abram, his faith was tested in his wanderings, and he learned to live the life of a pilgrim. Though Abram pitched his tent, he built an altar. And we said that really showed us Abram's priority. He built a lasting altar to the Lord for worship, even though he, himself, was dwelling in a tent. He recognized the priorities of life.

That sets the stage for this next scene which we enter here in Genesis, chapter 12, verses 10 through 20. Let's attend to this passage. This is God's word:

[Genesis 12:10-20](#)

Our Lord and our God, we ask that You would open our eyes to behold wonderful things in Your words. We know that every word is given by inspiration and every word is profitable. So help us, we pray, to learn from this great historical narrative, this great event in the history of the life of a faithful man, even this great failure is his faith. We pray, O Lord, that we would learn both through warning and through exhortation. And we ask, O God, that you would make us willing hearers and doers of Your word. For Christ's sake we ask it, Amen.

I. The great themes of the Abrahamic Covenant are: the Seed, the Land, the Nations.

I want to look with you at three or four things in this passage. In verse 10 we see the heading to this whole section in the words, "Now there was famine in the land and so Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there for the famine was severe in the land." In that passage we see God setting the stage for a trial for Abram. Abram had already had to endure many trials on obedience to God's call. He had, of course, had to leave his native country. He had had to go to an unknown destination. He had to deal

with his wife's childlessness in the face of God's promise to make him a great nation. He had to deal with the loss of his father. He had to deal with coming into a land and not finding a permanent home, but living as a nomad. He had to deal with being surrounded by idolaters on every side. And now, there is a famine in the land.

The Lord is testing Abram's faith and faithfulness and this verse 10 is setting the stage for the rest of the event as it unfolds in verses 11 through 20. So this verse sets the stage for a story which reveals the sinfulness of a great man. Abraham, though he was a great man, was a sinner. So we see the sinfulness of a great man set side by side with the grace of a great God. But before we look at this passage as a whole, I think it will help us to remember the themes that are set forth in the promise of God to Abram in the blessing of verses 1 through 3. Because each of these three themes have a role to play in this passage in explaining what exactly is going on here. If you will remember, God promises to Abram blessings in verses 1, 2 and 3, and I'd like you to look there with me very briefly.

We see there at least three main features to that blessing. There is the promise of a seed, the promise of posterity. There is the promise of the land, and there is the promise of the nations. And those promises continue to be repeated throughout the story of Abram here in Genesis 12 through 23. Let me just give you a few examples. If you'll keep your Bibles open, I'd like you to turn to a few passages.

First of all, looking at Genesis 12, verse 2, let's see the promises about the seed. "I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing." So He promises that he'll be a great nation. That promise has to do with the seed, with the posterity that he will become a great nation. Then look at Genesis 13, verse 16. There God again says, "I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth; then your descendants can also be numbered." So again this theme of the posterity that God is going to give to Abram is brought to our attention. Then again in Genesis 15, verse 5, we read: "He took him outside and said, 'Now look toward the heavens and count the stars, if you are able to count them.' and He said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.'" Again a promise concerning the seed. Turn over another chapter to Genesis 16, verse 10. There again:

"Moreover the angel of the Lord said to her, 'I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they will be too many to count.'" And then again in Genesis 17, verse 2, we read: "I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will multiply you exceedingly." So over and over in God's dealings with Abram, He stresses the blessing of posterity. He is going to give him descendants. He is going to give him not simply an heir, but He's going to make him a father of a great nation, indeed a father of nations.

Then if you'll turn back to Genesis 12. Let's look at the second theme. This is the theme of the land. In Genesis 12, verse 7, we read: "The Lord appeared to Abram and said, 'To your descendants I will give this land.' So he built an altar there to the Lord who had appeared to him." Then look over in Genesis 13, verse 15: "All the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever." Then look over two more verses, [Genesis 13:17](#): "Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth; for I will give it to you." And then if you'd turn forward to Genesis 17, verse 8: "I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God." So over and over, throughout God's dealings with Abram in this section we see him repeating His promise of the blessing of the land. Not only posterity, but the land.

Now let's go back to Genesis 12 again and look at the third thing. Genesis 12, verse 3, we read: "I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." What's the third theme? The nations. The posterity, the land and the nations. God blesses Abram in his covenant promises and says that he will be a blessing to the nations. Look again at this theme as it's carried out. Turn forward, for instance, to Genesis 18, verses 17 and 18. This is Abram and Sodom and Gomorrah have come to the Lord's attention. And God is about to bring judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah and listen to the counsel of the Lord. Genesis 18, verses 17 and 18: "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed?" And so there even as God is about to bring judgment against Sodom and Gomorrah, he pauses to say, 'You know, I need to tell

Abraham this because in him all the nations of the earth are going to be blessed, and I'm getting ready to bring judgment against one of those nations. He needs to be able to intercede.' And then if we turn forward to Genesis 22. In the wake of God providing a substitute in the sacrifice of Isaac, we read this. Genesis 22, verse 18: "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed because you have obeyed my voice." So over and over the blessing that Abram is to be to the nations is mentioned as the promises of the covenant are reiterated.

Now, isn't it interesting that it is in precisely the three areas of those promises that Abram is tested. Precisely in the area of the promises of the posterity, the land, and his blessing to the nations Abram is tested. Think for a moment about the promise of the posterity. Abram's wife, Sarai, goes to the age of 90 before she ever bears him a son. And do you realize that Rebecca, his daughter-in-law, went 20 years before she bore a son and Abram was still alive? Do you realize what that would have been like for 160-year old Abram having gone through all the pain of waiting with Sarai, now he's waiting for his son's wife to have a child. This man's faith was tested over and over again with regard to the posterity. Think again of the promise of the land. Not only is Abram sent from his home country to a place where he doesn't know, you remember Hebrews tells us he didn't where he was going when he started out. The Lord just said you go, I'll take you there. Not only does he go to a country that he doesn't know, but he's a stranger there. And when his wife dies, he has to buy a parcel of ground to bury his wife. He doesn't own a stitch of land at his wife's death at the age of 127. Abram's faith is tested in the promises of the land. In fact Hebrews 11 reminds us that Abram died without the promises of God being fulfilled to him with regard to the land. Think again of this testing with regard to the nation. Abram was to be a blessing to the nation, and yet when Abram interceded for Sodom and Gomorrah, judgment still fell on them. Think of it. Abram was to be a blessing to his neighbors, but first in this chapter, and then again in Genesis 20, Abram is going to be a problem for his neighbors. Abram's neighbors take his wells. Abram's neighbors steal his nephew, Lot, and Abram has to engage in warfare. In every single one of God's promises to Abram, God tests him.

Do you see a pattern emerging here? Man's extremities are God's

opportunities. You know, it's in the trials of life that we either go one direction or another. We either revert to bitterness or our faith shines brighter in God. And in the midst of all Abram's trials, and we might also add in the midst of all Abram's failings, and we're going to see a big one tonight, we can say this. God did grow Abram by grace, and Abram did persevere to the end. That is an example for you and me, because in precisely the areas of God's promises to you, I promise you He will test you, just as He tested your father, Abram. And that sets the stage for the incident that we see here. Let's review it briefly.

II. The Covenant promises are endangered by unbelief.

First look at verses 11 through 13. There we see a failure in Abram's character. Frankly, we see a display of cowardice on Abram's part here, and we see a failure in Abram's trust in God. Abram wouldn't have resorted to this chicanery if he had truly trusted in God in terms of the promises. And here we see in verses 11 through 13 the covenant promises are endangered by unbelief. Abram has been promised by God that the Lord would give him a seed, the Lord would give him a land, and the Lord would make him a blessing to the nations, and Abram endangers all of those things by his behavior here. They go down into Egypt. As they go into Egypt, Abram knows that he has a beautiful wife. And Abram also knows, and by the way we have copies of laws in Egypt from this time now, that the Pharaoh had the right to take the wife and children of any sojourner coming into his land. Now probably that would not have been done normally with a great dignitary like Abram. But Abraham's faith breaks down, and he knows that when he goes into Egypt, it is very likely that either one of the local petty lords is going to try and kill him for his wife, or that Pharaoh himself is going to hear about her, and he's going to get rid of Abram so he can take her for his wife. And so Abram's faith breaks down. This is a sheer breakdown in trust of the Lord. But even as it is a breakdown in the trust of the Lord, it evidences the truthfulness of this passage.

This passage has been brought under great ridicule by the liberal critics. They mock, for instance, how in the world could a woman 60 years old be considered so beautiful that Abram would be in danger of his life because of her presence. Remember Sarai did live to be 127 years old. Perhaps she

was in the very prime of her womanhood at this time. It's very interesting that in the parallel passage to this the next time, it does not mention that she was beautiful. Apparently, when Abimelech tried to take her it was because he wanted a marriage contract and a treaty between him and Abram. It was not necessarily her outward beauty that enticed her, but now she is still in her prime and a beautiful woman. And so Abram fears. We also know from the times that it was a very common thing for people from Haran to take their half-sisters as their wives. In fact, among the Hurrians it was sort of a status symbol to be married to your half-sister. In fact, it was such a status symbol, and we know this from the tablets of Nuzi, that sometimes if you married a woman who wasn't your half-sister, men would actually adopt their wives as their sisters in order to raise their social standing. This was a big deal in this time. And so we see numerous things which confirm the historical accuracy of this account. Abram uses a trick from his culture to try and protect himself in an alien culture. The culture of Egypt. Nevertheless, Abram was endangering the covenant blessings.

You know sometimes we see our children in their late high school age or in their college years, and we see them making decisions that we know could haunt them for the rest of their lives, and we just shake our heads and we say no, don't do it. What is it about freshmen? Because we know the ramifications. And when we come to this passage, I mean, imagine the children of Israel gathered around hearing Moses deliver the story of how God, through his great plan of redemption, was going to raise up a redeemer for Israel, Moses, to bring them out of the land of Egypt as God's representative. And here they are listening to the story of the promised seed and suddenly they see the father of the faith trying to give away the mother of the faith. And they go, 'No, don't do it, Abram, don't do it.' But Abram's lack of character shows through here. Derek Kidner says this: "Abram's craven and torturous calculations are doubly revealing, both of the natural character of this spiritual giant." You are seeing what this man would have been like without grace. Nothing can Abram claim for himself. "There is nothing of our own in our good," Calvin used to say. "There is nothing of our own in our good." Abram, apart from grace, was a coward.

But we're also seeing something else. The sudden transition that it is possible for the same person to make from the plane of faith to the plane of fear. Abram only a few days, a few weeks, a few months before buoyed by such faith in God that he can build an altar in the presence of his enemies and worship, is now asking his wife to lie and endanger herself and her virtue, her reputation and the future of all God's promises so that he might be protected. You see, even heroes of the faith are sinners and need to be saved by grace. And is that not one of the great testimonies of the truthfulness of Scripture? If we had been making this up, would we have said that about the father of the faithful? No. But because God's words are true, He records both the good and the bad even about His faithful servants. Here you are seeing He had another evidence, He had another testimony of the truthfulness of Scripture, the inerrancy of Scripture, the authority and the trustworthiness of the Scripture. Now, from this great lack of faith where Abram asks Sarai to say, "tell them you're my sister." Technically true, because we know that Sarai was his half-sister. Nevertheless it is endangering the promise of the covenant.

III. The covenant promises are preserved by the sovereign Lord's intervention.

We see in verses 14 through 17 that when Abram fails on the job, the Lord God of Israel does not. The Lord sees, just like He saw on the slopes of Moriah, He sees Sarai in her time of need. And there again we learn that God's covenant promises are preserved by His sovereign intervention, not by us. God's covenant promises are preserved by His sovereign intervention. Even when Abram is faithless, the Lord remains faithful. Abram goes down into Egypt. Just as he anticipated, the Egyptians see that Sarai is beautiful. They begin to talk about her. Word of her beauty gets all the way to the house of Pharaoh. Pharaoh says, I've got to have this light-skinned woman in my harem. By the way, we also know that the Pharaohs of the day very much liked light-skinned Syrian women in their harems to compliment the darker-skinned women who are already in their harems. And so Pharaoh hears about Sarai and says, 'Pick her out. Bring her to me. Pay for her to her master.' And so just as Abram had planned, he received a great deal of wealth from Pharaoh, and he gave his wife over into the harem of Pharaoh. But even when Abram is faithless, the Lord is faithful, and he strikes Pharaoh in his house with great

plagues.

Reminds you of another thing he did in Egypt once? You see here in Genesis 12 a foreshadow of what God is going to do in His redemption of the people of Israel in the days to come.

IV. The heir of the covenant castigated by the nations.

And that brings us to verses 18 through 20. So far Moses has made absolutely no comment about the morality of what Abram has done. And that has led some commentators to say, 'Well maybe Moses doesn't think it's so bad, what Abram did.' Maybe Moses thinks that this is a crafty strategy to keep alive the hope in the midst of danger. But I want you to note that the Lord places, through Moses' pen, a rebuke of his servant, Abraham, from the mouth of a pagan. Think of it. A godly man rebuked for his untruthfulness by an idolater and a pagan. Now what do you think Moses thinks about what Abram did? Moses is telling you, when you see Pharaoh, the godless Pharaoh, rebuking Abram, Moses is telling you that Abram's faith has failed here. Here we see the heir of the covenant being castigated by the leader of a foreign nation.

But I want you to see as well. Alongside that rebuke and alongside, by the way, of yet one more testing of the promise about Abram being a blessing to the nations. Is he a blessing to Pharaoh? Hardly. He's the cause of curses and famine coming upon his house. But I do want you to see in this passage three things that we see in the Exodus.

Notice that it is famine that brings Abram into the land of Egypt, just as it is famine that brings the brothers of Joseph into the land of Egypt. Notice that God visits plagues on the house of Pharaoh just as in the Exodus God visits plagues on the house of Pharaoh. And notice that Pharaoh gives God's covenant heir plunder and wealth and riches, just as the Egyptians gave to God's people upon their departure from Israel, we are told in Genesis 15 and also in the book of Exodus, many riches. Moses is drawing a parallel for us here so that in this event of the life of Abram is prefigured a greater redemption that God is going to accomplish one day in the future. It's accomplished not because of Abraham's faithfulness, but because of God's faithfulness.

And therein is a lesson for us. We do not learn from this, of course, that we should be complacent about our obedience, because God will dig us out of this mess after all anyway. That's not the message. The message ought to make us tremble at the thought of what we do with God's precious promises. But it is to remind us that in the very last instance it is not our faithfulness that assures the continuance of the promises of God: it is God's faithfulness and the grace which He works in us.

One cannot survey the life of Abram and say that it was Abram's righteousness that caused God to love him. No. When you survey the life of Abram, you say "Every goodness that I see in this man is the result of the grace implanted in him by God." For he was just an idolater from the land of the Ur of the Chaldeans, that God by grace chose and called to be the man of promise and to be the fountainhead of the promises of all those who trust in Christ. Let us look to the Lord in prayer.

Our Heavenly Father, we thank You for the richness of your words, and we ask now that You would bless it to our spiritual nourishment. We pray, O God, that we would not take lightly the covenant promises nor our requirements to trust You, to rely upon you and not to lean on our own understanding. We ask these things through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.

The Mosaic Covenant

The whole area of the law of Moses and the economy of God. The Mosaic Covenant and how it relates to the Covenant of Grace, and especially to the New Testament, is one of the fundamental issues that underlies the difference between dispensationalism and Covenant Theology. So bearing that in mind as we plow into this material today, I think it will help us understand the importance on getting ourselves straight on the scriptural teaching on this matter. If you would look at then at Exodus chapter 2 and I want to direct your attention to the last three verses of the

chapter.

You remember the context here. Exodus chapter 2 tells you of the birth of Moses and the second half of the chapter tells you of Moses' failure to help his people, and beginning his escape from Egypt. And when we come to these last verses of Exodus chapter 2, we are told again of the plight of Israel under the oppression of their Egyptian rulers and we read this. Hear God's Word:

“Now it came about in *the course of* those many days that the king of Egypt died. And the sons of Israel sighed because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry for help because of *their* bondage rose up to God. So God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And God saw the sons of Israel, and God took notice *of them.*”

Thus ends this reading of God's Holy word, may He add His blessing to it. Let's pray together.

“Father, as we study Your great work of redemption in the days of Moses, we would again be moved to wonder, love, and praise for the power of Your redemptive plan for the way that You strengthen the arm of the weak and you dash the oppressors to the ground. We thank you O, Lord, for Your grace, we do not deserve such a glorious redemption and yet that redemption which you accomplish for Israel out of the Exodus is simply a faint shadow of the glorious redemption that we have in Christ. As we contemplate this, as we study Your word, we ask that You would help us to understand it aright for our sakes, for Your glory, and for Your people's good. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.”

The theological issues raised by the relationship between the Mosaic economy, and all I mean by Mosaic economy is God's way of dealing in the time of Moses and under the covenantal relationship as it was expressed in the Scriptures in the days of Moses as opposed to other time frames in which he dealt with His people. The theological issues raised by the relation of the Mosaic economy to the New Covenant are at the heart of some of the most significant differences about biblical interpretation in the evangelical church today. If you go to a group like

the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS), or you and I had been present at something like the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, you would find broad agreement amongst those who call themselves evangelicals on the issue of the authority of Scripture and on the inspiration of Scripture and even on the inerrancy of Scripture.

But when you move into the sphere of interpretation of Scripture, you immediately begin to see significant differences within the evangelical community and one of the areas of difference that is most striking is in the area of how different evangelicals understand how what was said by God during the days of Moses relates to us as Christians, post Pentecost in the New Covenant era. If I can frame that question slightly differently, one of the fundamental issues in all of Christian interpretation and all theology is, “What is the proper relation of law and gospel?” We know that much of Paul’s writing was designed to address precisely that issue and yet there are significant differences in interpretation of what Paul meant and how he resolved that issue of the relationship between law and gospel.

For instance, in both Jesus and the apostle Paul’s day, we know that there were people who had a very different understanding of how the Mosaic code was to function in the era of the New Covenant. The Essenes believed in a New Covenant. You see, it is not distinctively Presbyterian or Reformed, or even Christian to believe in a New Covenant. The Essenes believed in a New Covenant. But the Essenes in the time of Christ, those who were part of the Qumran sect from whom we have gotten the Dead Sea scrolls, basically believed that the New Covenant was going to be a pristine form of the Mosaic Covenant. In other words, for the Essenes, the New Covenant was going to be the Mosaic Covenant all over again, but it was just going to be ‘perfecter’ if I can use that English. The Old system was going to be restored to a level of perfection that it had not obtained in the time of Moses and the Old Covenant in general. So the New Covenant for the Essenes was basically the Old Covenant cleaned up a bit and revisited.

Now needless to say, Jesus’ and Paul’s conception of the New Covenant, of the kingdom of God, is radically different than that. You don’t have to study much in the Sermon on the Mount to see that Jesus had a different

vision from the Essenes on the kingdom of heaven and how God's glory was going to be manifested in the New Covenant.

In Paul's day, we know that there were people that Paul called 'Judaizers' and they followed him around in his mission work. He generally worked in synagogues and built a core group of people who would listen. They already knew the Old Testament. He would proclaim the Word of God to them as they met on the Sabbath day. He would gather a group that was willing to go deeper in their study of Scripture and to hear him set forth the Gospel again and again and work out the implications of Jesus' teaching and the significance of Jesus' person and work, and in the process, he would build a core group of a church around it.

But we also know that there were people who followed Paul around targeting those disciples that he was working with, to explain to them that Paul did not understand the proper relationship of the Mosaic law to the kingdom of God or to the New Covenant. And they wanted to explain to these new converts that Paul was working with, that they, if they were truly going to be obedient to God, were going to have to obey the ceremonial code of Moses.

So the issue of how the law and the ceremonial laws, the distinctive laws of Moses in particular, how that Mosaic economy relates to the Gospel to the New Covenant era, has been a standing issue in Christian theology from the very beginning. It has been an area of dispute.

More recently, if we can jump forward many centuries, in the development of dispensationalism, we mentioned briefly before we read the Scriptures about John Nelson Darby and the Plymouth brethren and C.I. Scofield and the Scofield Reference Bible. How many of you grew up reading a Scofield Reference Bible or a New Scofield Reference Bible? So there are a few. Scofield was actually a lawyer who grew up in the old Southern Presbyterian Church, but when he was converted, at a Men's Christian Association Bible studies in St. Louis, the YMCA, you know it as today, he began to attend the YMCA's Bible studies and learned the Bible. And he became an avid teacher of the Bible. And developed, in a systematic form some of the ideas that John Nelson Darby had developed in a little less systematic form in his massive

writings and sermons. And he produced a reference Bible called the *Scofield Reference Bible* which became the single most powerful tool for propagating the theology which we now call *Dispensationalism*.

In that Scofield Reference Bible, he divided the history of redemption into seven distinctive dispensations. And he had a very specific view of the Mosaic covenant. Darby or Scofield argued that the covenant, or the dispensation of Moses, was the dispensation of law - not grace. And that the children of Israel in fact made a mistake by agreeing to abide by the law of God promulgated at Mt. Sinai. According to Scofield, what they should have said when Moses came down from the mountain with the tablets of the law was, "We don't want law, we want grace." He saw the Covenant of Abraham as a Covenant of Grace, but the Covenant of Moses he saw as a Covenant of Works or of law. And he felt that Israel made a fundamental mistake and went back to a form of legalism or works righteousness when they accepted the law. Now never mind that there is no mention at Sinai of whether the Children of Israel had an option to choose grace or law; there is no debate.

Now, if you read the notes in your Scofield Bibles, they are very helpful tools to have. The notes lay out the system quite clearly. At any rate, again, the understanding of how the Mosaic Covenant relates to the New Covenant is at the very heart of that biblical system. Scofield operates from a misunderstanding of Paul's words in Galatians. He goes to Galatians and he hears Paul saying that we must not add law to gospel as the basis of justification. And he deduces from that that the law, in order not to fall into a Galatian heresy, that the law must have nothing to do with a Christian whatsoever. And so any idea of incorporating the Covenant of Moses into the schema of the Covenant of Grace compromises the grace of the Gospel. So he thinks that the way you provide the best justification for the doctrine of Grace in the believer's life is you make sure that you leave the law out of it.

Now many of you have been around long enough to have known at least a little bit about the Lordship controversy which particularly raged in Bible church circles. And Dr. Ryrie and Dr. Hodges and some of those brethren were on one side of that controversy, and John MacArthur got himself on the other side of that controversy. Hodges and Ryrie were accusing

John McArthur of being a legalist and McArthur was accusing Ryrie and Hodges of being Antinomians and Arminians and there was a big raging controversy about the relationship of faith and works in the Christian life.

Understand what is going on here. You have pure dispensationalists like Hodges and Ryrie arguing against MacArthur who had been doing what? Reading more and more Puritans and Reformed guys. And MacArthur ends up with a hybrid view of redemptive history. I think he would identify himself as dispensational and premillennial in his eschatology, but he would identify himself as Reformed in his soteriology, his doctrine of salvation. And he is also becoming more and more reformed in his view of the general schema of redemptive history. And so he sees the Reformed tradition that says justification is by faith alone, but that faith is never alone. Okay. He sees that Reformed distinctive and he hangs on to it and he says, if you deny that justifying faith is always accompanied by the grace of the spirit in sanctification, then you are an Antinomian. And Hodges and Ryrie fire back and they say what? You are a legalist because you have brought the law into the Gospel.

And so Hodges writes in his book, ***Absolutely Free***, that salvation is by faith alone and basically that obedience is optional. So that we accept Christ as Savior when we are saved, but accepting Christ as Lord is either a secondary step or a nonessential step. And in the view of some dispensationalists would be an undesirable step. And you have got MacArthur firing back that that view is not an adequate view of the New Testament teaching on justification and sanctification, nor on the New Testament doctrine of veneration which says that the fundamental confession of the Christian is what? Jesus is Lord, and not that Jesus is Savior. Jesus is Lord; that is the saving confession of the believer in the New Testament. That is the simplest statement in the New Testament. You find it in Acts chapter 8 among other places. But Jesus is Lord is the fundamental confession of a Christian. That is not the second step for a Christian. That is the first step in terms of the public confession. So you have got this controversy going on.

What is going on there? It is a difference over how the Mosaic covenant relates to the Covenant of Grace in general. So, how that issue of Law and Gospel, and how does the moral law in particular, fit into the

Christian life are issues that are still with us today.

Another issue that revolves around how you interpret that Mosaic Covenant is the issue of Theonomy or Christian Reconstructionism. You know that there are some people who believe that all the nonceremonial laws in the Old Testament continue to be binding on all Christians. *The Westminster Confession of Faith* speaks of three aspects of the law: moral, civil and ceremonial. Most Theonomists argue that there are only two categories of law: moral/civil and ceremonial. And then they go on to argue that all of the moral/civil law in the Old Testament is still binding on believers personally and corporately in the New Covenant, so that we not only must obey the core of the law, the moral law as expressed in the Ten Commandments for instance, but we must also work for the implementation in our society of the civil law contained in the law of Moses.

Now again, whereas the Dispensational view sees a radical discontinuity between the Mosaic law and the Christian Gospel, the Theonomic or the Reconstructionist view of law sees a radical continuity between the Mosaic code and the New Covenant ethic. In fact, it is framed in diametric opposition to the Dispensationalist view. The dispensationalist view, for instance, says if a law isn't repeated in the New Testament, then it is not for the Christian. So what does the Theonomist say in opposition? Unless a law is repealed in the New Testament, it is for the Christian. So the whole structure of the view of the law in Theonomy is in opposition to dispensational categories.

If you are not familiar with the background of Theonomy, *Theonomy* really originates with a man named R.J. Rushdooney. Two of his more famous students were Gary North and Greg Bahnsen. As a young man he wrote a book called ***Theonomy and Christian Ethics***. This was a raging issue in certain segments of the Reformed community and it is still a debate in some areas of the Reformed community, though not quite as heated as it once was.

Again, those issues like Dispensationalism and Theonomy also revolve around your understanding of how the Mosaic Covenant fits into the Covenant of Grace, and especially with regard to dispensationalism, and

in what way the Mosaic Covenant relates to the Covenant of Works. We have already talked about the Covenant of Works in the Garden prior to the Fall. And for Dispensationalists the Mosaic Covenant is basically a repetition of the Covenant of Works.

Now Covenant Theologians have described the covenant with Moses differently over the years, and there has been some confusion over this issue even amongst Reformed Theologians. But in general, while Reformed Theologians acknowledge that there are aspects of the Covenant of Moses or the Covenant of Law, which reflect some of the language and ideas of the Covenant of Works, nevertheless, the Covenant of Law, or the Covenant of Moses, or the Mosaic Economy, is squarely within the stream of the Covenant of Grace. It is not an alternate option to the Covenant of Works given to us by God in the Old Testament. It is part of the Covenant of Grace. It is not saying, "Well, okay, if you don't get saved by faith as under Abraham, you can try law under Moses." That is not the point.

One reason why I read Exodus chapter two and last three verses, was so that you will notice that Moses himself, in those verses, when he is getting ready to tell you the story of the Exodus, links God's redemptive work in the Exodus to what? The Covenant of Abraham. So as far as Moses is concerned, there is no radical dichotomy between what God is doing with His people in the time of the Exodus and what God promised to Abraham. **In fact, he says that the reason God came to His people's rescue was because He remembered the promise He had made with Abraham.** And if you will remember back to our study of Genesis chapter 15, God went out of His way to tell Abraham about the oppression of Israel in Egypt and about the fact that He was going to bring them out of Egypt as a mighty nation, and that He was going to give them the land of Canaan. And so, Moses goes out of his way in both Genesis 15 and in Exodus 2 to link the Mosaic Economy with the Abrahamic Covenant, so that the Mosaic Economy isn't something that is replacing the way that God deals with His people, under Abraham; it is expanding what God was doing with His people through Abraham.

The Mosaic Covenant receives more elaboration than any other covenant in the Bible. The details and the stipulations of the Covenant of God in

the time of Moses are more detailed than any other covenant relationship, and when the New Testament wants to contrast the work of God in the New Covenant era to the work of God in the Old Covenant era, it will use the Mosaic Covenant as a foil. We will look at that when we get to our New Testament studies, and I will try and walk you through the different ways that the New Testament uses the Abrahamic and the Mosaic Covenant.

There are some ways that the Old Testament uses the Covenant of God with Moses which help you understand how a person could misunderstand the relationship of the Mosaic Covenant to the Covenant of Grace, because for instance, when Paul wants to argue that God has always saved His people in the same way, by using the instrument of faith and justifying them by grace, what covenant does he appeal to? The covenant of Abraham. But when Paul wants to stress the discontinuities and the greater glories of the New Covenant, what covenant will He appeal to? He will go right back to the Covenant of Moses.

So the way that the New Testament writers will use these covenants, could lead the reader who was not watching closely what they were doing and saying, to think that the New Testament had a negative assessment of Moses and a positive assessment of Abraham. So I understand how Scofield could have gotten where he got, but he is still wrong. It is just easy to see how you could get there. The New Testament writers give us subtle hints that you have to watch very closely in order to understand that they do not have a fundamental criticism of God's work under the Covenant of Moses. They have a problem with how Moses has been misappropriated by both the Jews and the Judaizers.

When you are in polemics against a false teaching, what do you tend to do? You tend to speak negatively about the other teaching. Your job at that point is not to say, you know there fifteen things right about that teaching. What you tend to do is say, no, there are fifteen things wrong about it and leave it at that. And the New Testament is constantly in polemic against both what? Jewish theology and Jewish Rabbinic theology and Judaizing theology which attempt to draw Christians back into some sort of mandatory ceremonial observance in order to be full Gospel Christians, if you will. So, it is easy to see how this could happen

and we will look at this issue with you very briefly.

The Covenant and the Law.

First of all, I want to take up the issue of the relationship of the covenant to the law. The relationship of the Covenant to the Law. It is tempting to lose the forest for the trees when you come to the covenant, because law so dominates what Moses gives us during his specific era of the Covenant of Grace from Exodus to Deuteronomy. Law so dominates that that it is possible for covenant to fade into the background of our minds as we are reading this massive presentation of the law of God. It is also possible for us to lose the continued grace emphasis which is there from Exodus to Deuteronomy. Exodus and Deuteronomy especially are books of Grace.

An acquaintance of mine and a friend of many of the faculty members here, a gentleman named Gordon McConvill, an Old Testament professor, wrote a theology of Deuteronomy not too long ago, entitled ***Grace in the End***. Now that is not a bad title at all for a theological study of Deuteronomy.

But, the law is so up front and in your face in this presentation in this segment of redemptive history it is possible to lose the forest for the trees. You are right up on the law, and though it is right in front of you, you can miss what is actually a larger picture. And so I want to give you a proposition that you have already read in Robertson's book, in his section on the Covenant of Moses, or the Covenant of Law. And here is the proposition: the concept of Covenant, even in the Mosaic economy, the concept of covenant is larger than law. Let me give you Robertson's words. "Nothing could be more basic to a proper understanding of the Mosaic era, than that covenant supersedes law. It is not law that is preeminent, but covenant. Whatever concept of law may be advanced, it must remain at all times, subservient to the broader concept of covenant. So what? And what does that mean? Okay. So what, we will start with that one, and then we will go back to what does it mean.

Law is basically an extrapolation of stipulations in a covenant.

Every covenant has requirements. Every covenant has stipulations. Law is just an expansion. It is just an elaboration on those stipulations. So law in believing experience has its origins in the requirements of the

covenant. But you see, if that is the case, then covenant is the broader concept under which law must be understood. Now, do you see immediately how that, in and of itself, protects us from a legalistic interpretation of the Gospel? If you view law as some sort of independent way of relating to God, apart from the Covenant of Grace, then you don't understand that law as it is first presented in the Scriptures, comes within the framework of a covenant relationship already established. And of course, the classic proof of that is in the book of Exodus, itself. Remember again, Exodus 2 verses 23, 24, and 25, especially 24. The whole Exodus experience is in response to what? God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But if you will turn over with me to Exodus, the twentieth chapter of Exodus, you will see this stressed again.

“Then God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”

And then He begins to give the commandments,

“You shall have no other gods before Me.”

Now friends, it is vital for you to you understand the framework in which He gives the essence of the moral law in Exodus chapter 20. It is the framework of having done what? Already having brought Israel out of Egypt. He does not say, “If you will keep these commandments, then I will bring you out of Egypt.” He says, “I am the Lord your God, I am already in covenant relationship with you, I've already brought you out of land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, by the grace of the covenant, in response to the groans of Israel, I remembered the covenant with Abraham, therefore, you shall have no other gods before Me.” You see, it makes all the difference in the world, in the way you read that law. That law cannot be viewed as an independent way of dragging ourselves up by our boots and earning our way into relationship with God again. Law becomes what? The Law is household instruction for the covenant family from the God of Grace who has saved us by grace.

And there is no more radical transformation for your concept of law, than that particular understanding. If you understand that law is a derivative of the requirements of the covenant, so that the grace of the covenant and

the covenant relationship itself provide the framework in which the believer always understands the law, you'll never fall into the idea that the law is an alternative way of relating to God apart from the faith and grace of the covenant. See, only someone who doesn't understand that covenant framework, could possibly fall into the trap of legalism. And because, for instance, our dispensational friends reject that covenant framework, they think that the only way you can get rid of legalism is to do what? Get rid of the law. But how does the Psalmist sing, *How I Love Thy Law O Lord*, if you get rid of the law? The answer is not getting rid of the law; it is understanding how the law functions within the framework of the Covenant of Grace.

Do you grasp this? Covenant is the larger concept. It takes precedence over the law. It provides a context for the law. Remember, a covenant by definition, has conditions. As we said, there is a sense in which there is no such thing as an unconditional covenant. Those conditions may be graciously fulfilled by the Lord, but there are still conditions for every covenant. Because every covenant has mutuality in it, there is no such thing as a covenant in isolation. Covenant is always in relationship and relationship by definition have mutuality. So, a covenant by definition has conditions. And that aspect of the covenant becomes the foundation for Old Testament law.

Now it is also true, and I would want to stress this with all other good Reformed theologians, that law is ultimately an expression of what? The character of God. Law is not an arbitrary proclamation by God. It is an expression of who He is. So it is not arbitrary. These conditions of the covenant are not arbitrary in any degree. This ethic is grounded in what God is like. And by the way, that is just another reason why we can't simply willy, nilly, dismiss the law in order to protect grace. That is saying, "God, we have to forget what You are like, in order to really understand grace." Whereas the Reformed approach is, "No, you can't really understand grace until you know what God is like."

And so you never want to run away from the law. You just don't want ever, ever to misuse it in such a way that you think it is somewhat of an alternative path into relationship with God that He provided apart from the Covenant of Grace. Because we are fallen, we have already lost the

game before we are out of the blocks. So, you have got to understand how the law functions within the Covenant of Grace.

Now, the key to dealing with the Mosaic Covenant is to understand why the New Testament talks about the Mosaic Covenant the way it does. For instance, without turning there, let me just recall to your mind the words of the Apostle Paul. You remember early in Romans where he says, “You are not under law, you are under grace.” And you can remember words early in the Gospel of John, where John speaks of “Moses bringing the law, but the Lord, Jesus Christ, bringing grace and peace.” And what do you get? You get the language of contrast between especially the Mosaic form of the Old Covenant and the Covenant of Grace under Jesus Christ. And this again leads people to draw the incorrect deduction, “Ah ha, these two things are in opposition to one another. You know, the law of Moses is opposed to the grace of Christ, and if we really want to hold up to the grace of Christ, we have got to get rid of the law of Moses.”

But, note what the New Testament is doing very carefully when it does this. It is actually highlighting the distinctive emphasis of the Covenant of Moses. And what is the distinctive emphasis of the Covenant of Moses? Robertson has already told you. The distinctive emphasis of the Covenant of Moses is that in the Covenant of Moses, God externally summarizes His will for man with His own finger; God writes the law.

Now don't miss what is happening in Exodus 20-24. This is not the first time that God has revealed moral law. From Genesis 1 to Exodus 19, it is painfully apparent that there is a moral order to this universe. I have been arguing at First Pres in our series on Genesis that much of what Genesis 1-6 does is to try and convince you that there is a moral order to this universe and if you mess with it, you are going to be judged. So Moses is arguing for a moral order to this universe out of the blocks in the book of Genesis.

And, behind that moral order, is a moral law giver. And He is the Lord God of Israel, the Lord God of heaven and earth, the maker and creator. That idea is not introduced to us in Exodus 20, but never before has the creator written down His code on a piece of stone, until you get to Sinai. And so the very highlight of the progress of the covenant, and I want you

to see this as progress and we are going to look at the ways in which it is progress in just a few moments, but the very progress of the covenant is seen under the Mosaic Covenant in God's externally summarizing His will, externally summarizing that moral order.

Advantages of the Mosaic Covenant

In fact, let me argue that there were at least four things in the Mosaic Covenant in which it advanced our understanding of the Covenant of Grace over the expression of the Covenant of Grace in the time of Abraham. You see, far from being some sort of a retrogression, far from going backwards, the Mosaic Covenant enhanced our understanding of the Covenant of Grace. The first way that it did that is that in the Mosaic Covenant, God formed Israel into a nation. There is a real sense in which the Exodus is the crucible in which the nation of Israel was created. There had already begun to be a people of Israel. In the time of Abraham, God singled out Abraham's family and isolated them as a particular, as a peculiar, as a unique, as a distinctive, faith family through which He would engage in His covenant dealings. And Abraham had descendants just as God had planned. But they weren't formed into a unified nation until the event of the Exodus. Do you not understand what is going on there? In all those stipulations about the whole of Israel, about fighting to eradicate the aliens, or the eradicate the natives who are aliened to the land of promise, but who have lived in the land of Canaan, the fact that the tribes who are Transjordan tribes who are east of the Jordan have to obligate themselves to continue to fight with the army of Israel until all the lands which God has given to Israel to occupy all of those things. What is the purpose of that? To consolidate that people into a nation.

Now that is an advancement in the covenant work of God. He has moved His work from the level of merely the family to the nation. And what do the prophets begin to stress immediately about His work in the New Covenant? That He will move it yet to a higher phase: from the family, to the nation, and then to the nations. The Messiah will draw all the nations to Him. "The peoples that walked in darkness. They will see a great light." The Gentiles, they will see a great light. They will all stream into the mount of Zion. And from the family to the nation, to this transnational entity that He will bring into being, the church. So this

movement from family to nation is a definitely a step forward. That is one way in which it was an advancement over the Abrahamic Covenant.

Secondly, the comprehensiveness of the revelation in the Mosaic Covenant is an advancement over the Abrahamic Economy and all that went before it. We have talked before about the doctrine of sin in Genesis 1-11 and we have talked before about how even the liberals recognize that in Genesis 3 and in Genesis 4 and in Genesis 5, and in Genesis 10 and 11 that the authors, as they would say, are trying to build a case for mans sinfulness which “gets God off the hook” for the existence of evil in the world. Now, though we would not agree with the way the liberals characterize it, they have caught onto something, they understand correctly that Moses is building for us there a doctrine of sin in those passages. You can’t come away from three, four, five, ten, and eleven without a doctrine of sin. You read those passages, and you are going to have a doctrine of sin.

But let me tell you, when you have finished reading Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, your doctrine of sin has been exponentially altered. Because you have a code which is so comprehensive that it touches every area of life. Personal, familial, community, society, judicial, military, religious, vocational; every area of life is touched by this law. And if you had any doubts about what sin was before, most of them have been solved by the time you have read through the extensive code of Moses. The comprehensive revelation of the Mosaic Covenant out strips anything that has gone before it. Even in its expression of the issue of sin. Now let me also say that Moses makes a great point of saying that the comprehensiveness of Revelation that he has of God out strips anything that has gone before. What, would, if you had to pick one passage, of talking with your folks in the church, what would be the one passage that you would go to, to show that under Moses that our appreciation and understanding of who God is transcends what has gone before it. Even in the gracious Covenant of Abraham. What one passage would you go to? Exodus 6, turn with me to Exodus 6. And it is elaborating on this simple statement. Exodus 6, begin in verse 1.

“Then the LORD said to Moses, "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for under compulsion he shall let them go, and under

compulsion he shall drive them out of his land." God spoke further to Moses and said to him, "I am the LORD; and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty, but *by* My name, LORD, I did not make Myself known to them."

Now, you Hebrew scholars know that the title for God, *Lord*, was in fact used prior to Exodus 6. You find it scattered throughout the book of Genesis. So what in the world does Exodus 6 mean when He says, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob didn't know My by My name, the Lord? Well, I can give you the thirty second version, but if you really want to study this, there is a wonderful little book, called ***The Revelation of the Divine Name***, it is only about twenty pages, or so, by Alec Motyer. You have probably read Alec Motyer before. He writes for Intervarsity. He has a wonderful commentary on Isaiah, and has written popular commentaries in *The Bible Speaks Today* series. In his little article, ***The Revelation of the Divine Name***, which was published by what used to be called, IVF, Intervarsity Fellowship, which is now called, UCCF, The University and Christian Colleges Fellowship in Britain, he argues this point. What God is saying there in Exodus 6 is not that they didn't know that name, the Lord, which they clearly did. But that they didn't have an inkling of the glorious significance of what that name, the Lord meant. But that the children of Israel were going to know when God was finished dealing with Pharaoh. So why is it that Moses tells Pharaoh that he wants the people of God to be released? Remember? So that they can worship.

Now I don't know how you reacted to that, but as a kid reading that, and knowing the story of Exodus, I always thought that it was a trick. That Moses was in fact, lying to Pharaoh, telling him that all we want to do is go out and have a worship service and we will be right back. But that is not the point of that repeated phrase, and you will find it repeated a dozen or more times, in the story of the children of Israel in Egypt. The point is that really was God's reason for bringing the children of Israel out of Egypt. He wanted them to worship. But you can't worship someone that you don't know. And so even in the way that he brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, God revealed Himself to them, in such a way that they would have a reason to worship Him with an understanding and an

intensity which transcended anything that they had ever experienced before.

And it is not surprising my friends, that the Song of Moses, and the Song of Miriam, occur immediately after the great deliverance of the children of God at the Red Sea, because they were there to worship. And so in Exodus 6, we see that God revealed Himself in the days of Moses in a way that transcended the way that He had revealed Himself in the times of Abraham and Isaac, and that is why He can be revealed to them in Moses' days as the God of loving kindness, as the God who is patient, as the God of mercy, as the God of covenant, as the God who bore them out on eagles wings. And we could pile up all those glorious descriptions in Exodus and in Deuteronomy, that is why He can be described in that way. It is far beyond anything that Abraham could have grasped. Because Abraham did not see the glorious revelation of the divine name like Moses and Israel saw it. So that is the second way in which we see an advancement in the Covenant of Moses, not only was Israel formed into a nation, but there is a comprehensiveness of revelation in the Mosaic Covenant that transcends Abraham.

Thirdly, the Mosaic Covenant has a greater capacity to humble men. The Mosaic Covenant, the revelation given there in the covenant has a greater capacity to humble men. Think of the phrase, repeat it over and over in Exodus, just as the Lord commanded. Man's natural instinct is to worship God in the way that he wants to. The way that is most convenient for him, is pleasing to him, is pleasurable to him. Man's temptation is to "worship God" really thinking of himself as the primary audience in worship. Over and over, the Mosaic Covenant points us to the object of worship, God, by reminding us that God does not only want us to worship Him, but He wants us to worship Him in His way. And what does that do? It humbles man's natural inclinations and makes him bow the knee to the Maker, not only in worshipping Him, but in worshipping Him in accordance with His will. Because people can accidentally worship themselves, when they think they are worshipping God, if they don't worship God in the way that God says that God says that He wants to be worshipped. And so that very emphasis in the Mosaic Covenant, and you see it from the beginning to the end of the

book of Exodus, is a way of humbling us, and saying to us, you must not only worship God, but you must submit your will to His as you worship Him, even in the way you worship. Now we could point to other ways in which the Mosaic Covenant humbles us, but that is a good example.

A fourth way in which the Mosaic economy is an advancement over the Abrahamic Covenant. In the Mosaic Covenant, we see a fuller picture of the holiness of God, and of the holiness expected of the people of God. You cannot read the book of Leviticus, if you read it closely at all, without catching the twin themes of consecration and atonement. The whole book revolves around those two themes: *Consecration*, our being set apart in preparation for worshipping God, and *Atonement*, the requirement necessary for entrance into fellowship with God. And both of those aspects stress the holiness of God. To come into His presence, you must be set apart, set apart from that which is sinful, set apart from that which is worldly, and you must be atoned for. Why? Because He is holy, and you are not. The very fact that the children of Israel had God in their midst as they traveled through the wilderness required them to obey all manner of burdensome rules. The refuse of the children of Israel couldn't be poured out in the camp. It had to be taken outside of the camp and poured out. Why? Not because it would have been unpleasant for the people of God to live with, but because God was dwelling in their midst. And so in all those ways, we see an advancement in the Covenant of Moses. It is not going backwards. God is moving forward in His Covenant of Grace.

Now, quickly reviewing. We have first of all said, that theological issues raised by the Mosaic Covenant are among the thorniest in the church today. Even within evangelicals, there are differences about how the Mosaic Covenant relates to the New Covenant era. And particular, there are differences in how the moral law relates to the Christian. We have also argued that Covenant is the larger concept, between the choices of covenant and law. And that you only properly understand the law's role in the believers life, whether in the Old Covenant, or in the New Covenant, if you understand that law is subsumed under the broader, more profound, and more basic rubric of covenant. That law is actually an extension of the requirements, or conditions, or stipulations, of the

covenant. We said if you understand that, you are protected either from legalism or antinomianism. But that if you do not understand law's relationship to covenant, you can actually fall into legalism and antinomianism simultaneously. Believe it or not, it can be done. And we have said that one of the problems of dispensationalists, of consistent dispensationalists, one of the reasons why Reformed theologians very frequently refer to them as antinomian in their view of the Christian life is precisely because many of those of the dispensationalist camp have decided that the only way that you can preach grace is to do away with the law, and to say that the believer has nothing to do with the law, and to read those very categorical statement of Paul in the New Testament as if Paul's problem was with the law itself, or with the believer incorporating any aspect or use of law in the believer's life.

Now, having said that covenant was the larger concept of law, we have looked at the distinctiveness of the Mosaic Covenant. In the distinctiveness of the Mosaic Covenant we said there was an external summarization of God's will optimized in God's writing of the ten words on stone.

The Unity of the Law, the Mosaic Covenant, and Grace

And I want to emphasize to you that in the Old Testament in the book of Exodus in particular, those ten words, are linked very directly to the covenant itself. Look with me at a few passages. For instance, in Exodus 34, verse 28, listen to these words. Exodus 34:28 –

So he, Moses, was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did not eat bread or drink water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.”

So notice how closely, the words of the covenant, the covenant itself, are linked to the Ten Commandments. So that, that external summarization of God's will, is called the Words of the Covenant. That is not the only place. Turn over to Deuteronomy, chapter 4. This language will remind you of Genesis 17, when the sign of the covenant is called the covenant. And the Covenant is called the sign. Listen to this. Exodus 4:13

“So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to

perform, *that is*, the Ten Commandments;”

Now that is a classic passage which would lead someone with a dispensational interpretation of Scripture, to say, “Ah ha, you see, the Mosaic Covenant is a performance based, works based covenant in the way we relate to God. Because there it says that this is the covenant which He commanded you to perform, that is the Ten Commandments. You see, this is an alternative to faith, as in the covenant of Abraham.” But if you don’t understand the way that covenants speak of outward forms, like the covenant sign, or the Tables of the Covenants, as representative of the covenant itself, you could misunderstand that.

What is Moses doing there? He is tying together, as closely as possible, that thing which optimizes the covenant of Moses. The economy of law here, that is the external summarization of God’s will in the Ten Commandments, itself. Those are the words of the covenant; they are the covenant itself. Does that mean that this is a covenant by law, and not by grace? Moses would have scratched his head in wonderment at you, had you asked him the question. What does he want you to see? The thing which characterizes, which optimizes God’s redeeming work in the era of the Mosaic covenant, is this external summarization of His law in the Ten Commandments. Turn forward to Deuteronomy 9, Deuteronomy 9, verse 9.

“When I went up to the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant which the LORD had made with you, then I remained on the mountain forty days and nights;” and down at verse 11, “And it came about at the end of forty days and nights that the LORD gave me the two tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant.”

Now again, just like in Deuteronomy 4:13, we see this linkage between the covenant itself, and the words, the ten words, the Ten Commandments. And by the way, this time, we see this linkage after Moses has said two very significant things. Actually it is the Lord who said these things, and Moses by the inspiration of the Spirit, has recorded them. Back in Deuteronomy 7, beginning in verse 6, Moses has recorded these words of the Lord.

“For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. "The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers,”

And so in that passage, the Lord makes it very clear that He didn't not enter into relationship with the children of Israel because of some quality in them - but because of a quality in Him. His love. Now, this is tantalizing because He won't go any further than that. And you are going to have to ask the Lord face to face when you get to glory, because that is the only answer that God gives to the question of “Why am I a guest at the feast of the marriage supper of the Lamb?” His answer is, “It is because I loved you.” Now He says that not in the New Testament: He says it in the Covenant of Moses. Which is a Covenant of Grace. And then He says it again, right before He speaks of this tables of the covenant in Deuteronomy 9:9 and 11, look at verses 4, 5, and 6, in Deuteronomy chapter 9.

“Do not say in your heart when the LORD your God has driven them out before you, 'Because of my righteousness the LORD has brought me in to possess this land,' but *it is* because of the wickedness of these nations *that* the LORD is dispossessing them before you. "It is not for your righteousness or for the uprightness of your heart that you are going to possess their land, but *it is* because of the wickedness of these nations *that* the LORD your God is driving them out before you, in order to confirm the oath which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. "Know, then, *it is* not because of your righteousness *that* the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stubborn people.”

Now, look at what He does. He hedges you about on every side. He says, “You want to know why I have put my heart on you? It is because I love you. And you know why I am bringing judgment against them? It is not because you are better than them. It is because they are in wicked rebellion against Me, and I have chosen in My justice to bring judgment against them. And you, because of the covenant I have made with

Abraham, are the beneficiary. But it is not because of your righteousness.” That is not Paul; that is Moses. Okay. So don’t tell me that Paul didn’t understand Moses, or that Moses was in opposition to Paul. That is Moses telling you that. And that is right smack dab in the midst of this covenant that some have been so unfair as to characterize as a covenant of works.

Now, what then do you do with the passage or two that we mentioned in the New Testament. Turn with me for instance to the Gospel of John. John chapter 1, verse 17. John 1:17, a classic passage appealed to, especially by our old-timey dispensational friends. Here is where they go. John 1:17.

“For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.”

And as you remember, the authorized version of the King James Version hardens the contrast, so it reads like, “For the Law was given through Moses, but grace and truth were realized ...” And they say, “See, can’t mix up Grace and Law. Law, that is Old Testament. It doesn’t have anything to do with the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. It doesn’t have anything to do with Grace and Peace and Truth. That is New Covenant stuff.” Is that how to read John?

There are two keys to understanding what John is doing here. First of all, you must understand a principle beautifully phrased by John Murray as a relative contrast in absolute terms. The New Testament does it all the time. It makes a relative contrast in absolute terms. When God, the Holy Spirit, speaking through the Apostle John, says that “Law was given through Moses, but grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ,” let me ask you two questions. Is he saying, that there was no grace in the Old Covenant? If so, explain to me Noah. Explain to me Abraham. Explain to me Deuteronomy 7 and 9. Explain to me David. So, you have gotten the point. This is a relative contrast in absolute terms.

Now, let me flip the question around the other way. Is he saying that there is no Law under the New Covenant? The Law was given by Moses, but grace and truth realized through Jesus Christ. Do you remember the

words that came from this apostle's mouth recorded for us, telling the words of the Lord Jesus Christ. "If you love Me, keep my commandments." Now it is going to be a scant fourteen chapters, before he gets to that statement. Could he be so senile when he wrote this that he had forgotten that he had made this statement in John chapter 1? No. The statements are perfectly consonant, because it is a relative contrast in absolute terms. That is the first way you understand what John is doing here.

The second way that you understand this statement is to understand that John is trying to encapsulate in a few words, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and beautifully characterizing the epitome of those two covenantal administrations. If you wanted to characterize the glory of God's revelation in the time of Moses, where do you start? The law. You are overwhelmed by the law, when you look at the Mosaic revelation. And even our Lord Jesus doesn't say, in the Sermon on the Mount, I am going to give you a new law. No, the law is going to stay the same. The Lord Jesus is going to apply it in such a way, that it can be seen for the fullness that it is, having scraped away all the encrustation's of the Rabbinic and Pharisaical tradition. But He doesn't give a new law. Notice that Jesus' words of contrast in the Sermon on the Mount are not, "Moses said," but I say." That is not what the Sermon on the Mount says. What is the contrast of the Sermon on the Mount? "You have heard, but I say." What is His point of contrast? The incorrect exposition of the Law which the people of God had heard through the tradition of elders contrasted to His correct and divinely authoritative exposition of the Law as recorded in the Sermon on the Mount. So His contrast is not "Moses said, but I say." But is, "You have heard that people said," or "You have heard people say that Moses says," but "Let me tell you what Moses says, because I wrote it." That is the contrast on the Sermon on the Mount. That law is My law. Moses was My instrument. Let me tell you what I meant when I wrote the Ten Commandments.

So the contrast is not between the old system of ethics, and the new system of ethics. It is at one level, between a misunderstanding of that system and Jesus' full understanding of that system. And of course, in the backdrop of it, even in the Sermon on the Mount, is the

understanding of the ethical system in light of the person and work of Christ. But that is another story for another day.

So, when you come to a passage like John 1:17, you understand that John is encapsulating for you what was the epitome of the Mosaic economy, the expression of the law. God, Himself, wrote with His own finger, the moral standards for all His people.

But, what was the epitome of the New Covenant? The achievement of grace and truth in the lives of God's people, through the operation of the Holy Spirit dispensed from the right hand of God and from the ascended Christ. That is the essence. And as the Apostle Paul will argue in II Corinthians chapter 3, and it seems to me that his words are almost a gloss on John 1:17, he is going to argue, not that there was no glory in the former, and only glory in the latter. But rather he will argue that there was glory in the former. But there was much greater glory in the latter. You see, it is on a continuum. It was from the lesser to the greater. If there was so much glory that Moses had to veil his face under the Old Covenant, how much more glory is there for the minister of the New Covenant? It is a relative contrast in absolute terms, and it is a phrase designed to stress the respective epitomes of those two covenantal administrations. It is not an absolute contrast. It is not excluding grace under the Old Covenant, nor is it excluding Law under the New Covenant. That is not the point of the argument, even contextually, if we were to go back and do contextual exegesis there. John's point is not draw some sort of a radical dichotomy.

Now, another passage, an infamous passage, Galatians 3. Galatians is consistently interpreted by nonReformed evangelical interpreters as a book which proves that Paul had no place for the law in the Christian life, and that any bringing in of the Christian law in the Christian life is, in fact, a compromise of the Gospel itself. Which put us Reformed folks in a rather precarious position. According to that interpretation, we are hanging with the Pharisees and the Judaizers. But look at what Paul says in Galatians 3, beginning in verse 13.

“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us-- for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A

TREE"- - in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the faith”

Notice that Paul is saying that the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, and the ongoing work of the Spirit in regeneration, and the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit in the believer’s life is a result of what? Our receiving the promises that God made to Abraham. This is not a new plan, Paul is saying. It is not that they had it one way. The Spirit wasn’t operative under that old covenant thing. And we have it a new way. No, the very indwelling of the Holy Spirit in us, the very outpouring of the Holy Spirit in His initial regenerating work in His ongoing sanctifying work in us, is a response to the promise that God gave to Abraham, so that we believers, all of us, are recipients and participants in the Covenant of Grace made with Abraham. It is all part of the same glorious structure of the Covenant of Grace. But notice, what He keeps on saying here.

“Brethren, I speak in terms of human relations: even though it is *only* a man's covenant, yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it. Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as *referring* to many, but *rather* to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ. What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise.”

Now, here is Paul’s logic. Paul is saying, at the very outset, the Mosaic Covenant was never designed to replace the Abrahamic Covenant, nor to modify the stipulations or conditions, or requirements, whatever term you want to use there of the Abrahamic Covenant. It is never designed to do that. It wasn’t a replacement, it wasn’t an alternative way of salvation, you misunderstand the function of it, if you think that God is now offering an alternative way of salvation, or as He is adding to the grace requirements of the Covenant of Abraham. For if the inheritance is based upon Law, it is no longer based on a promise, but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise. So there is his argument. That is the basis of the inheritance -- the oath. And you hear the language of what? Of Deuteronomy 7 and 9 coming through there. Paul is not quarreling with Moses; he is exegeting Moses here.

Then he goes on to say, “Why the Law, then?” Good question. It was added because of transgressions, or you could translate it, it was added for the sake of defining the transgressions. Having been ordained by angels by the agency of a mediator until the seed should come to whom the promise had been made. Now a mediator is not for one party only, whereas God is only one. Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God.

So Paul’s initial statement is it was added in order to heighten our understanding of transgression, which would have been a shocking statement about the Law to the Jews of this day. That would have seemed irreverent. And can you hear the echo of the Judaizers challenge/question to Paul in Romans 3 on this. “Do we say that we sin that grace might abound? Do You mean You are saying the Law is there so that sin will increase?”

No, no, no, you don’t understand. The Law is there in order to heighten your awareness of sin. And that is not the only reason Paul is not giving you the full scope of the law. He is arguing in the context of a polemic and he is highlighting one specific function of the law, in order to do what? To tweak the noses of the Judaizers, but not just to be difficult, to make them think about the function of the Law, and Paul’s fundamental objection to the Judaizers is what? They have never, A. understood the law, and B. they have never understood what the Law was for. And that means at least they have not understood all of the functions that God intended the Law to play. And because they have they misunderstood that, they have completely skewed what the Scriptures say about the way that God relates to man, and how God accepts man. Or to turn it around, and speak of it in a Pauline term, in what way we are accounted righteous before God, in what way we stand right before Him, in what way we are acquitted before Him. Because they misunderstand the function of the law, they are confused about everything else.

But immediately he comes back to this question, because he knows that some people are going to misread what he is saying; the Judaizers certainly, but even perhaps some friends. And they are going to say, “Well that means, Paul, that the Law must be contrary to the Covenant of

Abraham and its promises,” and so he says, “Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God?” No. For, if a Law had been given which was enable to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on Law, but the Scripture has shut up all men under sin, but the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

Paul is again hitting them at what level? At the level of the function of the Law. He says, “In a fallen world, you have to understand that the Law in and of itself and by itself cannot justify,” and he tells you why in verse 22.

“But the Scripture has shut up all men under sin,”

The Law can only justify you if you are perfect. Now understand Paul’s polemic is not to say that it would be inherently wrong for God to justify somebody because they were perfect. That is not Paul’s polemic at all. In fact, the apostle Paul will use that polemic to show that Jesus Christ was justified on the basis of obedience, so that you could be justified on the basis of His obedience as you have faith in Him. Paul had no problem with the concept of “do this and live.” Paul has no problem with the concept of do and live. On at least two occasions, his frontal assault against Judaizers, psuedoPharisees, will be, “You think you live by the Law; do it! You think you can stand before God and say, Lord, I did this, I did that.. Fine. I will be standing there with you on the judgment day. You just go ahead and live that way. And if you are perfect God will accept you, I promise He will. Just go ahead and do it.”

You see, then Paul’s argument, is, “Oh no, that would be against grace for you to attempt to be justified by God that way.” No. That is not Paul’s argument at all. Paul’s argument is, “Bubba, that doesn’t work, because you are already a sinner. The Scripture has shut you up in sin, and what I am trying to press home to you, is that you don’t understand the function of the Law in the context of believing, covenantal fellowship with God. The function of the Law is not to get you justified, before God.” That is not the function of the Law. The Law is not able to impart life, he stresses in verse 21. The Law in and of itself, cannot impart life.

Now this is a key element of the New Covenant ethic. The New Covenant

ethic, contrary to much popular belief in teaching, does not say that Law is bad and grace is good. Or Law is bad and faith is good. Or Law is bad, but the Holy Spirit is good. That kind of contrast is not the New Covenant ethic. **The New Covenant ethic says, “Look, the Law continues to be the standard of obedience, but the law in and of itself is not capable of producing obedience, only the Holy Spirit is.” And the Holy Spirit produces that obedience by His grace work, the instrument of that obedience in us is our faith, and by faith we then produce the fruit of obedience in the keeping of the Law.** Is this clear? And so Paul says to these people, “The law is not capable of imparting life. Only the Holy Spirit can do that in accordance with grace. The instrument that God has chosen for that is faith. And **obedience is the product of that work of the Spirit, not the cause of it.**”

Then he goes on to argue:

“But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.”

Now those verses give some folks fits. Because there are at least two ways that you could understand what Paul is getting at there. Is Paul, when he is using that kind of language, “before faith came,” talking about the experience of the individual believer before and after regeneration, or is he talking about eras of redemptive history before Christ and after Christ, calling the era prior to Christ, before faith came, the time of the Law, and the era after Christ, now that faith has come? My guess, is that he is doing a little bit of a double entendre here. But again, his statement, “before faith came, and now that faith has come,” cannot be taken as an absolute contrast. It is a relative contrast in absolute terms. How do you know that? Because who is Paul’s example of faith? Abraham. And he was kicking around a few years before Jesus came. So, again, you can’t come up with airtight categories here, excluding the operation of the Spirit in faith, under the Old Covenant, in contrast to the New Covenant.

And so again, Paul's contrasts here, are relative, and they are designed in particular to isolate that element of the Law of God in the days of Moses, especially the ceremonial code, which was in and of itself designed to point forward to a real work that was going to accomplish atonement and which, because that work has already come, are now utterly worthless for the believer, in both justification and sanctification. By the way, that language is not mine, weak and worthless; that is the language of Hebrews chapter 7. That is what the ceremonial law is now that faith has come.

Now that is Paul's polemic against those who would impose the ceremonial code on believers. He says, "Look, you misunderstand the whole function of the law." And at that point, he is thinking in broad categories about the law, not simply ceremonial, but the law as a whole. But when he isolates and begins to speak to them about the function of the Law as a tutor, he has in mind both those distinctive elements of the Law: the moral law and the ceremonial law. And he thinks of the moral law not only as a tutor, or as the slave who leads us to the school teacher; he thinks of the moral law not only as the one who leads us to Christ, because in the law, we see our own need for the teacher, Jesus, but he sees the ceremonial code as the tutor that leads us to the reality, the one who is really going to teach us the atonement. The one who is really going to accomplish atonement for us.

Now we are going to come back to that passage when we get into our New Covenant section, but I wanted to look at them because those are passages which are often appealed to by some, in order to prove a radical dichotomy in the Covenant of Grace, or actually to say that there is not a unified Covenant of Grace from Old Testament to New Testament, but in fact, they are distinctive dispensations. And it is patently clear that that is exactly opposite from what Paul is arguing. Paul is arguing there is no discontinuity between Abraham and Moses. What Moses established did not undercut what God had already established under Abraham. That is the whole logic of his argument, in Galatians 3. So this very passage which is often appealed to, to say to Reformed Christians, "See you have got it all wrong, because you are trying to bring this Law thing back in and you are just like the Galatians." You would have to say, "Well, my

friend, you have got it upside down. You have done a 180 degree interpretation of Paul's logic. The flow of his logic doesn't make sense, if what you say is true about the relationship between Law and Gospel."

So, what is the role for the Mosaic Covenant today?

First of all, the moral law continues to be the perfect standard of obedience in the Covenant of Grace. This is stressed in numerous ways in the New Covenant. Think of the sheer amount of law material found in the New Testament, especially in the Epistles. A lion's share of the Epistles fall in the category of moral exhortation: live this way, obey these things, do these things. And usually it comes in the form of an exposition of an Old Testament principle applied to New Covenant believers. The overwhelming amount of law material in the New Testament is an argument that the New Testament authors themselves did not see a radical dichotomy between the standard of the law in the Old Covenant and the standard of the Law in the New Covenant. The moral law is the same. Why? Because God is the same.

And that is remarkable, because you know how when you are in an argument? You tend to overstate and you tend to contort what the other person is saying. And in this conflict with Judaizers and Legalists, the New Covenant is very carefully protecting the place of law in the believer's life. And that is truly remarkable. That to me is one of the great marks of the inspiration of the New Testament. The best of men have overstated themselves in that argument over the 2000 year period of Christian history, and yet the New Testament is incredibly careful with how it states that particular relationship.

Furthermore, Paul stresses in passages like Ephesians 2, Romans 5, and Romans 8, that we were redeemed to be righteous. And how does he define righteousness? He defines it in accordance to the character of God and in terms of the law of God - see Romans 7. The law of God, Paul says, is holy, it is spiritual. These are Pauline descriptions of the law. Those are not Pharisaical descriptions of the law. Those are Paul's description of the law. The law is holy, and righteous.

And, in the New Testament, our Lord Jesus stresses that blessing comes from obedience. Put in Old Testament terms, blessing comes from law

keeping. And the other side of that is that the New Testament continues to stress that chastening to those who violate God's law.

And finally, Jesus and Paul stress that our judgment will be by works. In all these ways, we see that the moral law of the Mosaic era continues to be relevant to believers. Paul stresses that blessing comes from keeping the law. Look at Ephesians 6:2. You remember his emphasis? This is the only commandment with a promise. Obedience to parents yields living long in the land of your fathers. Jesus stresses that blessing comes from obedience. In Matthew 5:17-19, He who teaches and keeps all the law, he will be blessed, he will be considered great in the kingdom. In Matthew 7 verses 24-27, the culmination of the Sermon on the Mount, what is Jesus' point? It was the man who acted upon the demands, the claims of Christ, building his house on the rock, he was the one whose house stood up under the waves. He didn't just hear the words and think that they were really nice, and was deeply moved by them; he built his house on the rock. The blessing comes from obedience. Hebrews 12:6 stresses that chastening will be done to those who violate God's law. I Corinthians 11 verses 30-32 teaches the same thing, in the context of the Lord's Supper of all things. When Paul said, "and many of you are asleep," he didn't mean they were taking a long nap. Chastening comes from taking the Lord's Supper in a flippant way and not discerning the body. That is not manifesting a true connection, appreciation for a mutual love for those in the body. So there is blessing and cursing in the New Covenant, which again shows the continuing function of the law. And as we said, Christians under the New Covenant will be judged by works. Matthew 25 verses 31-33, II Corinthians 5:10,

Now friends this reminds us why it is so important for us to understand justification, sanctification, and the relationship between law and gospel. Because if you don't understand those things, you cannot preach the Gospel that Paul preached. You have to preach a justification that has absolutely nothing to do with personal obedience and law keeping, while at the same time, stressing that there is no such thing as a justification without a corresponding sanctification.

And so you have to stress the freeness of grace and justification, while simultaneously stressing that grace reigns in righteousness, to borrow

Paul's words from the end of chapter 5 of the book of Romans, remembering that the purpose of grace in the life of believers is not fire insurance, but it is that we would be transformed into the image of the Son, and restored to the fullness of our humanity. And so Lordship, you see, is not peripheral to Christian experience; it is the ultimate expression of Christian experience. It is the purpose that God is working for us. And so faith and works must be present in the believer's life. James' words, in James chapter 2 are not antiPauline, they are quintessentially Pauline. Paul couldn't have said it better himself. In fact, he did on a few occasions, say precisely what James says in James chapter 2.

You have to understand those things as we proclaim the Gospel. And it you know this is one of the things that we just need to rehearse, this is one that you are called upon to meditate upon over and over, and over and over. And I will confess, I am slow, these things didn't come together for me, until I had been working them through for seven years in the context of study in seminary, and in postgraduate training. You have got to commit yourself to reflection and meditation, so you can preach a Gospel of grace which is absolutely free. A justification that has nothing to do whatsoever with me, with what I have done, but at that same time, to stress that grace always reigns in righteousness and that he who has faith has works, and that is a Pauline Gospel.

Now this emphasis is seen elsewhere in the New Testament call to obedience. The Christian life, according to the New Testament, is characterized by joyful obedience. We see it in John 14:15, in Jesus' word to His disciples. "If you love Me, keep My commandments." "Love to God," F.F. Bruce says, "love to God and obedience to God are so completely involved in each other, that anyone of them implies the other two." You can't love God without obeying Him. And that is exactly what James is poking at. He is saying, "Well, you say you love God, but you don't obey Him? Well, I don't believe you love Him." And that is just what John says in I John. "You hate your brother. Well, God said, 'don't hate your brother.'" "In fact God said, 'love your brother.' So, you don't love God. They go together."

Eric Alexander puts it this way. "The evidence of knowing God is obeying God. So the Christian life is characterized by joyful obedience." This is

not against the doctrine of grace. Listen to the words of Martin Luther, who wrote that radical treatise on Galatians, and who himself has been charged with nigh unto half a millennium, by the Roman Catholic Church as being the most wicked antinomian to ever walk the planet, “I would rather obey God than work miracles.” That is not the statement of an antinomian. “I would rather obey God than work miracles.” Now is that antiGospel? No. Obedience to God in the context of grace is, in fact, the ground of freedom because when we recognize it is God we obey, we are freed from the doctrines and opinions and commandments of men.

What is the most frustrating thing in life? To be judged by people on arbitrary standards that you have never seen written down anywhere. Where does it say that I have to wear my hair like that? Where does it say that I have to wear that kind of clothes to be accepted in your group? Where does it say that I have to drive that kind of car, live in that particular part of town? You aren't their slave, they aren't your master. God is your master. You are freed from the doctrines, opinions, and commandments of men. His law is the only standard by which you will be judged, because you are freed from the arbitrary and manmade standards of all your would be lords. And that is why even Seneca, the great Latin stoic, said to obey God is perfect liberty. Listen to Thomas Vincent, “God is the only Lord of the conscious, and though we are to obey magistrates and parents and masters, yet we are chiefly to do this because God requires us to do so. And if they command us to do anything which God does forbid, we are to refuse obedience, choosing to obey God rather than any man in this world.” The charter of Christian freedom is that once we have appropriated the grace of Christ, the law becomes not a burdensome code that condemns us, but it becomes our charter of Christian freedom as the Gospel of Grace and the cross of Christ transforms it. It ceases to be our enemy. It is no longer designed to drive us in our sin to Christ, though it still performs that function. It is the mirror, the royal law, that we see our sin in that continues sends us back to Christ.

As Christians, we must learn how the law functions because it has multiple functions. The New Testament makes it very clear. That God's revealed will as set forth in His word, and in His law, is the pattern of

obedience which He calls us to follow. The revealed will of God is found in the Scriptures where the whole duty of man to God is made known, said Thomas Vincent. As we close, just listen to these words of the New Testament,

John 14:15. "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."

John 14:21. "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him."

Galatians 3:10. "For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM."

Ephesians 4:1. "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,"

Ephesians 4:17. "This I say therefore, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind,"

Ephesians 6:6. "not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart."

You couldn't find a better description of the Christian ethic.

Phillipians 2:12. "So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling;"

I Timothy 6:14. "that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ,"

I Timothy 6:18. "*Instruct them* to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share,"

Hebrews 13:16. "And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with

such sacrifices God is pleased.”

James 1:22. “But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.”

The New Testament ethic does not dispense with the glorious core of the moral law. It places it in the framework of grace and calls on the believer to sing with David, how I love Thy law, O Lord. Let’s pray.

The Blood of the Covenant

Exodus 24:1-11

The Glory Blood of the Covenant

If you have your Bibles, I would invite you to turn with me to Exodus 24. During the summer on Wednesday evenings, we worked through the Book of the Covenant. Now, keep your finger at Exodus 24, and turn back to Exodus 20, and look at verse 22. The Book of the Covenant begins in that verse. The Book of the Covenant contains the applications and illustrations of how the Ten Commandments apply to the daily life of Israel as individuals and as a community. It runs all the way from [Exodus 20:22](#) to [Exodus 23:33](#). In other words, it covers all of Exodus 21, 22, and 23, and *that* part of Exodus chapter 20 which is immediately after the Ten Commandments. The Ten Words give the fundamental legal principles for Israel's society, their community, and the Book of the Covenant applies that to the community life in specific situations. And we said as we studied through that Book of the Covenant on several different occasions, that it teaches us at least three general lessons.

It teaches us that we're all accountable to God all the time in every aspect of our life; it teaches us that we are to be concerned with the welfare of our neighbor. We were struck over and over again how the Book of the Covenant asks us to be our brother's keeper, to be that good neighbor to that neighbor in need and in distress, and to act righteously, not just in our private relationship with God, but in our public relationship with our neighbor. In other words, it stressed that if you really love God you will love your neighbor.

And that leads to the other great theme we saw stressed and it's simply this: holiness is more than personal piety; it's about public morality. It's about the way we relate in the various relationships of life that God has brought. And the subjects covered in the covenant code were extremely varied. I won't review them tonight, but there are at least 22 different applications of God's law in the Ten Commandments found in the Book of the Covenant. Everything from the death penalty to proportionate

penalties to laws about the Sabbath Day—all manner of applications and though those applications are varied, they're not comprehensive. It's clear that this couldn't function as the complete civil code of a society though it gives wonderful applications of the principles of the Ten Commandments for Israel's society. Israel was clearly meant to draw deductions and conclusions from the illustrations and descriptions found in the Book of the Covenant.

Tonight we enter into a new section of the Book of Exodus. In the passage that we start tonight, the focus of the Book of Exodus from now to the very end will be on the worship of God. Almost half of the book focused on the worship of God. We will begin tonight looking at this great covenant confirmation ceremony recorded in Exodus chapter 24. And you're going to see several things emphasized in the verses that we look at tonight.

For instance, in verses one and two, you're going to see the holiness of God emphasized by the fact that only Moses was allowed to approach Him. Though some of the leaders of Israel are called to draw near, only Moses goes up to the top of the mountain to commune with God. It speaks something about the holiness of God, doesn't it.

Secondly, in verses three and four, you're going to see the significance of the law highlighted for Israel. Moses receives the law from God; he recounts the law to the people and he will then write it down because the law is so central to this covenant relationship which God is establishing with His people.

In verse three we will also see that Israel's understanding of God's grace in the Exodus placed a requirement on them to be holy, and that's why they say, "Lord, all that You have commanded, we will do." They understood that grace constrains them to obey. Then if you look at verse 4-8, you'll find that the binding fellowship, the obligation of the covenant as well as the people's gratitude to God is expressed in these offerings, especially the peace offering that is mentioned in this passage.

Fifth, if you look at verse 8, you'll see that Moses' words of institution indicate that the sprinkling of the blood on the altar and on the people

serve as a sacrament, that is, as an outward sign of an inward spiritual reality. There's nothing superstitious going on here. That is made clear by the fact that Moses doesn't sprinkle the twelve stones. There's nothing superstitious or magic going on here; Moses sprinkles the *people* with the blood. This is not superstition, its symbolism. It's an outward sign of an inward spirituality of this relationship which has been established between God and His people. But that is not all for when you look at verses 9-11, we have a visible manifestation of God—a theophany—a manifestation of God. It happens from time to time in the Old Testament, the burning bush. And here, as Moses and the leaders of Israel go up the mountain, we are told astonishingly that they see God. It's a rich passage; let's study it together to God's glory.

“Then He said to Moses, Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and seventy of the elders of Israel, and you shall worship at a distance. "Moses alone, however, shall come near to the LORD, but they shall not come near, nor shall the people come up with him." Then Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice and said, “All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do!” Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. Then he arose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel.

He sent young men of the sons of Israel, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as peace offerings to the LORD. Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and the other half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, " All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!" So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words." Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel; and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself. Yet He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and they saw God, and they ate and drank.”

Amen. This is God's word, may He add His blessing to it. Let us pray.

Our Lord, teach us from Your holy Scriptures, of Yourself and of the glory of that sacrifice which substituted for us and for our sins, that quenched Your judgment and condemnation against us, and brought us into everlasting fellowship with You. This we ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

Our theme in this section of Exodus has been, Glorifying God, because Exodus 24-40 is all about glorifying God. It's all about worship. And Exodus 24 itself is about worshiping God by His grace and promise. The only reason that Israel is here at Mt. Sinai, worshiping the living God, is because of His grace and promise, so beautifully set forth in this covenant which is described here. There are several things we need to learn from this passage. In verses 1-4, you will see the covenant recounted, embraced, and written down or inscripturated. And in these four verses, we learn two very important things. First, we learn about the principle of representation. If you want to worship God, you need a representative, because you're sinful, you need someone to stand in between. These four verses tell us about the principle of representation, and about the centrality of the word of God in His covenant relationship with His people.

I. The principle of representation and the centrality of the word in the covenant at Sinai.

In verse 1 the representatives of Israel are called upon to come near to Mt. Sinai and worship. Now, there's a story behind that, and for those who have forgotten, let me refresh your memories. In exodus 19:17, 21 and 24, God will meet with Israel. The children of Israel had been waiting 430 years for this. They've been making their way across the wilderness for this, and now the time and come and God, because of the zeal and curiosity of the Israelites, has to say to Moses, "Don't let the people touch the mountain, because if they do, I'll strike out against them in My wrath because of My holiness." And He has to warn them repeatedly not to let the children of Israel break through to the mountain. You get the picture that the children of Israel are huddled in a mass around the mountain, just at the very edges, as close as they could possibly get. It's like someone at a great football game, and you didn't have tickets and you're at the gates crowding in as close as you can get to try and see what's happening

on the field. And this is how the children of Israel are, they're crowding.

But then, a big change. Look at [Exodus 20:18, 21](#). The next time you hear from Moses about the location of the people of God, where are they? They're not at the mountain. What happened? God spoke, they ran. Remember their reaction? God finally speaks to them in His own voice, and what do the children of Israel say? "Uh Moses, one small request. Would you please never have Him speak to us again." It terrified them. They were in awe. They were struck with fear. They fled. So now Moses now being asked to bring the children of Israel back, because they're far away, but they're not to touch the mountain. Only the representatives, Nadab and Abihu and Aaron, the priestly class hasn't been set apart yet, but they represent that group that will one day be the priestly class of Israel. And isn't it interesting that Nadab and Abihu, who had the privilege of going up the mountain of the Lord, will themselves violate the law of God and be judged by it. And the elders of Israel, 70 of them, the ruling elders of Israel, are called up the mountain, to represent those who lead and guide and shepherd and rule the people of God. And Moses the mediator.

But in verse 2, we see that the mediator alone is allowed to go all the way up the mountain to meet with God. The elders and Nadab and Abihu and their father, Aaron, they go up part of the way. But Moses alone draws near to God. Why? He is the representative. He's the singular representative for Israel, for Moses to go up to meet with God is for Israel to go up to meet with God, because he's the mediator. You see, God is teaching us something. In one man, all of Israel is represented. Moses. God had promised to commune with His people, and by Moses alone coming up the mountain, the people of God are communing with God, because he is the representative.

In verse 3, Moses comes down after worship and recounts to the people God's words. He tells them all of the things that God Himself had not told them with His own voice. God spoke the Ten Words. They were terrified. They begged for Moses to be the one to speak the rest of the words of God to them, so God told Moses those words, [Exodus 20:22-23:33](#), so Moses recounts those words to them. Moses speaks out loud all the words of the book of the covenant that God had given to him. And what do they say?

Verse 3, “All the words that God has spoken we will do.” This is not the first time that they have confirmed their willingness to enter into a covenant with God. Back in [Exodus 19:8](#), when they first got to the mountain the children of Israel say, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do.” So now, after having heard God speak the Ten Commandments, having heard Moses speak the book of the covenant which elaborated upon the Ten Commandments, they say again, “Yes, we are ready to enter into this covenant relationship. Everything that the Lord has spoken we will do.”

And then, verse 4, what happens? Moses writes down the word of God. Friends, you are beholding in Exodus 20-24, the beginning of the inscripturation of the canon of Scripture. Notice how it begins. It begins with the “finger of God Himself writing down the Ten Commandments, and then it continues with Moses, under the divine inspiration of God Almighty writing down the words that He has spoken into his ear. This is the beginning of the canon of Scripture.

From those four verses alone we learn two glorious principles. We cannot worship God without a mediator because we are sinners. Like the children of Israel, we can't touch that mountain. We need a mediator, a mediator counted as holy in the sight of God, and Moses serves as the peoples' mediator in this place. The fact that the people themselves cannot come in behind the curtain, they cannot ascend the mountain, they cannot go up with God, shows the distance and it also shows the imperfection of that mediatorial relationship. But it does teach us clearly that you cannot worship God without a mediator because of sin. This passage also teaches that you cannot worship God without honoring and obeying His word, because what is right smack dab square at the center of this relationship? The word of God. The Ten Words, the ordinances, the application of the Ten Words, right at the heart of the relationship. You cannot worship God without honoring and obeying His words. No wonder Jesus said, “I would have you be hearers and doers of the word.” So that's the first thing we learn from this passage, the principle of representation and the centrality of the word of God in this covenant that God is making at Mt. Sinai.

II. The principle of vicarious sacrifice and duty from gratitude

in the covenant at Sinai.

But there's more. In the rest of verse 4 through verse 8, here we see the reading, the embracing, and the sealing of the covenant. In verses 1-4, we saw the recounting, embracing and writing down of the covenant. Here, we see the reading, embracing, and sealing of the covenant. Moses gets up early and has an altar built. Remember, God has already told him how to build the altar. It's right in the end of Exodus 20. It must be uncut stone, not hewn. It can't be high which would expose the nakedness of the priests. No artifice of man's hand is to defile it. Moses makes this altar according to the stipulations of Exodus 20, and sets up 12 pillars, and we're told in verse 4 that the pillars represent the tribes of Israel. It's a representation of the whole people of God. The altar itself will represent the presence of God. The stones will represent the people of Israel.

And then in verse 5, young men are sent for. There are no priests yet, so these young men are needed to help with the offerings. Both burnt and peace offering are offered. The burnt offerings are burned completely. They're burned to cinders. The peace offerings are slaughtered. Half the blood is poured in the basin, and half in poured on the altar. Then, later, the meat from the peace offerings will provide food for a feast, a fellowship feast with God.

Notice in verse 6 and 7, half of the blood is sprinkled on the altar. The altar would have been covered with blood. And then in this very context, after pouring the blood out on the altar, Moses reads the book of the covenant, and now, for the third time, the children of Israel say, "We will do this. We will obey. We will embrace this covenant."

Then, in verse 8, this amazing scene. Moses takes the hyssop branch and dips it in the blood and begins slinging it out on the people of God until the blood has been spread on the people of God, symbolically indicating that they have been brought into a blood relationship and life and death commitment with the God of Israel.

What do we learn from this passage? We learn, first, the principle of vicarious sacrifice. Those animals symbolized the sacrifice that is necessary to establish the relationship between God and Israel. You say, "How do I know that?" I'll tell you later, but let me just say, I know it

because the book of Hebrews tells me and I know it because Jesus tells it to me.

That slaughter of the animals represents the principle of vicarious sacrifice, that we cannot come into fellowship with God apart from a sacrifice on our behalf, because we're sinful and we're in need of atonement.

Secondly, we learn that duty flows from gratitude in the covenant of grace. The children of Israel, when they say, "All that the Lord has said, we will do," they do it with gratitude in their hearts because they're here only due to the grace of God. God hasn't said, "If you'll do all these things, I'll bring you out of Egypt." Where are they standing? They're standing in the wilderness of the Sinai. How did they get there? Through the Red Sea, through the plagues, through the redemptive grace of God. They're not there except by the grace of God, so their obedience is in response to the grace of God. It's not so that God will show them grace, but because God has shown them grace. We learn that right here, in verse 4 through 8.

III. The covenant is both the means and the end of God's saving design-binding relationship and fellowship.

But that's not all. We learn a third thing in verses 9-11, where the presence of God and communion with God are beautifully set forth. We learn that the covenant is both the means and the end of God's saving plan. In verse 9, all the representatives of Israel, every class of leadership, elders, priests, Moses, go up the mountain. But something astonishing happens. Something that every good child of Abraham knew could not happen without big trouble. They see God. They see a manifestation of God. Even in the next verse you find out that the expectation is that when a sinful human sees the awesome, the holy, the mighty God, it means death. It means certain death. But God in His mercy spares them.

Something very interesting happens. They see this manifestation of God and what happens? There is absolutely no description of God given. The description in [Exodus 24:10](#) is from the feet down. Now, if someone gives a description of you from the feet down, not just from the feet down, but from the bottom of the feet down, there's not a whole lot to go on. What's the point of the passage? What are the feet resting on? What does Moses

say that it looks like the feet are resting on? I know about the blue sapphirey-looking pavement stuff, the lapis lazuli, but what does it say that looks like? It looks like the sky. God is not part of the earth. God is not conjoined with the earth. God is not mother-earth. God rules over heaven and earth. He makes the earth His footstool, He's the sovereign God of heaven and earth. You're seeing the Creator-creature distinction pictured in the very manifestation of God that these, the leaders of Israel, see. He's not like us; He's above us; He's the Creator that brought everything into being, but He's not part of it, or under it, or surrounded by it. He's over it all. He's God over all, maker of heaven and earth.

God spares them, and in verse 11 we're told that they sit down and they eat a meal with God. The covenant is sealed with a meal, because to be brought into the covenant is to be brought into the family of God and to slide your knees up under the table of God, to sit down at His table as His children. And that meal that they eat symbolizes the sweetness of union and communion, the enjoyment of the presence of God which the people of God enjoy because of the covenant. You see, the covenant is a relationship that's for a relationship. It's a special relationship designed to save us out of the world and into His family, to save us from our sins into holiness so that we can be in an eternal relationship with Him forever. And it's set forth right here in verses 9-11.

IV. Our Lord Himself connects and explains His saving work on the cross with Moses' words in [Exodus 24:8](#).

But there's one last thing. Go back to verse 8. Jesus fulfills the blood of this covenant. Our Lord Jesus Himself connects and explains His saving work on the cross by using Moses' words in [Exodus 24:8](#). When Moses confirms that God has brought His people into a saving, covenant relationship, in [Exodus 24:8](#), he says, "Behold," as he sprinkles this blood on the people, "this is the blood of the covenant. This is the blood that seals the covenant. This is the blood that shows that you have been brought into covenant relationship with God. This is the blood that spares your judgment. This is the blood that unites you with the family of God. And on the night that Jesus was betrayed, on the night in which He stood in that upper room and the account of it is recorded in every one of the gospels and in John, Jesus lifts up the cup to explain what He is about to

do for the disciples the next day. He uses this phrase, this language from Exodus 24, and He says, “Behold, this is the blood of the covenant.” No, He doesn't! He says, “Behold, My blood of the covenant.” Jesus is saying that it is “My blood which is going to seal this covenant.”

You see, the author of Hebrews, in [Hebrews 10:4](#), explains to you that “the blood of bulls and goats cannot forgive sin and cannot cleanse the conscience.” And Jesus is looking to His disciples, He's looking into their eyes, and He knows that they know this passage, and He knows that they know the significance of that blood bringing the people of God into fellowship with God Himself, and He's saying, “My friends, that blood couldn't bring you into fellowship with God, but My blood can and will. Behold, My blood of the covenant.” And He adds in Mark, “which is shed for the forgiveness of your sins.” You can't worship God without that Mediator. There is no way into fellowship with the God who rules over heaven and earth, but by the name and merits and blood of Jesus Christ.

Franklin Graham is exactly right. “That Name is all we've got.” That's the one thing we've got. We've got one Mediator, and His blood, and His blood alone, brings us into fellowship with the living God. He fulfills this blood of the covenant, that we might worship and meet and commune and fellowship and put our knees under the table of God forever. Hallelujah, what a Savior. Let's pray.

O Lord, we cannot do justice to the awesomeness of what You displayed at Sinai but which You completely transcended at Golgotha. But we want to apprehend it and we want to glory in it, and we want to bathe in it, and we want to be strengthened in it, and we want to be changed by it, and we want to praise You for it. So grant us some inkling of a comprehension of the greatness, the height and depth and breadth of the love of God which is in Christ Jesus' blood of the covenant. This we ask in Jesus name, Amen.

Dispensationalism - A Reformed Evaluation

If you have your Bibles, I would invite you to turn with me to Romans chapter 2. I want to point your attention to two verses. We are going to begin today by making some observations about dispensationalism and then we are going to give a rapid overview to the Davidic Covenant and especially the establishment of the house of David in II Samuel 7. But first I want you to concentrate on two verses here at the end of Romans 2, 2:28-29. Hear God's Word.

“For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.”

Thus ends this reading of God's Holy Word. May He add His blessing to it. Let's look to Him in prayer

“Father, we thank you again for the opportunity to meet together as we study the history of theology, as we study your Word. We pray that both of those exercises would refresh us with the truth as well as brace us against error. And we pray that you would help us to embed the truth of your word in such a way as to live it out and to be competent to proclaim it to others for the sake of Christ and for His glory. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.”

You will see the logic of my reading that passage in a few moments as we discuss our topic today. I want to make a few comments to you today about the Theology of Dispensationalism. Those of you who have been reading Vern Poythress' book, ***Understanding Dispensationalists***, have already gotten some idea of the intricacies of the dispensational system and why dispensationalism and Covenant Theology are so diametrically opposed. I want to make a few historical comments about dispensationalism and then I want to make a few theological comments about dispensationalism with regard to different types of dispensationalism, and then I want to draw some contrasts between Covenant Theology and the more classic forms of dispensationalism. Let me start off with just some, some basic historical, theological comments.

A Brief Background to Dispensationalism

The dispensational system of theology, if we are honest, is actually a Nineteenth Century phenomenon. Now I don't want to get into an argument about these things. I know many good dispensationalists like to trace elements of dispensational teaching and belief way back into the history of the church. But as a historical theologian, and that is what I am by profession, I can pretty confidentially tell you that the system of dispensational theology is a Nineteenth Century phenomenon in the history of the church. It is particularly associated with John Nelson Darby and the Plymouth Brethren movement in Britain in the Nineteenth Century, and in America, with the name C.I. Scofield, Cyrus Ingersoll Scofield.

The dispensational movement created its own seminary in Dallas. And has for many years had control of a very theological journal, called, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, that has been sort of the official journal for dispensationalism. And many of you are aware of Dallas Seminary and of *Bib Sac* and of folks in the Bible Church movement, who would be very much indebted to the dispensationalist tradition.

Dispensationalism is not necessary committed in and of itself, for or against Calvinism and Arminianism. Earlier this century, for instance, you would have found many people who would have identified themselves as Calvinists and dispensationalists. And you would have found some who would have held basically to an Arminian theological framework been dispensationalist. On my best information, Dallas today would officially have sort of an ambiguous approach towards Calvinism. In other words, there wouldn't be an out and out denial of Calvinism. Yet in fact, I am told that there is still a great deal of fear and discomfort with Calvinism at Dallas Theological Seminary. There are reasons for that which I won't go into right now. They will become clear later on.

Dispensationalists, of course, see their theological system to be in opposition to Covenant Theology, or Federal Theology. All Federalists have been Calvinists, but not all Dispensationalists have been Calvinists. It is highly significant that a Dispensationalist may be either Calvinistic or Arminian. This is not comparing apples and oranges. There are several similarities between Dispensationalism and the Arminian alternative to Covenant Theology. Many dispensationalists, however,

contend that their system is simply an alternative to Federalism; both may be Calvinistic. But of course, rare is the dispensationalist who would aver that the 16th and 17th century Calvinists were dispensational. Most were Federalists.

Historically, they are separate systems. One began in the 16th century, the other in the 19th. Dispensationalists would see their theological system to be more biblical than Covenant Theology, and they should be seen as rivals. There is no one on either side of the Dispensational/Covenant Theology Debate who would say, "Well, both of these sides are half right, we just sort of need to combine the two of them." They are diametrically opposed at so many points that it would be hopeless to attempt to come up with sort of a hybrid of dispensationalism and Covenant Theology.

Differences - Eschatological

Now, the differences between Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology are not mainly in the area of Eschatology. When we say *Eschatology*, we are talking about usually the end time and especially the time of the coming of Christ. Dispensationalists are premillennial, because it is essential to their theological system, it is perhaps the fundamental point of Dispensationalism that Israel and the Church are distinct, and the Law-Gospel distinction must be preserved at all costs. That is the very heart and core of classic dispensationalism. You should never, ever mix up Law and Gospel, and you should never ever mix up Israel and the Church

Classic dispensational, in addition to being *premillennial*, is also *pretribulational*. Essentially, to say that one is premillennial means that one believes that Christ returns prior to the biblical millennium described in the book of Revelation chapter 20 and according to dispensationalists also mentioned elsewhere in the Scripture. To be *pretribulational*, means that you believe in a rapture of the church that occurs prior to the great Tribulation mentioned in the book of Revelation, and again hinted at in other places in the Old and the New Testaments. So classic dispensationalism has been both premillennial and it has been pretribulational.

For those of you who are familiar with eschatological views, for those who believe in a rapture, there are three views of a rapture. There is the *pre tribulational view*. That is the belief that Christians are raptured, or taken out of the world prior to the Great Tribulation.

There is the *mid tribulational view*. Believers are raptured out of the world in the midst of the Great Tribulation. And there is the *post tribulational view*. Which says that believers are raptured out of the world, or Christians are raptured out of the world, after the Great Tribulation. All classic dispensationalism, however, is premillennial and pretribulational. And I will explain why that is in just a few moments.

On the other hand, most Covenant Theologians have been either post- or amillennial. That is, they interpret the millennium described in Revelation 20 to be something that occurs prior to the return of Christ. Simply defined, postmillennial means that the coming of Christ is post, that is after the millenium, and amillennialism is just a sub category of post millennialism. You can only have two views at the time of the millenium. Christ is either coming before or after the millenium. Those are the only two possible views. So, amillennialism is a sub category of postmillennialism. All believers are either premillennialists or postmillennialists.

Amillennialists tend to stress the heavenly character of that millennium. They will, for instance, stress that the millennial reign is going on now, in heaven. It is a spiritual millenium. Whereas postmillennialists tend to stress a more earthly character to that millennium, and often times project it as a golden age which is yet to be experienced, but which will occur before the time of Christ. This is how many postmillennialists viewed it last century, B.B. Warfield, being a great example of that. If you want an example of Puritan postmillennialism, Iain Murray, ***The Puritan Hope***, describes the Puritans' view of the millenium and it was a post millenium view.

Now, there have been however, some who fall into the category of being Covenant Theologians who are premillennial. Horatius Bonar, Robert Murry McCheyne and some of the other great Scottish Calvinists last century. However, their type of premillennialism differs from

dispensational premillennialism. For one thing, they were almost always not pre tribulational in their view of their rapture teaching.

Differences – Literal Israel and the Church

Now, as we have said, eschatology is not the fundamental difference between Covenant Theology and dispensationalism, but eschatology is simply an implication of the fundamental difference. The fundamental difference is actually seen in the difference between Israel and the church.

Dispensationalism, and again, allow me to speak in generalities, if you have read books like ***Progressive Dispensationalism***, by Darrell L. Bock, and Craig A. Blaising, who are professors at Dallas, or have been professors at Dallas. You will know that Dispensationalists themselves acknowledge that there are multiple systems of Dispensational Theology, and Blaising and Bock come up with three basic categories of dispensationalism. They say there is *classic or historical* dispensationalism. There is *revised, or modified* dispensationalism. And there is *progressive* dispensationalism. And each of those different forms of dispensationalism have a slightly different twist on how Israel and church relate.

Now, allow me to paint in broad brush, right now, not for the sake of tarring and feathering someone, but at least trying to get us to the nub of the issue. The fundamental difference between Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism is this issue of Israel and the church. Dispensationalism stresses the literal fulfillment of prophecy about Israel and posits an essential difference between physical Israel and the church. If you have Dispensational friends who are discussing with you how you interpret Old Testament passages, and their fulfillment is seen in the New Covenant, almost always they will tell you something like this, “Well, I take the Bible literally and you are spiritualizing away these passages.” Now what they really mean by that is they take the term Israel, literally. Now, everybody has to acknowledge symbolic elements in prophecy. Anybody who has read dispensational interpretations of the book of Revelation will see that it is very clear that dispensationalists also have a very symbolic approach to the meaning of Scripture, but what they mean, whereas you think that these prophecies about Israel and Judah

in the Old Testament are fulfilled in the church and in the coming in of the Gentiles into the church, we dispensationalists do not believe that the Church is prophesied about in the Old Testament. And we believe that the prophecies about Israel and Judah in the Old Testament are to be literally fulfilled in Israel in Judah in the New Covenant.

Now, again, allow me to overstate it like that for emphasis. Because as you have already learned from Poythress, there are some dispensationalists who would want to say it differently than that. But we can't say everything at once, and we have got to start somewhere. So let me generalize like that. I don't think that it is an unfair characterization.

Now, Covenant Theology on the other hand, sees the Church as the fulfillment of Israel in New Covenant prophecy. Covenant Theology is happy to acknowledge the uniqueness of the Church, especially in its post Pentecost phase. But Covenant Theology sees all believers in essential continuity. There are not two peoples of God. There is one people of God.

Covenant Theologians would agree that the forms, and especially the institutional forms of those people of God, was different under the Old and under the New Covenant. The form of the people of God under the Old Covenant was expressed primarily in Israel, which was an ethnic, ecclesiastical and national community, whereas in the New Covenant, the form of the people of God is, the institutional form of the people of God, is the Church. And the Church in the New Testament is trans ethnic and trans national and purely ecclesiastical as opposed to ecclesiastical and civil. There is no question that there was a blending of matters civil and ecclesiastical in the Old Covenant for the people of God, but that is not the case in the New Covenant.

Dispensationalism, however, contends that God has two peoples with two destinies. And again, I am speaking of a classic form of dispensationalism. The two peoples of God, Israel and the Church, have two separate destinies. They see Israel, with the earthly millennial reign of David in the land of Israel restored to its Davidic and Solomonic boundaries. For the Church, there is heaven. So, for the dispensationalist, there are two peoples and two separate destinies,

whereas Covenant Theology going back to its concept of the Church and God's sovereign election from before the Creation, strenuously argues that there is only one people of God in all ages and there is only one destiny for all the people of God.

Now, you are beginning to see why I read Paul's words in Romans 2:28-29, because Paul obviously had a great concern to address precisely these kinds of issues. And in that passage, Paul makes it clear that not all Israel is Israel. Okay. So he makes it clear that Israel was from the very beginning a spiritual entity, even though there was an external aspect to Israel; that circumcision was not simply a matter of an outward form and sign, but that there was an inward spiritual reality which was necessary for fellowship with God.

And that is one of the disputed points between the Covenant Theology perspective and the Dispensationalists. The Covenant Theologian wants us to understand that Israel from the very beginning, had within her bounds, both the elect and the reprobate. And that God's promises were not made, as it were, as a shell simply to the external Israel, but to those who had indeed embraced and appropriated the promises of the Covenant with Abraham. God's plan is the same in the New Covenant as it was in the Old. And that is a disputed point between Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism.

Differences – Only One Plan From Eternity for All of God's People

Probably the greatest problem then, between Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology concerns God's saving purposes in the Old Testament. Some of the older Dispensationalists used to actually even argue that salvation was by works in the Old Testament and by faith in the New Testament. Now, Poythress is very careful to note that most Dispensationalists today don't argue that particular point of view. But that was a very common point of view in some of the older Dispensational writings. And of course, Covenant Theologians point out that that would contradict the essential Reformation doctrine of *sola gratia*, or salvation by grace alone, if that were the case. Salvation is not only now, by grace alone, the Reformers argued, it has always been by grace alone since the Fall.

Now, more mainstream dispensationalism has suggested that Old Testament believers were not saved by works, but by faith, but they differ from Covenant Theologians in their description of the nature of that faith. Some modern dispensationalists generally argue that the saving faith of the Old Testament was substantially and materially different from the saving faith of the New Testament. They tend to argue that sinners in the Old Testament were not justified by faith in the Gospel of the Messiah as sin-bearer (Christ crucified), but rather their faith was in promises that were peculiar to their individual era in redemptive history. So they may have received occasional messianic prophecy, but that was not essential to their saving faith, *per se*.

Now, this isn't just out of accord with Covenant Theology, but this is the area where dispensationalism has been most out of accord with Protestant theology. This is out of accord with all Calvinism, all Lutheranism, and even mainstream Anabaptist thought at the Reformation, who all taught that Old Testament believers were justified by faith in the coming Messiah as sin-bearer. These Old Testament believers all heard the Gospel, the Reformers argued. How? Through the prophecies and types. Therefore, the essential content of their faith was materially the same in all ages, including the NT. So though the New Covenant believer may have a firmer grasp on the Gospel, because the events of the Gospel are now retrospective for the New Covenant, yet the Gospel was set forth in shadows and in types to the Old Covenant believer. So that justifying faith in the Old Testament was in Messiah, was in Christ as sin bearer, and they were expecting His coming, whereas the New Covenant, looks back upon the finished work of Christ, the Messiah. That is a fundamentally Protestant point of view about saving faith in the Old Testament. And Dispensationalism tends to take issue with it.

So, the historic Protestant view is that the essential content of faith has been materially the same in all ages. Historical Protestant teaching is that no one has ever been justified except by faith in Christ crucified. That is the essence of the Reformation doctrine of *sola fide*, or salvation by faith alone. And so when classic forms of Dispensationalism disagree with that point, they are not just disagreeing with Covenant Theology,

they are also disagreeing with Protestantism as a whole. And in that light, you see why it is impossible to harmonize the two systems. That fundamental difference is at the core. Calvinism has always held that the saints in both Old and in New Testament are all in Christ. They are part of the body of Christ, part of the bride of Christ, because of God's election.

Major distinctions between Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism

Now, let's look then systematically at some differences between dispensationalism and Covenant Theology. And if you can picture two columns, with Dispensationalism on one side and Covenant Theology on the other side. What I am going to try and do is give you a contrast between classic Dispensationalism and classic Covenant Theology. And again, I do it, having already told you that you will find variations on these views in Dispensationalism and you may even find some variation on some of these views by Covenant Theologians, but I am trying to generalize in order to help you see the distinction. Many times I will have people say, "I have a hard time explaining the differences between Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology." I am giving these to help you understand.

First of all, Dispensationalists may be an Arminian or four point Calvinists, but Dispensationalists are almost never five point Calvinists. The point that they drop out, of course, is limited atonement. Covenant Theologians are, of course Calvinists by definition, of the five point variety. Covenant Theology, if it enforces anything, it enforces the Calvinistic doctrine of Limited Atonement. If Covenant Theology does anything, it sets in context a full orb'd Calvinist doctrine of Particular Redemption.

Secondly, Dispensationalists speak in terms of a literal interpretation of the Bible. This is a major rhetorical thing that you hear in discussion with Dispensationalist friends. "We interpret the Bible literally." Of course, the implication being that you don't. We interpret the Bible literally, you don't. You do something else to it. Whereas Covenant Theologians would argue, "We interpret the Bible literally, but, we believe that the New Testament interprets the Old Testament." We believe that

the New Testament is the hermanutical manual for the Old Testament. And Dispensationalists are suspicious of that. When you say that the New Testament must interpret the Old Testament, Dispensationalists get a little bit edgy, because they feel you are about to spiritualize something that the Old Testament has said for them very clearly. So that is a fundamental difference. The Covenant Theologian believes the New Testament has the final word as the meaning of that passage, whereas the Dispensationalists tends to want to interpret the Old Testament and then go to the New Testament and attempt to harmonize the particular teaching of the New Testament with their previous interpretation of that Old Testament passage, rather than allowing the New Testament fundamental hermaneutical control.

In a classic example of this, Scoffield himself tells you that the most important passage in the Bible, from a Dispensational perspective is Amos chapter 9. Well, of course, Amos chapter 9 is interpreted in Acts chapter 15, but the interpretation of Amos chapter 9, that is given in Acts chapter 15 is diametrically opposed to the central principle of Dispensationalism. So how does the Dispensationalist deal with that? Well, he gives you his “literal interpretation” of Amos 9 and then simply attempts to harmonize the teaching of Acts 15 with his previous literal interpretation of Amos 9, whereas the Covenant Theologian says no, “James tells you what Amos 9 means in Acts chapter 15, and therefore, James’ interpretation must exercise all hermenutical control even when you are doing your own original exegesis of Amos 9.” Because if James says that is what Amos 9 means, and James is speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit recorded in Acts chapter 15, then that is what Amos 9 means. So you see a fundamentally different approach to Old Testament and New Testament interpretation.

Thirdly, Dispensationalists do not accept the Protestant idea of the analogy of faith., that “Scripture interprets Scripture.” We find it in *The Westminster Confession*, you will find it in all of the Protestant confessions, and again, it gets back to that previous point that I was making. Dispensationalists are dubious about that principle, because they think that it is a way to spiritualize away literal prophecies in the Old Testament. And, very frankly, if you have classic Dispensational friends,

they will suspect you as being just a little bit liberal, because you spiritualize away literal prophecies. Even if you say you believe in inerrancy, in authority, and inspiration, there will be a concern that you are hermeneutically actually spiritualizing away the meaning of Scripture. So they do not accept the analogy of faith.

Thirdly, on the Covenant Theology side, of course, we accept the analogy of faith. Scripture interprets Scripture. And for the Covenant Theologian, the New Covenant always has the final word as to the meaning of the Old Covenant passage. It doesn't mean that you don't start with the original context, and that you don't bother yourself about original intent, it just means that you recognize from a biblical theological standpoint that later revelation, by definition, controls the final Systematic Theological understanding of earlier revelation.

Fourth, for the Classic Dispensationalist, Israel always means the literal physical descendants of Jacob. For the Covenant Theologian, Israel may mean the literal physical descendants of Jacob, or it may mean spiritual Israel which may be a subset of literal physical Israel, or it may actually be larger than the subset of literal physical Israel. It could refer to Gentiles as well. And that, is of course, is precisely the point that Dispensationalists must argue against

Fifth, Dispensationalists say that Galatians 6:16, where Paul uses the phrase *the Israel of God* actually means *physical Israel alone*. However, Covenant Theologians tend to argue that Israel of God in Galatians 6:16 is a reference to spiritual Israel, paralleling it with Paul's other statements, for instance, in Galatians 3:29, Romans 2:20-28, which we read today, Romans 9:6 and Philipians 3:3.

Sixthly, for Dispensationalists, God has two peoples with two separate destinies: Israel with an earthly destiny, and the Church with a heavenly destiny. The Covenant Theologian, God has always had only one people. And though there is a sense in, however, views the church as a post Pentecost phenomenon, understands there is also a sense in which the Church is simply the people of God in all ages.

Seventh, for the Dispensationalists, the Church began at Pentecost, not

before. The people of God in the Old Testament were Israel, while the people of God in the New Testament are the church. Seventh on the Covenant Theology side, the church began with Adam, and of course, reaches its fulfillment and culmination in the New Testament. Covenant Theologians would point to the passages like Acts 7:38 where Stephen speaks about what? He is speaking of the Church in the wilderness, when he is actually speaking of Israel in the wilderness. .

Eighth, according to classic Dispensationalism, the Church was not prophesied about in the Old Testament. There is no mention of the church in the Old Testament. It was a mystery until the New Testament. For Covenant Theologians, there are many Old Testament prophecies that speak of the Church.

Ninth, all Old Testament and prophecies about Israel are for the literal Israel, not for the Church. For the Dispensationalists, all Old Testament prophecies are for Israel, for physical Israel or for the literal Israel, but not for the church. For a Covenant Theologian, some Old Testament prophecies pertain to literal Israel, and some pertain to a spiritual Israel.

Tenth. The Church. For the Dispensational side, the Church is a parenthesis in God's program for the ages. It is a temporary thing in the flow of history. You have heard the phrase The Great Parenthesis, which is used to the time when Messiah came and the Jews shockingly rejected Him. This actually thwarted God's plan, because the original plan was for Messiah to come and set up a kingdom in Israel, but oops, the Jews rejected Him. At that point the prophetic clock stopped and we entered into the period of the Gentiles, the Great Parenthesis. That is a period about which there was no prophecy in the Old Testament. At the end of the period of the Great Parenthesis, the end of the time of the Gentiles, as the Dispensationalists interpret that section in Romans chapter 11, the Church is removed. That is the rapture. Then the prophetic clock starts ticking again, and God's dealings with Israel resume.

And by the way, that gives you a clue as to why a pre tribulation rapture is so important for consistent classical Dispensationalism, because you have to get rid of Gentile believers in the program of God, before you can get on with the work that God is doing with literal physical earthly Israel.

And that is why mid-trib and post-trib Dispensationalism does not work; because you are mixing up God's dealings with the church and through earthly Israel. So, pre tribulational rapturist functions in Dispensationalist eschatology to remove the Church so that God's program for Israel can resume. You get the Church out of the way before the tribulation, and then things start happening amongst the Jews. By the way, this stuff is hot on the market again. The Tim LaHaye, *Left Behind* novels are out, and I guarantee people in your congregations are reading them. I don't care where you are going, where you are attending, I guarantee you there are some people there that are reading those novels and they are really old, classic dispensationalism where some people disappear one day and others are left behind.

On the other hand, for Covenant Theologians, the Church is the culmination of God's saving purposes for the ages. The Church is God's great masterpiece. It is the bride of Christ, the body of Christ.

Eleven. For Dispensationalism in its classic form, the main heir to Abraham's covenant was Isaac and literal Israel. The main heir to Abraham's covenant was Isaac and literal Israel. The Covenant Theologian understands that the main heir to Abraham's covenant was Christ and spiritual Israel; and spiritual Israel is all who have faith in Him.

Twelve. For Dispensationalism, of course, there is no covenant of redemption within the Trinity. There is no intertrinitarian covenant. For Covenant Theology, however, there is an intertrinitarian covenant which effects election.

Thirteen. For Dispensationalists, there was no Covenant of Works with Adam in the Garden. Whereas, Covenant Theology believes that God made a conditional covenant of works with Adam as representative for all his posterity.

Fourteen. Furthermore, for Dispensationalism, there was no Covenant of Grace with Adam. Whereas for Covenant Theology, God made a Covenant of Grace with Christ and His people including Adam.

Fifteenth, for Dispensationalism, Israel was rash to accept the Covenant at Mt. Sinai. You remember we read that Scofield said, "That was a big mistake. The children of Israel should have said, 'We don't want law, we want grace.'" For Covenant Theology, Israel didn't have a choice as to whether to accept the covenant arrangement at Sinai. It wasn't an option.

Sixteenth. For Dispensationalism, the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31 is for literal Israel. The New Covenant of Jeremiah 31 was for literal Israel and is not fulfilled in Luke 22:20. For the Covenant Theologian, the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31 is the same as the New Covenant spoken of by the Lord Jesus in Luke 22. And both are for spiritual Israel.

Seventeen. For classic Dispensationalists, God's program in history is mainly through separate dispensations. And for Covenant Theologians, God's program in history is mainly through related and progressive covenants. So naturally you would expect Dispensationalism to stress what? Discontinuity in redemptive history, while Covenant Theology stresses continuity, although that is not an absolute for either.

Eighteen. As we have mentioned before, some Dispensationalists have argued that salvation was by works in the Old Testament, whereas Covenant Theology argues that no man has been saved by works since the fall. Salvation is by grace.

Also, nineteenth, many Dispensationalists teach that the nature of Old Testament faith is different from the nature of New Testament faith. The nature of Old Testament and New Testament faith is different. Whereas Covenant Theologians argue that all those who have ever been saved, have been saved by faith in Christ as their sin bearer, though that has been progressively revealed with greater fullness as God unfolded His plan of redemption.

Twentieth. Classic Dispensationalists will argue that the Old Testament sacrifices were not recognized by the Old Testament saints as Gospel types. They were only seen as such in retrospect. Whereas Covenant Theologians will argue that the Old Testament believers believed in the Gospel of the Messiah as sin bearer through the sacrifices their types and

prophecies.

Twenty-one. Dispensationalists argue that the Holy Spirit only indwells New Testament believers; He did not indwell Old Testament believers. And He will not indwell believers after the rapture. And of course, the Covenant Theologian argues that there is no such thing as a believer who is not indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

Twenty-second. Dispensationalists teach that Jesus made an offer of the kingdom to literal Israel, but Israel rejected it and so the kingdom was postponed. Covenant Theologians teach that Jesus of course proclaimed the kingdom of heaven, which from the outset was a spiritual kingdom, and though it was rejected by many Jews, it was also accepted by many Jews and Gentiles alike.

Twenty-third. Dispensationalists teach that Old Testament believers are not in Christ. They are not part of the body or bride of Christ. That is the Dispensational view. On the Covenant Theology side, believers in all ages are in Christ.

Twenty-fourth. Dispensationalists teach that the law has been abolished for believers in the New Covenant. Or, should I put it this way, for believers in the church age. And some will go as far as to argue that the Sermon on the Mount is not for Christians. The Sermon on the Mount is for the kingdom age, and so we can only indirectly learn from the Sermon on the Mount. In contrast, the Covenant Theology teaches that the law continues to have three uses in the New Covenant: to restrain sin, to lead to Christ, and to instruct Christians in godliness. Those are the three uses of the law.

Twenty-five. Dispensationalists teach that Old Testament laws are not in effect unless they are repeated in the New Covenant or in the New Testament. And of course, Covenant Theologians teach that the Old Testament moral law remains in effect in the New Covenant, though the civil and ceremonial laws have been abrogated.

Twenty-six. For the Dispensationalists, the millennium is the kingdom of God. For Covenant Theologians, the kingdom of God is much broader

than merely the millennium. The church is its institutional form, and Covenant Theologians are usually amillennial or post millennial.

Twenty-seventh. Dispensationalists believe that Old Testament animal sacrifices will be restored in the millennium, whereas Covenant Theologians believe that the Old Testament sacrifices were fulfilled in Christ and have been abolished forever.

And finally, classic Dispensationalists teach that David will reign on the millennial throne in Jerusalem in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. And Covenant Theologians teach that Christ is reigning on the throne and His saints will rule under Him and the new earth. That is a quick outline.

Dispensationalism

1. May be Arminian or modified Calvinist. Almost never 5-point Calvinist.
2. Stresses 'literal' interpretation of the Bible.
3. Usually does not accept the idea of the 'Analogy of Faith.'
4. 'Israel' always means only the literal, physical descendants of Jacob.
5. 'Israel of God' in Gal. 6:16 means physical Israel alone.
6. God has 2 peoples with 2 separate destinies: Israel (earthly) and the Church (heavenly).
7. The Church was born at Pentecost.
8. The Church was not prophesied as such in the O.T. but was a hidden mystery until the N.T.
9. All O.T. prophecies for 'Israel', are for literal Israel, not the Church.
10. God's main purpose in history is literal Israel.

11. The Church is a parenthesis in God's program for the ages.
12. The main heir to Abraham's covenant was Isaac and literal Israel.
13. There was no eternal Covenant of Redemption within the Trinity.
14. There was no Covenant of Works with Adam in the Garden of Eden.
15. There was no Covenant of Grace concerning Adam.
16. Israel was rash to accept the Covenant at Mt. Sinai.
17. The 'New Covenant' of Jer. 31:31- 34 is only for literal Israel and is not the New Covenant of Lk. 22:20
18. God's program in history is mainly through separate dispensations.
19. Some Dispensationalists have said that O.T. sinners were saved by works.
20. Most Dispensationalists teach that men in the O.T. were saved by faith in a revelation peculiar to their Dispensation, but this did not include faith in the Messiah as their sin-bearer.
21. The O.T. sacrifices were not recognized as the Gospel or types of the Messiah as sin-bearer, but only seen as such in retrospect.
22. The Holy Spirit indwells only believers in the Dispensation of Grace, not O.T. and not after the Rapture.
23. Jesus made an offer of the literal Kingdom to Israel; since Israel rejected it, it is postponed.
24. O.T. believers were not 'in Christ,' nor part of the Body or Bride of Christ.
25. The Law has been abolished.
26. O.T. laws are no longer in effect unless repeated in the N.T.

27. The Millennium is the Kingdom of God Dispensationalists are always Pre-Millennial and usually Pre-Tribulational.

28. The O.T. animal sacrifices will be restored in the Millennium.

29. The Millennium will fulfill the Covenant to Abraham. Israel has a future.

30. David will sit on the Millennial throne in Jerusalem.

COVENANT THEOLOGY

1. Always Calvinist. Usually 5 point.

2. Accepts both literal and figurative interpretation of the Bible.

3. Almost always accepts the idea of the 'Analogy of Faith.'

4. 'Israel' may mean either literal, physical descendants of Jacob or the figurative, spiritual Israel, depending on context.

5. 'Israel of God' in Gal. 6:16 means spiritual Israel, parallel to Gal. 3:29, Rom. 2:28-29, 9:6, Phil. 3:3.

6. God has always had only 1 people, the Church gradually developed.

7. The Church began in the O.T. (Acts 7:38) and reached fulfillment in the N.T.

8. There are many O.T. prophecies of the N.T. Church.

9. Some O.T. prophecies are for literal Israel, others are for spiritual Israel.

10. God's main purpose in history is Christ and secondarily the Church.

11. The Church is the culmination of God's saving purpose for the ages.

12. The main heir to Abraham's covenant was Christ and spiritual Israel.
13. The eternal Covenant of Redemption was within the Trinity to effect election.
14. God made a conditional Covenant of Works with Adam as representative for all his posterity.
15. God made a Covenant of Grace with Christ and His people, including Adam
16. Israel was right to accept the Covenant at Mt. Sinai.
17. The 'New Covenant' of Jer. 31 is the same as in Lk. 22; both are for spiritual Israel according to Heb. 8.
18. God's program in history is mainly through related covenants.
19. No man has ever been saved by works, but only by grace.
20. All men who have ever been saved have been saved by faith in Christ as their sin-bearer, which has been progressively revealed in every age.
21. O.T. believers believed in the Gospel of Messiah as sin-bearer mainly by the sacrifices as types and prophecies.
22. The Holy Spirit has indwelt believers in all ages, especially in the present N.T. era, and will not be withdrawn.
23. Jesus made only an offer of the spiritual Kingdom, which was rejected by literal Israel but has gradually been accepted by spiritual Israel.
24. Believers in all ages are all 'in Christ' and part of the Body and Bride of Christ.
25. The Law has 3 uses: to restrain sin in society, to lead to Christ, and to instruct Christians in godliness. The ceremonial laws have been abolished; the civil laws have been abolished except for their general equity; the moral laws continue.

26. O.T. laws are still in effect unless abrogated in the N.T.

27. The Church is the Kingdom of God. Covenanters are usually Amillennial , sometimes Pre-Millennial or Post-Millennial, rarely Pre-Tribulational.

28. The O.T. sacrifices were fulfilled and forever abolished in Christ.

29. Christ fulfilled the Covenant to Abraham. Some Covenanters believe in a future for literal Israel, most don't.

30. Christ alone sits on the throne. Saints rule under Him.

The Davidic Covenant

If you have your Bibles, I would invite you to turn with me to 2 Samuel 7. We are going to rapidly overview to the Davidic Covenant and especially the establishment of the house of David in II Samuel 7

The Davidic Covenant

Robertson says that the climax of the Old Covenant is found in the coming of the kingdom in David's day. When the king sits on his throne, the kingdom has come. That principle holds true for both the Old and the New Covenant eras. To understand this, we will first look at II Samuel 7 and then I would like to set the context for this Davidic Covenant. Let's hear God's Word in II Samuel 7:

Now it came about when the king lived in his house, and the LORD had

given him rest on every side from all his enemies, that the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within tent curtains." And Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your mind, for the LORD is with you." But it came about in the same night that the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying, "Go and say to My servant David, 'Thus says the LORD,' Are you the one who should build Me a house to dwell in? "For I have not dwelt in a house since the day I brought up the sons of Israel from Egypt, even to this day; but I have been moving about in a tent, even in a tabernacle. "Wherever I have gone with all the sons of Israel, did I speak a word with one of the tribes of Israel, which I commanded to shepherd My people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?'" ' "Now therefore, thus you shall say to My servant David, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts," I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be ruler over My people Israel. "And I have been with you wherever you have gone and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make you a great name, like the names of the great men who are on the earth. "I will also appoint a place for My people Israel and will plant them, that they may live in their own place and not be disturbed again, nor will the wicked afflict them any more as formerly, even from the day that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. The LORD also declares to you that the LORD will make a house for you. "When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. "He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. "I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, but My loving kindness shall not depart from him, as I took *it* away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. "And your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever." "" In accordance with all these words and all this vision, so Nathan spoke to David." Thus ends God's word.

Context of the Davidic Covenant

Let me set the context of this great passage. This passage offers one of

the most significant moments in God's dealing with His people under the Old Covenant, because the establishment of the house of David is an integral part in God's master plan to crush the head of the serpent. For instance, Psalm 78, verses 67-72, makes it clear that the placement of David on the throne was of major significance in God's redemptive purpose and was essential to the establishment of godly rule in Israel. God had brought His people out of Egypt. He had given them a good land. He had driven out their enemies. But because of their sinfulness in the days of the judges, God was angered and delivered them into the hands of their enemies. And then, Psalm 78 tells us that God came to their rescue, established sanctuary and remedied their sin. He paved the way for righteousness in setting up His servant David as the shepherd of Israel, as the servant king on the throne.

So the book of II Samuel records four important events which provide the context for II Samuel 7. II Samuel 7 is the formal inauguration of the Covenant of God with David. It is the formal inauguration of the Davidic Covenant. But there are four important events that provide the context to this passage. And here they are.

First, the long civil war in Israel between the forces of Saul and David was brought to an end. And David was recognized as king. II Samuel 5:3 says, "So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and King David made a covenant with them before the LORD at Hebron; then they anointed David king over Israel." And we are told in II Samuel 5:10 that David responded to this in this way: David perceived that the Lord had established him as king over Israel and that He had exalted his kingdom for His people Israel's sake. Now that is not an insignificant statement on David's part, because you remember David's whole plan for the unification of the kingdom was jeopardized by the wickedness of his general, Joab.

You also remember Abner had come to David and wanted to establish with some sort of peace agreement between the forces of Saul and the forces of David. Abner was the lead general for Saul, and continued to run the opposition even after the death of Saul in the civil war. And Abner had come to David, at Hebron and he had made a pact with him, and he said, look, I am going back to the armies of Saul and I am going to

tell them, lay down your arms, we are going to follow David. And you can imagine how David's heart would have been lifted by the prospect of the end of this long civil war. And it wasn't just a civil war, remember, it was a holy war in the eyes of those who were fighting it. Those on both sides had fundamental religious principles at stake as well as political principles at stake. And what happened to Abner? Joab found out what Abner had done, Joab feared that Abner would displace him as the lead assistant and general, and Joab independently of David's knowledge, called Abner to come and meet him and he killed him.

Now you can imagine, if you can pick up on the rumors that fly around our President today, okay, you can imagine the kind of things that were said about David in Israel when that happened. You know, ah ha, David lured good Abner to his palace to cut this deal and Abner cut this deal and what did he do? He literally stabbed him in the back. You can imagine that from David's standpoint, this looked like the end of any possibility of any reconciliation between these two forces, because Abner was an honorable man. But Joab hated him for a variety of reasons that I won't go into right now, and Joab jeopardized the whole plan. So when God finally brought an end to this war, David really did realize that it was God who had given Israel into his hands, because he couldn't have conceived now anything but utterly wiping out the other side, ever bringing an end to animosity between those two warring groups, so that is the first thing that happens in setting up what happens in II Samuel 7. We see an end to the civil war. David is established as king in the land.

Secondly, in II Samuel 5, verses 6 and 7, we learn that David captures the stronghold of the Jebusites in Jerusalem and he made it his capital. We are told in II Samuel 5, verses 6 and 7, that the king and his men went to Jerusalem, to the Jebusites to the inhabitants of the land, and David took the stronghold of Zion, the same as the City of David. Up until that time, David's king, his capital had been among the Southern tribes in Hebron, and this move to Jerusalem which occupied a strategically central location between the Northern and Southern tribes, a strategic location for transport and warfare and communication, thus became his capital. And of course, that was an important step in establishing the unity of Israel. The Jebusites had long been a thorn in the flesh of the Israelites,

who had not obeyed the Lord in driving them out of the land in the original conquest. So now, David finally drives the Jebusites out of Zion.

Third, in II Samuel 6, verses 16 and 17, we see that David brings the Ark of the Lord to Jerusalem. This is the third aspect or event that sets the stage for the establishment of the Davidic Covenant. This emphasized the close connection between David's kingship, and the rule of God in Israel. The ark represented the throne of God, the presence of God, the rule of God, amongst His people. And to bring the ark into the capital, to the same location, was to emphasize that David's reign in Israel was reflective of the rule of God in Israel. The king of Israel would rule under the direct command of God, whose presence was symbolized in the form of the ark.

Fourth, we are told in II Samuel 7 verse 1, that the Lord had given David rest from all his enemies. In other words, God gave David's kingdom an unprecedented security from the adversaries that had been such a threat to the very existence to the nation. The Lord has finally brought a level of peace not experienced heretofore in Israel, here at that advent of David's reign.

So all four of these things provide the context for what read in II Samuel 7 verses 1-3. And I direct your attention there. Now in the context of the culmination of those four things, David pours the thoughts of his heart out to his faithful prophet Nathan. He says, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within tent curtains." David sensed the incongruity of his living in an impressive palace while the Ark of God was still in a tent. I mean if David was in a palace of cedar, surely, God's ark ought to be an impressive structure. David's own humility and his love for the Lord moved him with the desire to bring about a change in that situation and he shared that desire with Nathan, his friend, his prophet. And Nathan perceiving the king's sincere motivation, gave his blessing on the project, which was implied in his words to David. He said, "go and do all that is in your heart, for the Lord is with you."

Now some have suggested that Nathan here spoke a prophetic word that did not come true. since God subsequently instructed David not to go through with the building. However, I want to note, first, that Nathan

was absolutely correct when he said, the Lord is with you. The Lord Himself affirms that in verse 9. I was with you wherever you went. The hand of the Lord was indeed upon His servant David.

And second, as Matthew Henry reminded us a long time ago, Nathan spoke this not in God's name, but as from himself, not as a prophet, but as a wise and good man. And we are going to see in the very way that God corrected David here and forestalled this event coming about. God, Himself, protected both David, and Nathan's reputation in the way He went about doing this. Look at verses 4-7 now, here we see God's response. The Lord's gracious response is recorded in these verses, the same night that David had shared this with Nathan, and Nathan had said to him, "Go and do it, the Lord is with you," the Lord came to Nathan and He instructed him to put a question to David. He said, "Go and say to My servant David, 'Thus says the LORD,' Are you the one who should build Me a house to dwell in?" Now look at how good and wise our sovereign Lord is in the way he sends these words to David. He gives these words to David from the mouth of Nathan and not from another prophet, so that the reputation of Nathan would not be impugned. I mean, what would it have been like, if God had sent another prophet to tell this to David. It would have looked like Nathan had spoken wrongly. But God is good and He allows Nathan to be the one to deliver this news. And think how perplexing it would have been to David to have had Nathan tell him during the day, the Lord is with you, go and do likewise and then another prophet shows up and says don't do it. So the Lord's wisdom and kindness is seen in the way that He delivers this message to David. David is not confused and Nathan's reputation is not damaged.

Furthermore, the Lord came immediately to Nathan, before David could act on the prophet's words of encouragement, and thus he spared both of them from embarrassment. Finally, note that the Lord does not speak a sharp rebuke to David. The Lord does not speak a sharp rebuke to David. He honors His servant's holy desires by giving His contrary instructions gently in the form of a question. In fact, we later find out from the lips of David's son, Solomon, that the Lord told David that He was pleased with what David wanted to do. Turn with me to I Kings. I Kings, chapter 8, verses 18-19. "But the LORD said to my father David,

'Because it was in your heart to build a house for My name, you did well that it was in your heart.' So Solomon tells you that the Lord said to David that He was pleased with the desires of his heart, even though it was the Lord's plan for Solomon to build this house, not David. Then, in verse 6, the Lord reminds David of an important spiritual truth. He says, "For I have not dwelt in a house since the day I brought up the sons of Israel from Egypt, even to this day; but I have been moving about in a tent, even in a tabernacle." And I want you to stop for a moment and think how profound those words are.

First, they point to God's willingness to identify with His people. If His people must travel in the wilderness in tents, God is going to be there with them. The sovereign God of Israel is not removed from His people, He is nigh unto His people, and He even shares in their humiliations. Is this not a foretaste of Christ's tabernacling with His people. And yet, you see it here in the sovereign God of Israel.

Secondly, these words emphasize God's continual presence with His people. He is not distant or unconcerned. But He is near. He is even in the midst of His people. And our glorious Lord Jesus Christ would one day show forth beyond all human expectation, the extent of God's commitment to be with His people, when John tells us in John 1:14, that "He was made flesh and He dwelt, He tabernacled among us." Now in verses 8-17, we see that covenant which God inaugurates here with David. The Lord surpasses Himself in blessing David. He reminds David that it was He who chose him and made him ruler. "I took you from herding sheep, from following the sheep to be my ruler over my people, over Israel." He has been with David, He has given him victory over His enemies, He is the one who has made David great, He is the one who will make David great. "I was with you wherever you went. I have cut off all your enemies out of your sight." I have made you a great name, like to the names of the great men that are in the earth, verse 9.

Furthermore, God says in verse 11, He will establish His people in their own land and He will give them rest from their enemies. And ultimately, again, verse 11, the Lord Himself will build David a house. Nathan tells David that God will make you a house. Now notice here the play on words. David had begun this passage by saying, that he wanted to build

a *house* for the Lord. Of course, by that, he meant a *temple*. Now as you know, the word for house, means palace. And the word for temple, or house, means temple, and the word for dynasty are all the same word in Hebrew. And so there is a play on words going on here. David says Lord, I want to build you a house,” meaning a temple, “because it is not right for me to be in a house,” meaning a palace, “and “You dwell in a tent. And God comes back and He says, “David, will you build Me a house,” meaning a temple? “No. I will build you a house,” meaning a dynasty. The Lord was not speaking of building David a house of cedar. He was speaking of building David a dynasty. That is something that He has not given to Saul. Saul wanted Jonathan to sit on the throne and God told Saul that Jonathan would not sit on the throne of Israel. But now God is saying to David, “David, your sons will sit on the throne of Israel.” So, the Lord says, “You will not build Me a house, a temple, but I will build you a house, a dynasty.” He would establish David and his seed after him, as the monarchs of the people of God.

The Covenant with David Established.

Now in these words and the following, we have the formal inauguration of God’s covenant with David, though the word covenant is not found here. Other passages explicitly state that this was a covenant inauguration. For instance Psalm 89, verses 3 and 4, “I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn to David, My servant, your seed will I establish forever and build up your throne to all generations.” You will also find that in Psalm 132. So later passages make this clear that this is a covenant inauguration.

Now, the covenant insures a number of blessings to David. First, his own flesh and blood will occupy the throne. And when thy days be fulfilled and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, and I will set up thy seed after thee which shall proceed out of your body, I will establish his kingdom.” Verse 12. This is no small promise, given the political instability of the near east kingdoms of David’s time, or for today for that matter.

Secondly, David’s heir will fulfill David’s desire by building a house for God. In verse 13, God says, “He shall build a house for My name.”

Third, David’s heir will stand in unique relationship to God. God will be

his father, and he will be His son. Nathan proclaims that amazing word, “I will be his father and he will shall be My son.”

Now, we who live under the New Covenant, and who have the precious privilege of addressing God as Father, may not be too startled by that statement, but to the Hebrew ear, it would have been unbelievable. Nowhere else in the Old Testament is an individual so clearly designated a son of God. And yet that is the blessing of David’s covenant.

Fourth, David’s heir may experience punishment for sins, but he will not be cast off like Saul. We are likely to read verse 14, very negatively. Look at that second phrase in verse 14, “when he commits inequity, I will correct him with the rod of men and strokes of the sons of man.” On the surface, that looks very negative. However, you need to understand that in the context of Saul’s having been cut off, so that is actually a very positive thing that is being said there. If he stumbles, and he will, like Saul, I will not cut him off. I will discipline him, but I will not cut him off. This of course, proved important in the days of Solomon’s disobedience as well as for many of the kings of Judah.

Fifth and finally, God makes the astonishing promise that David’s kingdom will last forever. “Your house, your kingdom will be established forever before Me.” Your throne will be established forever. It is worth noting that David’s dynasty is without parallel in the ancient near east in length of duration. His house ruled Judah for over four hundred years, for longer than the greatest Egyptian dynasty, and in stark contrast, to the numerous ruling families in the Northern kingdom. I am told that there has never been a longer reign of a single dynasty in any land in the history of the world than David’s four hundred year dynastic reign.

The Davidic Covenant Fulfilled

But of course, the promise was not that David would reign for a long time, but that he would reign forever. That very fact lead the prophets of the Old Testament to see that this Davidic promise would only be fulfilled in the Messiah, and that is of course exactly how the New Testament interprets it. This reign is ultimately only fulfilled in the reign of the son of David, Jesus Christ and His eternal messianic rule. This promise finds its ultimate fulfillment only in the reign of Christ. The succession of the

Davidic kings under the Old Covenant was a type. It was a shadowy figure. A preillustration of the unbroken eternal reign of the Lord Jesus, who even now reigns at the right hand in heaven.

And this, by the way, is one of the classic examples of why we should not allow the Old Testament pattern of description to determine our understanding of the New Testament reality. Or else, you will end up with the old time Dispensationalists believing that one day, David is going to be reestablished on the throne in literal, earthly Israel. Of course, the New Testament in passages like Hebrews 1:5, makes it clear that the Davidic reign was prophetic of Christ's reign. The reality is, by definition, clearer than the shadow. So you interpret the shadow by the reality, not the reality by the shadow. If the Davidic reign was a foreshadowing of the ultimate reality, surely you allow your understanding of the ultimate reality to help you understand what the foreshadowing meant, rather than the other way around.

Question: Is there a covenant sign in the Davidic covenant?

The short answer is no. There is no covenant sign mentioned in the Davidic Covenant as a specific covenant sign. But if there is any symbol of the Davidic covenant, it would be the throne. And let me just give you one example of that. If you would turn with me to I Chronicles 29, verse 22, "they made Solomon, the son of David, king a second time, and they anointed him as ruler for the Lord and Zadok as priest. Then, Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord." Yes, you read it right. Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord. You see there, what? An identification between the rule of God in Israel, and the rule of David in his seed. And so the throne in the Davidic Covenant functions to epitomize the message of the covenant with David. The teaching of, the prophetic teaching of the covenant of David, points us mostly to an understanding of two things. Jesus, office as king, and Jesus preaching of the kingdom. And that throne both points to the office of David and his descendants as the unique divinely appointed king of Israel, and to the rule of God in Israel, because God is even willing to call the throne of David, the throne of Yahweh. So that is quite an extraordinary statement there in I Chronicles. And clearly the Chronicler has a theological agenda behind that. He is showing you the significance of the Davidic line in the plan of

God. He is preparing you for the significance of the split of the nation and the wickedness that occurs from that, and he is relating it to the rejection of that divinely appointed throne of the line of David.

Old Testament Prophecies of the New Covenant-

The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament and the New Testament - The Covenant in the New Testament

I want to look at Jeremiah 31, because that is obviously the only passage in the prophetic literature which uses the terminology *New Covenant*. That terminology of New Covenant becomes very, very significant in the New Testament itself. It is picked up by the author of Hebrews, but it is also mentioned in the Last Supper narrative by the Lord Jesus Himself, as He explains the meaning of His death. And if that alone had occurred in the New Testament, that would indicate the extreme significance of the concept of *New Covenant* for explaining the meaning of the death of Christ. So we are going to look at that prophetic passage.

But we are also going to mention the fact that even in passages where the terminology of *New Covenant* is not used in the Old Testament, the concept of *New Covenant* is very present. For instance, there are other passages in Jeremiah's book where he doesn't use the terminology of New Covenant, but mentions the same basic theological concepts which he mentions specifically in Jeremiah 31.

Old Testament Prophecies of the New Covenant

One of the exercises that I am going to commend to you for your own biblical theological research in the Old Testament is to begin to build a catalog of passages from the prophets which refer to the concept of the *New Covenant* without referring to or using the terminology of the New Covenant. And then begin to collate those, and as you do, you will begin to see very similar themes coming out. And we will do enough of that today that you will get at least an idea of how this may be helpful in understanding the prophetic idea of the New Covenant.

And then having done that, I want to look briefly with you at the whole issue of the role of the Holy Spirit in the Old and the New Covenant. I have already had a couple of you raise that very good question in

connection with some previous lectures. Well, today is the day that we are going to get that. I am going to try and look with you, at least in outline, at the function of the Holy Spirit under the Old Covenant administration of the Covenant of Grace, and under the New Covenant administration of the Covenant of Grace. And we can attempt to explain why the New Testament uses such extreme language when it indicates that the New Covenant is the era of the Holy Spirit in distinction from the Old Covenant. How can that language be used? Does that language mean that the Holy Spirit was not operating in the Old Covenant? Or, in what way is the New Covenant distinctively the era of the Spirit? So, that is a very significant biblical theological issue. It impacts all sorts of issues in the Christian life from soteriology, to your doctrine of sanctification. So we are going to look at that briefly today. That is the second thing we are going to look at and then depending on how much time we have left, we are going to try and begin plowing through the New Testament itself, and looking at how it uses the Covenant concept in its own theology. And basically we are going to begin by cataloging every reference to the term covenant in the New Testament and looking at the theological context. So we will begin working through that way. So, for those of you who have been concerned that we just haven't had enough biblical content in this course, we'll try and amend that today.

In Jeremiah 31, we are going to begin with a prophecy in verse 27:

"Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and with the seed of beast. "And it will come about that as I have watched over them to pluck up, to break down, to overthrow, to destroy, and to bring disaster, so I will watch over them to build and to plant," declares the LORD. "In those days they will not say again, 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.' "But everyone will die for his own iniquity; each man who eats the sour grapes, his teeth will be set on edge. "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them, "declares the LORD. "But

this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. "And they shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

Thus far the reading of God's holy Word. Let's pray together.

"Heavenly Father, we thank You for this passage. We thank You for the significance of it in the life of the church, for the way it has impacted us as we have heard it referred to in the taking of the Lord's Supper, and in the preaching of the Gospel itself. We pray that we would understand more of it as we study it today. Pray that we would appreciate the prophetic preparation for the New Covenant which You set forth through Your faithful prophets, Isaiah, Ezekiel and Jeremiah, and others. And we ask that You would give us a greater understanding of this, in order that we might proclaim the truth. But even more fundamentally, than that, that we might ourselves have our breath taken away by the glory of the grace of the Gospel. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen."

Now, as I have just mentioned, Jeremiah is the only prophet to use the term, *New Covenant*. That is a unique term in the Old Testament. In fact, it is unique to this passage. The concept of New Covenant is only mentioned explicitly once here: Jeremiah 31:31, "I will make a New Covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah."

Just one aside on this matter. The Essenes made a great deal of the *New Covenant* concept. Now, that should be interesting to you in light of the exposition of the book of Hebrews if you believe as do some, such as Phillip Hughes and myself, that the book of Hebrews was written to a congregation that had some knowledge of and was perhaps being tugged at by Essene Theology. Then, the New Covenant teaching in the book of Hebrews takes on a new significance to you, because it is placed against the backdrop of incorrect Essene teaching about the New Covenant.

If you have read any of the Qumran material about the New Covenant, you know that the Essene idea of the New Covenant was basically the Old Covenant, sort of fixed up and tossed back out on the table again. In other words, it was sort of the Old Covenant renewed in a pristine form. Which of course, from the New Testament, perspective is a radical mistake in the understanding of what the New Covenant is. The New Covenant is not simply the Old Covenant in its Mosaic form cleaned up a little bit and tossed back out onto the table. It genuinely is a New Covenant in quality and in content. And so this New Covenant teaching is very significant.

Now, though Jeremiah is the only prophet to use the term New Covenant, he is certainly not the only prophet to use the concept of New Covenant. Let me give you one example in Jeremiah which conveys the same type of content that you see here in Jeremiah 31 verses 31-34, but does not use the terminology of New Covenant. And I think you will see the transferable concepts as we begin to review other prophets. Look at Jeremiah 32. In Jeremiah 32, we read this, beginning in verse 37:

“Behold, I will gather them out of all the lands to which I have driven them in My anger, in My wrath, and in great indignation; and I will bring them back to this place and make them dwell in safety. "And they shall be My people, and I will be their God; and I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me always, for their own good, and for *the good of their children* after them. "And I will make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; and I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from Me. "And I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will faithfully plant them in this land with all My heart and with all My soul.”

Now we could go on, but you get the idea. There are already themes in that passage which refer not to a New Covenant, but to an everlasting covenant. Themes that are similar, themes which have already been elucidated on in Jeremiah 31:31-34.

Now, the fact of the matter is that we can find this throughout the prophetic literature. Let me turn you to one other place in Jeremiah 50, where we read this, in verses 4 and 5:

“In those days and at that time,” declares the LORD, “the sons of Israel will come, *both* they and the sons of Judah as well;”

There again, you see a theme that you saw in Jeremiah 31. The house of Israel, and the house of Judah are united.

“they will go along weeping as they go.” There’s that theme of judgment that you see as the preface to Jeremiah 31:31-34. You saw that especially in verses 27-30, where words of judgment were spoken. “they will go along weeping as they go, and it will be the LORD their God they will seek. “They will ask for the way to Zion, *turning* their faces in its direction; they will come that they may join themselves to the LORD *in* an everlasting covenant that will not be forgotten.”

You remember that one of the ways that Jeremiah defines New Covenant in Jeremiah 31, was how? It was going to be a New Covenant in the sense of what? It is *not* going to be like the covenant which the children of Israel broke. So his language of everlasting covenant fits perfectly with that concept of the New Covenant, because **one of the distinguishing marks of the New Covenant from Jeremiah’s perspective is its permanence, its unbreakableness.** And so his language of everlasting covenant fits beautifully with his definition of New Covenant in Jeremiah 31. So again, we are seeing similar themes without the terminology of New Covenant being used. Turn to the book of Ezekiel. In Ezekiel, chapter 37, we read this. And by the way, this beautifully ties in some of the stuff that we studied in our study of the Davidic Covenant in II Samuel 7 last time. Ezekiel 37, beginning in verse 24.

“And My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd; and they will walk in My ordinances, and keep My statutes, and observe them. And they shall live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived; and they will live on it, they, and their sons, and their sons’ sons, forever; and David My servant shall be their prince forever. And I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever. My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they

will be My people. And the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever." ' "

So again, here in Ezekiel's exposition of the New Covenant era of the kingdom of God, he doesn't use the language of New Covenant or everlasting covenant. He uses the language of Covenant of Peace. But the concepts are there, and they are parallel to Jeremiah's concepts. Turn back to Ezekiel 16. You will see this again. In Ezekiel 16, beginning in verse 60:

"Nevertheless, I will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you. Now, he is using the same terminology that Jeremiah often uses. Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed when you receive your sisters, *both* your older and your younger; and I will give them to you as daughters, but not because of your covenant. Thus I will establish My covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the LORD, in order that you may remember and be ashamed, and never open your mouth anymore because of your humiliation, when I have forgiven you for all that you have done, "the Lord GOD declares."

And again, you see the theme of the everlasting covenant, you see the theme of the forgiveness of sins, you see the theme of reunion. All of these themes that you see in Jeremiah 31 are being repeated by Ezekiel without the use of the terminology New Covenant. We could see the same thing if we were to turn to Ezekiel 34, in Ezekiel 34, and throughout that passage, especially beginning in verse 11, you will see this kind of language echoed, especially look for instance at verse 23"

"Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David will be prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken. And I will make a covenant of peace with them."

And that is the passage, by the way, from which we get the phrase, *there will be showers of blessing*. We get it from that passage in Ezekiel 34.

So you see, you hear these themes being repeated, even though three different terms are used: New Covenant, Everlasting Covenant, Covenant of Peace. But you see the concept circulating in Ezekiel and in Jeremiah. And indeed we could come with a fairly extensive catalog of these types of prophetic passages. And I would suggest that if you are ever attempting to take a look at what the Old Testament prophets expected from the New Covenant era in the kingdom of God, then correlating them is a good way to see a fuller picture of prophetic view of the nature of the New Covenant.

Very often, you get the idea that the New Testament teaches the right doctrine from the wrong text. We hear biblical theologians say that all the time. The New Testament got the theology right, but it was really bad exegesis. What I think you will find out, is first of all, that is a very dangerous thing to say, because the New Testament is the divinely inspired hermeneutical manual to the Old Testament. That is what the New Testament is. So when you start quibbling over the New Testament exegesis, you are quibbling with something very serious. It is God's exegesis. And His exegesis is not quite open to the same kind of scrutiny as mine is.

But secondly what I think you will find is that, in fact, the New Testament shows a tremendous grasp of the main lines of prophetic Old Testament understanding in the nature of the New Covenant. And you can understand how Jesus and His apostles have to spend a lot of time correcting Jewish misexpectations based on incorrect rabbinical teaching. And I suspect that one reason why Jesus was very careful about using terminology related to the Covenant in His public ministry was precisely because of the misunderstandings of the covenant based on an inadequate grasp of what the prophets were teaching about the nature of the New Covenant. And I think as you lay it out yourself, and you can do it, it is not a difficult exercise, but lay out side by side prophetic passage after prophetic passage which deal with the nature of the New Covenant, whether it is called Covenant of Peace, or the everlasting Covenant, the New Covenant, and I think you will begin to see certain key elements. In fact, we are going to look at some of those emphases in a few moments. Robertson attempts to do this in *Christ of the Covenant*, in his chapter on

the New Covenant dealing with Jeremiah's covenant. And we are going to do that ourselves in a few moments. But I want to stress is the New Testament authors do a wonderful job of seeing the nuance presentation of the prophetic material on this.

Now, at least three New Testament authors apply central aspects of the New Covenant teaching to the present day. Luke, in Luke 22, verse 20, in the midst of the Lord's Supper and especially in the cup word of the Lord's Supper, takes Jeremiah's concept of the New Covenant, and of course I am speaking in a New Testament sort of way here, because he is simply recording for us what the Lord Jesus says. But Luke records for us, Jesus taking up the language of Jeremiah 31 and applying it to the meaning of His death in Luke 22. Now, in our last class session I am going to spend a good deal of time, simply exegeting that passage. So I am not going to stop and do it right now. But just bear in mind, there is one major author in the New Testament who picks up on the connection between the work of Christ and the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31.

Furthermore, in Hebrews, not only in chapter 10, but also in chapter 9, in chapter 8, and elsewhere, the author of Hebrews picks up the concept of the New Covenant from Jeremiah 31 and applies it, surprise, surprise, to the work of Christ. In his argument it is designed to show the superiority of Christ. And even John picks up on this theme. In fact, there is a lot of Covenant Theology hidden in the Gospel of John and I am not going after that right now, but in I John chapter 2, verse 7, there is a pretty significant hint to one aspect of the New Covenant of Jeremiah. In I John 2, we read this, beginning in verse 25:

“And this is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life. These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you.”

You remember, He has just spoken about those who have departed from the church, for whatever kind of Gnostic error that they have opted for. And he goes on to say,

“And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing

teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.”

Now that is an exceedingly rich passage, which deserves a long treatment itself, but understand the basic thing that John is saying there. What is one of the fundamental differences, John says, between those Christians who have continued to abide in the Apostolic teaching and those who have left the teaching of the Church to go back to this Gnostic era. Those who remain are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and hence, taught of the Lord.

Now, what is he picking up on? Jeremiah’s promise that from the least of them to the greatest, they will not need a teacher to teach them the law of God, it will have been written on their hearts by God, Himself. And so John is saying, “I can tell that that reality of the New Covenant has come about in you. Because you have not fallen for the false teaching. Why? Because you have the Holy Spirit to be your teacher.”

Now does that mean that John doesn’t need to teach them anything? No, he wouldn’t have written the book, if he hadn’t had to do that. He is speaking at a much more fundamental level, of the spirit of discernment which is gained only by those who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. And he is saying, “They didn’t have discernment, so they weren’t of us.” And he is saying, “Of course, you have discernment, you are of us.” It doesn’t mean that you have anything to learn, but it does mean that in that promise of Jeremiah 31, there is a real tangible evidencing of that reality coming to pass in their lives as believers because they have been able to resist the false teaching that turns away from the fullness of what the Apostolic teaching tells us about Jesus Christ. That teaching which some of their fellow professing believers have now reneged upon, but they have not; among other things, that He was truly human and He was truly divine. And he sees that as the fruit of the promises of Jeremiah 31 coming true in their lives. So in each of those passages, we have references in the New Testament to central aspects of Jeremiah’s New Covenant promise, so that New Covenant prophecy of Jeremiah is clearly of continuing importance for us today.

Old Testament Emphases Regarding the New Covenant

Now let me just mention six or seven of the emphases that you find in Jeremiah's prophecies and in Ezekiel's prophecies regarding this New Covenant and Robertson mentions each of these.

First of all, there is an emphasis on a return from exile to the land. There is an emphasis on the return of exile to the land. Now, the idea of the land and the Promised Land stretches all the way back to the concept of the Garden of Eden in the Bible. And from Eden in Genesis 1 and 2, the next concept of a divinely given Promised Land is picked up in the promises to Abraham which are fulfilled in the land of Canaan. And this a major theme in the book of Joshua among other things.

Now, it is very clear as well, from the author of Hebrews, that that concept of the Promised Land and the land of Canaan is not the culminating point in the idea of a land, a place of belonging of homeness for the people of God. But that in fact, that promise of the land of Palestine, itself, actually points forward to a greater reality. And, that fact is pointed to in passages like Ezekiel 40-48. Now, what is happening in Ezekiel 40-48? What is the big theme of Ezekiel 40-48? The New Temple. This is the New Temple of the people of God. Now what is interesting about that temple that is spoken of in Ezekiel 40-48? If you know the dimensions of the city of Jerusalem in the time of Ezekiel, and you plot, like good engineers, the temple that is described and its dimensions, it would have had to exceeded the city walls and city limits of Jerusalem to have been built. Now what is Ezekiel hinting at there? He is hinting that the temple that he is describing transcends any kind of reality to which his own people can relate to. Were his temple to be built in the Jerusalem of his time, it would have been larger than Jerusalem itself. It would have gone outside the boundaries of the walls. He is clearly pointing to a reality that transcends their present experience.

And John picks up on that, by the way in Revelation 21. That very idea is picked up upon as he is describing new heavens and the new earth. And in Revelation 21, as John is carried away in the spirit to see the holy city, the Jerusalem of God coming down out of heaven, he says, beginning in verse 16, that "the city was laid out as a square, with its length as great as the width, he measured the city with a rod. Fifteen hundred miles, its length, its width, and height are equal. And he

measured its walls, 72 yards according to human measurements which are also angelic measurements.” And then he goes on to describe the particular composition of the walls.

Now apart from the fact that conceiving a city of equal length, and width and height, that is not the normal way we describe a city. But if you add the square miles of such a city, it is larger than the square miles of the nation of Israel. So again, John is pointing you to a reality that transcends your current experience. He is saying, “let me tell you about a city that is going to be larger than the nation of Israel itself.” Plus, he speaks about these things that clearly point to the symbolic nature of what he is speaking about, the height of a city, being equal to its length and breath. And then there are angelic measurements and human measurements. What are angelic measurements? Has anyone learned angel measurements 101 at the university anytime recently? He is clearly giving you to understand that he is talking something that transcends your current experience. While he speaks to the realities of Eden and the land of Palestine in Canaan and Israel, occupied by the Israelites, those realities are actually pointing to that same reality, the heavens and the earth as God has prepared for His people.

Now, by the way, Paul picks up on this theme too. If you look at Romans chapter 4, we know that Abraham was promised the land of Canaan. And Paul says in Romans 4:13, “the promise to Abraham and to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.” Now, Paul expands your expectations on Abraham’s land promises, beyond simply the bounds of Palestine, to the inheritance of the whole earth. So over and over, we have those themes of Israel returning to the land in the prophetic literature, being understood in the New Testament to be something much greater and grander than simply reoccupying the ancient territorial boundaries of Israel, even if it is understood to be the boundaries that were established in the time of David and Solomon which were at their greatest extent. So, over and over those land promises in the prophecies are taken by New Testament writers to have far broader meaning for the people of God than simply that little plot of land on the east of the Mediterranean Sea.

Then, the promise you see in Ezekiel 36:35, the restoration of Israel to the land, listen to the language, Ezekiel 36:33.

“Thus says the Lord GOD, "On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places will be rebuilt. "And the desolate land will be cultivated instead of being a desolation in the sight of everyone who passed by. "And they will say, "This desolate land has become like the garden of Eden;”

So you see a connection back to the concept of the Garden of Eden in the return of Israel to the land. But it looks forward to something much greater than even the return of Israel to the land of Palestine. That land of Palestine itself is a symbol of something even greater that God plans to do and that is of course what? Giving all His people the new heavens and the new earth. It is yours.

Secondly, we see in Ezekiel and in Jeremiah the idea that there is going to be a full restoration of blessing in the New Covenant. Not only the new heavens and the new earth for the people of God, but a full restoration of blessing. There will be a reversal of the curse of sin. Which is, of course, death.

Over and over in those Old Covenant prophecies about the New Covenant, the reversal of the curse of sin is spoken of. One example is found in Ezekiel 37. This passage, no doubt forms the background of Jesus’ comments in John chapter 3 verse 8, when He says, “the wind blows where it will, and we don’t where it comes from and where it is going.” And you know that the play on words, between *spirit*, speaking of our *human spirit*, and *wind*, and *breath* and Holy Spirit exists for both the Greek *pneuma* and the Hebrew *nephish*. And so this passage here in Jeremiah 37, which is primarily focused on the return of those who are thought to be dead in languishing and exile, being brought back into the land, this passage forms the backdrop of John chapter 3 verse 8, but here I want you to see how it is used prophetically. The dry bones resurrected are a picture of the everlasting covenant and how it brings a reviving to the people of God, from death to life. Jeremiah 37, verse 1:

“The hand of the LORD was upon me, and He brought me out by the

Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones. And He caused me to pass among them round about, and behold, *there were* very many on the surface of the valley; and lo, *they were* very dry. And He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, Thou knowest." Again He said to me, "Prophecy over these bones, and say to them, ' O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. 'Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones, 'Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life. 'And I will put sinews on you, make flesh grow back on you, cover you with skin, and put breath in you that you may come alive; and you will know that I am the LORD.' "

And again in verses 11-14, this vision is explained.

“Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off.' "Therefore prophecy, and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD,' Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. "Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, My people. And I will put My Spirit within you, and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken and done it," declares the LORD. "

So you see this picture of resurrection and restoration to the land is related to the idea of what? Reversing the curse of sin. The curse of sin means death, the curse of sin means what? Being cut off from God and being cut off from His people. So Jeremiah is saying, “Look, one of the blessings of the New Covenant is going to be that God is going to reverse the curse of sin, and He is going to bring blessing to His people. They are going to be revived. Don’t tell me you are cut off and dead and dried up. I am going to revive you, and I am going to bring you back into the land.” And listen especially to this line: “You will know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, my people.”

Now keep that in mind, and turn with me to Matthew chapter 27.

Matthew knows this. And so in conjunction with the crucifixion of Christ, listen to what Matthew tells you in Matthew 27, verses 50-53, and just remember the background: “You will know that I am the Lord your God, when I have brought you up out of your graves.” Matthew 27, verse 50:

“And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up *His* spirit. And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, and the earth shook; and the rocks were split, and the tombs were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many.”

Now I don't whether any of you have ever preached a sermon on that passage, but you see what Matthew is doing there. He is giving a signal to every Jew in the house, every Jew who is listening to this passage being read as he describes the crucifixion, and he is saying. “Friends, Jesus' resurrection and the accompanying resurrection of many of the saints which occurred in that time frame is proof that what God promised to the prophet Ezekiel has come about through the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. ‘I have raised you up from you graves. Thus, you shall know that I am the Lord your God, and I am restoring blessing.’”

So the reason that Matthew recounts that for you, is that he wants you to understand what Jesus' work has accomplished. It has accomplished the fulfillment of that promise that had been given through he prophets as long ago as Ezekiel in chapter 37. And that may help you understand that strange passage which when you are reading in the context of Matthew 27. You wonder, “Why in the world did you tell us that?” You understand that in light of what the prophets had been promising would be the nature of the restoration of blessing, so now it makes perfect sense that Matthew would be zealous to connect it to Jesus' resurrection. He wrote that so you would understand what had been God's instrument in bringing about that resurrection. And of course, the redemption of our bodies, a truth constantly repeated in the New Testament, not just here in Matthew 27, but also by Paul in Romans 8, verses 22 and 23, and in I Corinthians 15, is seen to be a direct fulfillment of that Old Covenant promise of the full restoration of blessings. **The resurrection is the**

ultimate reversal of the curse of sin.

And so the New Testament sees the resurrection of the body as one aspect of the fulfillment of the Old Covenant promise but the New Covenant would entail a full restoration of blessing. The New Testament sees the resurrection of the body as one aspect of the fulfillment of the Old Covenant promise, that the New Covenant would be characterized by a full restoration of blessing and a reversal of the curse of sin.

Thirdly, not only does the Old Testament prophecy of the New Covenant look forward to a return from exile to the land in the broadest sense possible, not only does it look forward to a full restoration of blessing, it looks forward to a fulfillment of all previous covenant commitments. God's covenant commitments under David and under Moses and under Abraham will all be enjoined simultaneously. Let me say, that is not just a New Testament perspective. The New Testament makes much of that; and the author of Hebrews makes much of that as he mixes priestly promises, kingly promises, and prophetic promises in connection with the work of Christ.

But it is not just the New Testament that does that; Ezekiel also does that. Turn with me to Ezekiel chapter 37 again, and let's look at that passage that we previously read. And look in this passage for three things: look for the emphasis on the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, and the Abrahamic Covenant. Listen.

“And My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd;” Okay, we see the Davidic Covenant immediately. “And they will walk in My ordinances, and keep My statutes, and observe them.” There is the Mosaic Covenant. And, by the way, the Davidic Covenant itself had seen, and David had seen himself as fundamentally responsible for implementing that kind of righteous rule in Israel, so this is not something that Ezekiel is thinking up that is brand new. Over and over, David is the one who tells you that he longs to see the statutes of God, and the ordinances of God established amongst his people. But Ezekiel stressing that in this New Covenant, in this everlasting covenant, not only are we going to see the promises of the Davidic Covenant fulfilled, we are going to see the promises of the Mosaic Covenant

fulfilled. “And they shall live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived;” The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and so we are already back to the promises of Abram and later of course, to Abraham. “and they will live on it, they, and their sons, and their sons' sons, forever; and David My servant shall be their prince forever.”

So we are back to the Davidic Covenant, and to the rule of God amongst His people. “And I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them.” “And multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever.” That theme, of course, runs through every Old Testament Covenant between God and His people. I will be your God, and you will be my people. I will be near to you, I will be in your midst. I will establish my sanctuary with you forever. “and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever. "My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. "And the nations will know that I am the LORD”

That last section there in verse 28 is a classic theme. Over fifty times in the book of Ezekiel, that theme, that “they shall know that I am the Lord” is repeated. It is a continual theme in the book of Ezekiel. Over and over, everything that God does in the book of Ezekiel is why? So that then they will know that I am the Lord. And He means that both redemptively and in terms of judgment in terms of those who reject Him. So we see here, all the previous commitments of the covenant reiterated.

Again, one of the emphases of Jeremiah's New Covenant and of Ezekiel's New Covenant, we could also say of Isaiah's New Covenant as well, is a renewal of the heart. A renewal of the heart. Just for one minute, let's remember Jeremiah's words, “I will put my law within them and on their heart, I will write it.” The goal of this covenant is to internalize, internalize the love of the law in the people of God. The love of righteousness, the love of justice, the love of mercy, okay.

And that is the same theme that you see in Ezekiel. Look at Ezekiel 36. In verses 26 and 27, and by the way, you see it in this whole section from Ezekiel 36:22 and following, but pick up in verse 26 and 27.

“Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. "And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.”

So this heart renewal that Ezekiel speaks about is not unique to Ezekiel. It was right there in Jeremiah 31 to begin with. And you see it throughout Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Again, a central point of Jeremiah's New Covenant, Jeremiah 31 verse 34, is **the forgiveness of sins**. So we have return from the exile to the land, full restoration of blessings, fulfillment of all the previous covenant commitments, renewal of the heart and forgiveness of sins. And this, by the way, is the most common theme picked up on by New Testament writers with regard to the New Covenant of Jeremiah. The forgiveness of sins. Look at how the author of Hebrews will do it. He beats you over the head with this in Hebrews. In Jeremiah 31, verse 34, we read.

“for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

And it precisely that theme of the forgiveness of sin that the author of Hebrews is going to pick up on in Hebrews chapter 8 verse 9 and 10. For instance, Hebrews 10, verses 17 and 18. Here is his quote of Jeremiah 31:34, the relevant section of verse 34. Hebrews 10:17.

“AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE.” Now here is Hebrews commentary on that. “Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer *any* offering for sin.”

And over and over that theme of the forgiveness of sins resonates in this section of Hebrews and the very reason that the author of Hebrews explains that Jesus' mediation is superior is whereas, look at Hebrews 10:4, “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” Whereas it is impossible for the Old Testament ritual system to forgive sins, Jesus' sacrifice does forgive sins. And where does he go to prove that? Jeremiah 31. So he goes back and he sees Jesus' work as the

New Covenant fulfillment of that Old Testament New Covenant prophecy. It is Jesus' forgiveness of sins, in His work which is the New Covenant fulfillment of the Old Testament New Covenant prophecies.

Sixth, the theme of the reunion of Israel and Judah is one of the themes of the Old Testament New Covenant prophecies. You see this in Jeremiah 31, itself. Notice again, Jeremiah 31:27, "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and with the seed of beast." Now, you know, how long have Israel and Judah been divided by the time that Jeremiah is ministering? A long time. How long has it been since there has even been a northern kingdom? The northern kingdom was overrun a hundred years before this time. And yet central in Jeremiah's vision is not just the restoration of Judah, but the restoration of Israel as well. In the picture there is, amongst other things, the uniting of all of God's people. God is going to bring them all together. And this is picked up upon in Ezekiel. And again, this is even further removed from Ezekiel who is prophesying while in captivity. In Ezekiel 34, for instance, you see this and of course he is constantly using the language of Israel. But listen to what he says in Ezekiel 34, verse 23, for instance.

"Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd."

Now, throughout this passage, the emphasis is on them being what? One flock that has been brought back from being scattered. So the idea of him being one shepherd is very significant, because the last time there had been one shepherd was when Solomon was reigning. Ever since, post Solomon, there had been two shepherds at least reigning in and amongst the peoples of God in the northern and southern kingdoms. And Ezekiel is longing for the day when there is one shepherd. So this theme of the reunion of Israel and Judah is significant.

Now the New Testament, in Acts 15 particularly, sees a lot of the fulfillment of this theme in the bringing in of the Gentiles into the Church. Amos picks up on this same theme in Amos 9 and speaks about the restoring of the fallen tabernacles of David. And, James just takes that passage and directly applies it to the bringing in of the Gentiles into

the church. And so again, that is another rich passage that you could cultivate or rich theme that you could cultivate.

The Permanency of the Covenant

One last thing that is very obvious in Jeremiah 31 and that is the permanency of this covenant. Jeremiah, himself, calls this covenant *an everlasting covenant* and he stresses in Jeremiah 31 that one of the ways in which the New Covenant would not be like the covenant of old would be that it would not be broken.

Do you recall what is one of the fundamental theological questions that the prophets themselves wrestle with? “If God has promised always to be a God to us, if God has promised to give us the land, if God has promised that David will reign over Israel forever, how can it be that we can be sent into exile? Is that not an indication that God has somehow not been faithful to what He clearly promised us in His covenant with Abraham, His covenant with Moses, and His covenant with David?” This is a huge theological problem for all the latter prophets. You see Habakkuk wrestle with it, you see Jeremiah wrestle with it, and you see Ezekiel wrestle with it. All the latter prophets wrestle with that theological problem, because they are faced with the reality that they are no longer in the land, and there is no David reigning over them. And they actually live to see the day where there is not a Davidic heir reigning over the southern kingdom. I mean, it is one thing to have a divided kingdom and try to reconcile that with God’s promises. And it is another to be sent off into exile and to have the Davidic heir cut off. How do you reconcile all that with God’s promises? That is a fundamental prophetic problem.

And the prophetic answer to that is the New Covenant. And you ask, and how can the New Covenant answer that? The prophetic answer is this. **We see that the nature of the Old Covenant itself, as God originally constructed it, was intended to be transcended.** God never intended these Old Covenant forms to be the ultimate expression of the promises that He made to us. Those promises will only be realized in the New Covenant.

Now, by the way, can you see what an incredible evangelistic tool God has placed in the hands of His faithful servants with that New Covenant

hope leading up to the coming of the Messiah? **If that is where the whole of your hope is now vested, in that New Covenant, can you see how powerful that is when Messiah comes proclaiming the Kingdom of God. It is here, it is in your midst. Now that struck home to the disciples. It clearly did. And their very wrestling with their contorted views of the kingdom of heaven is proof of it.**

This was the only hope of the people of God, the New Covenant. It was the only thing that explained why in the world God had done the things that He had done to the people of God in the Old Covenant. Because that Old Testament itself, by nature, had been constructed by God, so that at some point in time, it would become outmoded and it would be transcended by something far greater. And that of course, was the New Covenant. And it is tied into the theme of the Kingdom of God as well.

The Holy Spirit in the Old and New Covenants

And we will come back now after this little exercise and look at the Holy Spirit in the Old and in the New Covenant.

If you have your Bibles I would invite you to turn to Acts chapter 2. Acts chapter 2, verses 16 and 17, and look at Peter's words in verse 16 where he quotes the prophet Joel in verse 17. Acts 2:16 and 17.

“But this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: 'AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS,' God says, 'THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT UPON ALL MANKIND;”

Of course, in that passage, Peter using the “this is that” formula which is a classic New Testament formula of fulfillment where it identifies a particular event in redemptive history as the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy. And here, Peter goes to Joel 2, and he says, “if you want to know what Joel meant in Joel 2, *this is that.*” And he is, of course, referring to the events of Pentecost and the pouring out of the Spirit at the Pentecost, the manifestation of tongues and all the other things connected with it. That is the fulfillment of what Joel was speaking of in Joel chapter 2. And of course, that inauguration of the

New Covenant era of missions in Acts chapter 2 and of the ministry to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth, by the Holy Spirit is a hallmark of the New Covenant era of redemptive history.

This operation of the Spirit and the language there could even be read to indicate that the Spirit had not been poured out prior to the giving of the Pentecost of the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost.

Now, why am I raising this problem? Because there are people, and by the way, this is not just an issue between so called Covenant Theologians, and so called Dispensational Theologians. This is an issue of distinction between Reformed Theologians and Arminian Theologians as to what was the role of the work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Covenant with regard to salvation. And you find this if you read the book edited by Clark Pinnock, on the doctrine of salvation, discussing the grace of God and the will of man, and other books like that. The men who argue against a Reformed doctrine of regeneration, that is that the Spirit must take initiative and act in the regenerating of a human heart, these men will argue that this is a distinctively New Testament phenomenon and that is not the way that it worked in the Old Testament. So they will not argue that regeneration was done a different way in the Old Testament than it was done in the New Testament. They will argue that it didn't occur at all in the Old Testament. They will argue that regeneration is distinctively a New Testament phenomenon exegetically. Now, so obviously this point of how the Spirit functions under old and new covenant is a broader question than just in the interesting warfare between Dispensationalists and Covenant Theologians. So we need to understand this.

The Holy Spirit at Pentecost

And so, any attempt to understand the significance of the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost must consider the two following factors

First of all, it is absolutely clear that the Holy Spirit was active in the Old Covenant, in all the modes of His activity under the New Covenant. We will mention a few in passing today. Pull out a concordance and look at the function of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. The modes of His activities are varied, just as varied as they are in the New Covenant.

Secondly, it is clear as well that the Holy Spirit was active in the Old Covenant like He was in the New Covenant from the ascription of the writers of the New Testament. In other words, the New Testament writers identify the work of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament to have been done by the same one that they refer to as the Holy Spirit. Let me just give you few examples of this. In II Peter, a passage that you are very familiar with in terms of your doctrine of scripture, in II Peter, chapter 1, verse 21, listen to what Peter says.

“for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”

Now we would have to do some work to determine what kind of prophetic activity Peter has in mind there. But let's just take for granted for a moment, and I will build a case elsewhere that what he has in mind, primarily is Old Testament prophetic activity, non just New Covenant prophetic activity, but Old Covenant prophetic activity. Now, if that is the case, you have Peter, here speaking about who is behind that Old Testament prophetic activity? My Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit who indwells me, He is being that Old Testament prophetic activity. Look again, back at I Peter chapter 1. This makes it actually quite clear. This establishes the question that we left open from II Peter 1:21. I Peter 1, verse 10.

“As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that *would come* to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven-- things into which angels long to look.”

Now in that glorious little passage, Peter makes it crystal clear that the prophets of the Old Testament who long to understand the full significance of the utterances that were given to them, made those utterances by, not just the Holy Spirit, but by that glorious title, the Spirit of Christ. So, was the Holy Spirit active and operative in the Old

Testament? Absolutely. He was inspiring Scripture. He was inspiring prophecy. The book of Hebrews, chapter 3, emphasizes His work in the incription of the Old Testament, when it says, and this is, if you have ever studied B. B. Warfield's study of the phrases, you will have seen this material before. But for instance in Hebrews 3:7 Scripture says, God says:

“Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS”

Now you know that, that is a passage in the Psalms referring back to an event in the Mosaic era. And yet, the author of Hebrews says, “the Holy Spirit says, today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.” And again in Hebrews 10:15, in Hebrews 10:15, this is especially significant in light of what we have just been studying in Jeremiah 31. Hebrews 10:15.

“And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, "THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS UPON THEIR HEART, AND UPON THEIR MIND I WILL WRITE THEM," *He then says,* "AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE."

Now, of course, the latter phrase, introducing verse 17, is implied, but the first section of ascription is not implied. It is the Holy Spirit that gives us the promise of the New Covenant by the mouth of Jeremiah. Matthew 22, is another example. Matthew 22, verse 41.

“Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying, "What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?" They said to Him, "*The son of David.*" He said to them, "Then how does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord,' saying, 'THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND,"”

Again, David's confession of the Lord as his Lord in the Psalms is ascribed to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Mark chapter 12, again records this incident. And Mark tells us the same thing. Jesus

answering, began to say, verse 35.

“And Jesus answering *began* to say, as He taught in the temple, " How *is it that* the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David? "David himself said in the Holy Spirit, 'THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD,' SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND,"

Acts chapter 1 carries on this theme. Acts chapter 1, Peter is explaining to the apostles the significance of the loss of Judas and the necessity of replacing one of the apostles. Verse 16.

“Brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus.”

And of course, he is leading up to verse 20, which says,

“"For it is written in the book of Psalms, 'LET HIS HOMESTEAD BE MADE DESOLATE, AND LET NO MAN DWELL IN IT'; and, 'HIS OFFICE LET ANOTHER MAN TAKE.'”

So Peter argues on the basis of the Holy Spirit’s inspiration of that Psalm, that Judas’ office must be replaced amongst the twelve. And then again, Acts 28, Acts 28, verse 25.

“And when they did not agree with one another, they *began* leaving after Paul had spoken one *parting* word, "The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers, saying, 'GO TO THIS PEOPLE AND SAY, "YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND;”

So in all these passages, we see the inspiration of the Old Testament prophets and writers ascribed to the Holy Spirit. So the Holy Spirit is active in the inspiration of the prophets and writers and of the Old Testament. But that is not all, for in Hebrews chapter 9, verse 8, the author of Hebrews tells us that it is the Holy Spirit who authored the ritual service of the sanctuary. Listen to what the author of Hebrews says:

“The Holy Spirit *is* signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed, while the outer tabernacle is still standing, which *is* a symbol for the present time.”

Now he has just spent several verses describing the tabernacle and then he says, the Holy Spirit is signifying this. Indicating it was the Spirit that instituted that ritual service of the sanctuary. Again, in Acts 7:51, the leading of Israel in the wilderness and throughout its history is ascribed to the Holy Spirit. Stephen says to the children of Israel gathered around him in Acts 7:51:

“You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did.” Resisting the Holy Spirit.

It was in the Holy Spirit that Christ preached to the antediluvians. And to those who lived before the flood. Now, this is a difficult passage, but you will follow the argument here. Peter says, that Christ also died for sins, once for all, I Peter 3:18:

“For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits *now* in prison,”

Now, if you understand what is meant by the first phrase, you don't get tripped up on some sort of view of Christ descending into Hades and preaching the Gospel to those already in Hell. In the Spirit, He preached the Gospel to those who were disobedient in the days of Noah, verse 20, but who are now imprisoned. That is, they refuse to repent. But it was in the Spirit that He did that. This is a tough passage, but you get the point.

And then, in II Corinthians 4:13, II Corinthians 4:13, we are told that the Holy Spirit was the author of faith in the Old Testament just like he was in the New Testament, or is in the New Testament. II Corinthians 4:12:

“So death works in us, but life in you. But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, " I BELIEVED, THEREFORE I SPOKE, "we also believe, therefore also we speak;”

Taking that Spirit as capital ‘S’ as opposed to merely a subjective statement about our own character, the Spirit of faith.

And we could compile others, in which the Holy Spirit is said by New Testament writers to be active in the Old Testament, but that is a good start. **Though the Holy Spirit is active in all those ways in the Old Covenant, nevertheless, the change from Old Covenant to New Covenant is often described in the New Testament itself, as fundamentally being seen in just this: That the New Covenant is uniquely the era of the Holy Spirit.** And there are certain passage that indicate that. A classic passage is John chapter 7, look with me there. In John 7, verse 39.

“But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”

Listen to John’s words, “the Spirit was not yet given because Jesus was not yet glorified.” Now here is John marking a tremendous transition in redemptive history, from before the Spirit and after Spirit. And by the way, the Greek is harder to understand than the English. The English of your translations supplies the idea of the Spirit not being given. That is not what the Greek says. The Greek just says, “the Spirit was not yet.” You want to talk about an ontological problem, for your doctrine of the trinity. There it is. Boom!

Now, this isn’t just a redemptive historical problem. Radically discontinuity is emphasized in this passage. “The Spirit was not yet, because Jesus was not yet glorified.” So you see this radical distinction from before and after Pentecost, before and after the ascension of Christ. The language is striking. And people seize upon that and they will use that to argue that the Holy Spirit was not operative in the Old Testament. You can see how they can misunderstand.

And a similar passage is in John chapter 16, verse 7, in John chapter 16, verse 7.

“But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.”

In John 20, verse 22, you get the idea that John has the agenda of discontinuity here in describing the relation between the Old and the New Covenants, John 20:

“And when He had said this” this is Jesus after the resurrection, “He breathed on them, and said to them, " Receive the Holy Spirit.”

Now, how many expositors of Scripture have you heard go on and on about how the disciples did not have the Holy Spirit until after the Resurrection? And base it on just that passage? Did you see the radical discontinuity that John is drawing there? He is drawing it for a reason, and we need to pay attention to that reason. But recognize that it has to be balanced against these other passages. And of course, the passage in Acts 2, verses 16-17:

“In those last days, the Holy Spirit will be poured out on all flesh.”

So the problem is to understand how the New Covenant can be, by way of distinction, the unique era of the Holy Spirit, while at the same time, acknowledging that the Holy Spirit was active in all His modes under the Old Covenant.

Now, I think the short answer to that question is that the language of discontinuity there has to be understood as a relative contrast in absolute terms. A relative contrast in absolute terms. It is a contrast which is significant and which no one in the Reformed community frankly, is interested in playing down. That is part of the glory of the New Covenant. None of us have a vested interest in playing down the discontinuity of that language. But there are certain things that stop you shy of taking that language without qualification. When you start saying the Holy Spirit was *not yet*, prior to Acts 2, you get yourself into a problem, that will get you kicked out of the Evangelical Theological

Society, or ETS. If you must be able to ascribe to the ontological trinity, to be in ETS, then you are in trouble if you can't.

So there are certain things that stop us short from reading that language without qualification. And let me just give you a few of those things that both show us the continuity and the discontinuity of the Holy Spirit's work in Old and New Covenant. In fact, I would like to give you four of them. The fact is that the Scriptures on which we are dependent for all our knowledge of the work of the Holy Spirit confine all their declarations about the work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament to the people of God in the Old Testament in Israel. If we look at the function of the Spirit in the Old Testament, we see that the modes of activity which are described in detail are always in relation to Israel. So it is only within and for the benefit of Israel that the Spirit of God works from Adam to Christ.

And so the distinctive of the operation of the Spirit and the outpouring of the Spirit is not in the newness of mode in which He is working, rather it is because the operation of the Spirit is now expanded to all nations. By the way, this in my opinion, is a key to understanding the language of *world, all, and many*, in the New Testament. That language is always in reference to the transcending of simply the people of God, considered as that ethnic religious entity of Israel, to God's work amongst even those who are apart from the covenant and apart from the promises, the Gentiles. So the New Covenant is the era of the Spirit. Whether we consider the extent of the Spirit's operations, the object of His operations, the mode of administration of His kingdom, or the intensity of the Spirit's action. And it is those four things that I want to look at with you. I will repeat those in just a minute. But those four things show you the continuity and the discontinuity of the Spirit's work in the Old Testament.

First of all, the New Covenant, is the era of the Spirit because in it, the Spirit of God is poured out upon all flesh. The New Covenant is the era of the Spirit because in it, the Spirit of God is poured out upon all flesh. It is a central idea of the New Covenant that it is worldwide in scope. The period of preparation is over, and the worldwide kingdom of God is now inaugurated. You see the missionary emphasis of Pentecost

in the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant there. The worldwide kingdom of God is now inaugurated and now the Spirit is to be poured out upon all flesh. No longer was one people to be the sole recipient, but the remedy of the Spirit was to be applied to all peoples. Now of course, that doesn't mean every last man and woman. Though, we might wish it did. But now, the barrier of the nation and the nations has been broken down. And all peoples will now come to Mt. Zion.

Secondly, not only is it poured out on all flesh, but secondly, the New Covenant is the era of the Spirit, because now, is for the first time, the object of the Spirit's work is to recover the world from its sin. So it is not just the extent of the Spirit's operation, it is the object, it is the goal of His operation. Listen to what B. B. Warfield says, "of course, this," that is the recovering of the world from sin, "this was the Spirit's ultimate object from the beginning, but during the period of preparation, it was only its ultimate and not its proximate object."

Its proximate object was preparation. Now, in the New Covenant, it is performance. Then it was to preserve a seed, sound and pure for the planting; now, it is for the reaping of the harvest. It required the Spirit's power to keep the seed safe during the cold and dark winter. It requires it now to plant the seed and water it and cause it to grow into a great tree. The Spirit is the leaven which leavens the world. In Israel, it was the leaven laid away in the closet until the day of leavening came. When that day came, and it was drawn out of its dark corner and placed in the heap of meal, then the day of leaven had come. Or, to use the figure of Isaiah during the days of the dark ages, when the kingdom of God was confined to Israel, it was like a barrier in a stream. The Spirit of God was its life, its principle during all the ages. And it was He that kept it restrained. Now, the kingdom of God, is like that stream with the barriers broken down. And it is the Holy Spirit that is driving it. So it is not just the extent, it is the object of the Spirit's operation that has changed.

Third, the New Covenant is the era of the Spirit because now, the mode of administration of God's kingdom has become spiritual. The mode of the administration of God's kingdom, has become spiritual. It is not just that the extent of the Spirit's work is broadened. It is not just that the object of the Spirit's work is now focused on His ultimate goal. It

is that the way that He administers this era is different.

Listen again, to what Warfield says. “In the old Dispensation, the kingdom of God was in a sense of this world. It had its relation to and its place among earthly states. It was administered by outward ordinances and enactment and hierarchies. In the new dispensation, the kingdom of God is not of this world. It has no relation to or place among earthly states. It is not administered by external ordinances. The kingdom of God is now within you. Its law is written upon the heart. It is administered by an inward force. Where the Jewish ordinances extended in the Old Testament, there was the kingdom of God. Where men were circumcised on the eighth day, where they turned their faces to the temple at the hour of sacrifice and where they went up to Jerusalem to the annual feast, a centralized worship, we say, for the temple at Jerusalem was the place where God might be acceptably worshipped, they were of the kingdom. Now, where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is the Church. Jesus’ words to the woman at the well are ringing in your ears right now. “There will come a time, when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is the church.” Irenaeus and Ignatius tell us wherever the Spirit works, and He works when and where and how he will, there is the Church of God, not just in Jerusalem. But in Judea, and Samaria, and unto the ends of the earth.” Warfield goes on to say, “we are freed from the outward ordinances, touch not, taste not, handle not, and are under the sway of the indwelling spirit.”

Fourth, and finally, the New Covenant is the era of the Spirit because now the Spirit works in the hearts of God’s people with a more prevailing and a more pervading force. Of course, He regenerated and sanctified the souls of God’s saints in the Old Covenant. We cannot doubt that He was operating creatively and that He was powerfully present within them as when David could pray, “create within me a new heart, and renew a right spirit within me.” We must never forget, however, that while that is an Old Testament prayer, it is of course, perfectly appropriate for New Covenant Christians to pray. And yet, we are compelled to say that the Spirit’s work in the New Covenant is more powerful and prevailing than in the old. For in the New Covenant God not only promises to pour out

the Spirit upon all flesh, but He promises that He will pour Him out in a special manner on His people.

Listen, again, to Warfield's deductions from this: "Surely this must mean much to us, that we live in the era of the Spirit. A Dispensation in which the Spirit of God is poured out upon all flesh while extending the bounds of God's kingdom until it covers the earth and that He is poured out in the hearts of His people so that He reigns in their hearts and powerfully determines them to do holiness and righteousness all the days of their lives. Because we live under this Dispensation, we are freed from the outward pressures of the law, and have the love shed abroad in our hearts and being led by the Spirit are His sons, yielding a willing obedience and by instinct doing what is conformable to His will. Because this is the Dispensation of the Spirit, we are in the hands of a loving Spirit of God, whose work in us cannot fail. And the world is in His powerful guidance and shall roll on in steady development, until it knows the Lord and His will is done on earth as it is heaven. It is because this is the Dispensation of the Spirit, that it is a missionary age, and it is because it is the Dispensation of the Spirit that mission shall make their triumphant progress until the earth passes at last into heaven. It is because this is the Dispensation of the Spirit, that it is an age of ever increasing righteousness and it is because it is the Dispensation of the Spirit that the righteousness shall wax and wax until it is perfect. Blessed be God that He has given it to our eyes to see this, His glory, in the process of His coming."

Now you can't miss Warfield's post millennialism in that. But don't miss the blessing of what he is saying apart from that particular eschatological issue. Don't miss the blessing of what he is saying. Because God is building His Church, and no matter what it looks like to the eyes of the world, one day the unveiling will come and it is going to be a glorious sight. All of us, eschatological perspective apart, all of us, share in that view of the triumph. And it is something very encouraging to us in the midst of the temple discouragement that we face in the New Covenant era. When we see the Gospel resisted in the hearts of the people that we preach to week after week and we wonder what are they listening too? Am I up there and does it just sound like "Blah, blah, blah,

blah, blah, blah? Did that get through? Did they not hear what I was saying?” It is important thing for us to remember as we contemplate the work of the Spirit in the New Covenant. That is a major biblical theological issue. The whole issue of the role of the Holy Spirit. Warfield has two articles. One *In Faith and Life*, his Sunday School lessons. There is an article called The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and then in his *Biblical and Theological Studies* he has a treatise on the Holy Spirit in which he deals with the Old Testament. I commend both of them to you as very helpful exegetical treatments at how the Spirit operates under the Old and under the New Covenants.

Concept of *Covenant* in the New Testament

Now, what I would like to begin with you is an introduction to the Covenant idea in the New Testament. We have already looked at that passage in Hebrews 9 for what it told us about the New Testament understanding about what a covenant is. But we really haven't looked at the other passages in the New Testament which pertain to the covenant.

The importance of the covenant idea to Old Testament studies is beyond debate. But in New Testament research, conclusions about that matter tend to be much more tentative. In fact, some scholars have gone so far as to suggest that the idea of Covenant itself, was transformed or became outmoded in early Christianity. Delbert Hillars, for instance, who wrote a book called, *Covenant, the History of a Biblical Idea*, said this: “The Essenes had a covenant, but it was not new. The Christians had something new, but it was not a covenant. That is to say, to call what Jesus brought, a *covenant*, is like calling conversion circumcision. Or like saying that one keeps the Passover with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth, which is of course a direct quote from the New Testament.” Now, why would this guy be so bone headed to say that, I just don't understand. For Christians, the coming of the substance made shadows out of the rich array of Old Testament events, persons, symbols, and figures. The reality brings the image to an end.

Now, his contention is fundamentally contradicted by the New Testament itself, and the burgeoning scholarship on the subject and role of the covenant in the New Testament indicates that Hillars' conclusion is wrong. And as we survey the covenant idea in the New Testament, we

may not be able to give a full assessment of the significance of that covenant idea in the various New Testament authors, but we can identify theological concepts which they explicitly relate to covenant in their New Testament writings. And we are going to restrict ourselves to the passages where *diatheke* occurs.

Diatheke and Suntheke

Let's begin by giving some words about the translation and meaning of covenant in the New Testament. The word, *diatheke*, occurs approximately thirty three times in the New Testament. Thirty times in the singular, three in the plural. It is implied another six times. A rather vigorous discussion of the proper translation of *diatheke* has been going on for some time now. And so it is advisable for us to devote some consideration to that matter. The debate concerns, whether in the New Testament, *diatheke* is usually to be translated as *covenant* in the sense of a contract or a binding agreement, is it to be translated as *testament* in the sense of a last will or is it to be translated as disposition, a unilateral divine decree or enactment. Those are basically the three options on the market.

And that question is further complicated by certain connotations of the English word, covenant, bargain, or contract. And the German word, *bund*, which can mean treaty or bargain or lots of other things too. Now those who have argued for rendering the word *diatheke* in the New Testament as *testament* or *disposition* have argued for that for both philological and theological reasons. It is argued, for instance, that the Septuagint and common Hellenistic usage is frequently appealed to as grounds for not translating *diatheke* as *covenant* in the New Testament.

On the theological front, the rendering covenant is said to obscure the unilateral character of the *diatheke* idea in the Septuagint and Paul. For instance, Adolph Dismon, who favored the translation, testament as the proper translation of all the passages where *diatheke* occurred, maintained that in the Septuagint *diatheke* meant a one sided disposition or more specifically a will and, but studies of Hellenistic literature indicated that *diatheke* was almost universally understood in a testamentary sense. He then argued, that the Septuagint and common Hellenistic meaning of *diatheke* was Paul's meaning. Of course, Dismon

was originally writing in German, and so his *bunt* gets translated into *covenant*, implied bilaterally which compromises the Pauline doctrine of grace.

Now that is his argument. If you translate it as covenant, you are compromising the Pauline doctrine of grace, which raises question about the whole theology of the Old Testament, I might add. But we won't go into that right now. Dismon encapsulates his linguistic and theological reasons for insisting that *diatheke* be rendered as *testament* in this short paragraph of Saint Paul, insisting that it meant in his Greek Old Testament a unilateral enactment, or last will or testament.

This one point concerns more than the merely superficial question of whether we are to write New Testament or New Covenant on the title page of our Bibles. It becomes ultimately the great question of all religious history: are we going to have a religion of grace or a religion of works. It involves the alternative: whether Pauline Christianity, or Augustinian, or Palagian. Now, that is one of the greatest overstatements and mistakes in this area ever committed.

When Dismon was writing, it was indeed the consensus that Hellenistic law and Hellenistic usage of *diatheke* supported an understanding of testament as an appropriate translation for *deithica* in the New Testament. But since Dismon's time, we have uncovered a good deal of Hellenistic material that shows that Dismon was too influenced by the Hellenistic discoveries of his own time, not to mention influenced by his own theological agenda. On the other hand, people like Behm have argued that though they agree with Dismon's emphasis on the one sided character of the *diatheke*, we shouldn't translate it as a testament. We ought to translate it as a disposition. And there have been a variety of arguments for that. Behm, for instance says, "the religious concept of *diatheke* in the Septuagint represents a significant development of a Hebrew term, even while preserving its essential content, to try and keep the actual word covenant, which in any case is not really coextensive with the Hebrew word, by adopting compromises like covenantal disposition, or covenanted order, or ordinance.

Well, by introducing the alien thought of testament only obscures the

linguistic and historical basis of *diatheke* in the New Testament. Again, I think Behm is completely out to lunch. Let me give you my arguments against these. There are a number of effective arguments in responding to these assertions by those who favor covenant as the proper translation of *diatheke*

First, it has been suggested that the notion of testament, that is last will and testament, never appears in the Septuagint in connection with *diatheke*. Now, this isn't just "Johnny-come-lately-me" coming along. Multon and Milligan in their vocabulary of New Testament Greek, or a vocabulary of the Greek Testament, respond directly to Dismon's contentions about the meaning of *diatheke*. And they say, we may fairly put aside the idea that the Septuagint testament is the invariable meaning of *diatheke*. It takes some courage to find that definition there at all. Now that is Multon and Milligan. And recent scholarship has tended to confirm that particular judgment. Mendenhall's work, those of you have worked on this from the Old Testament standpoint know G.E. Mendenhall's work on covenant. And his work on covenant has confirmed this as well. You will find it in the *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. You will also find it in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* article on Covenant which he helped co-author. And he confirms this, that recent scholarship indicates that testament is not a good translation of *diatheke* in the Septuagint. And if that verdict is accepted, then obviously, the case for testament as the usual rendering of *diatheke* in the New Testament is substantially weakened. If your main argument is been, the word *covenant* means for Paul, what it meant in his Greek Old Testament, and then you show that the Greek Old Testament never means testament when it uses *diatheke*, then you have a got a real problem trying to prove that Paul meant *testament*.

The second argument, against the idea that *diatheke* should be translated *disposition* in the Septuagint and also in the New Testament. It has been argued that the term *covenant* adequately conveys the unilateral character of the relationship without losing sight of its bilateral aspect. You remember we have said all along, you can't have a covenant in solitude. There has to be mutuality. There have to be two to have a covenant. And E. D. Burton, the great author of the commentary on

Galatians, has observed that the Old Testament concept of covenant carried the suggestion of both divine initiative and mutuality. And he concludes his study of *diatheke* in the pre-New Testament writings with these words. This is truly a great summarization. And if you are interested in this, you will find it in Burton's commentary on Galatians, page 500. But here is what he says:

“From the usage therefore, of the writers before the New Testament, or approximately contemporaneous with it, there emerged two distinct meanings of the word, *diatheke*. Testament, or testamentary provision is the most frequent use of *diatheke* in the classical writers. It is the invariable sense in Josephus. The meaning covenant is very infrequent in the classical writers, but it is the almost invariable meaning in the Septuagint, in the Old Testament Apocrypha, both translated and original, in the Alexandrine, and in the Palestinian. It is the meaning in the Sudapigrapha. It is the meaning in Philo. The essential distinction between these two meanings is that in a *testament*, the testator expresses his will, as to what should be done after his death, especially in respect to property. The *covenant* is an agreement between living persons, as to what should be done by them while they are living. It is of prime importance to observe that in the *diatheke*, the *birith*, between God and men so often spoken of in the Old Testament, the initiative is with God. And the element of a promise or command is prominent, but, it still remains essentially a covenant, not a testament.

In their emphasis on the former fact, some modern writers seem to lose sight of the latter. And I think that is one of the most brilliant summarization of this problem that has ever been put forth. People will argue, “See, it's promissory, it's promissory, therefore, it is not a covenant.” Of course it is promissory. God initiated it. It doesn't mean there is no mutuality to it. So you don't have to retranslate *covenant* to *testament* to emphasize the divine initiative in it.

So the translation of *covenant* is more adequate than the translation *testament*, because, it signifies a relationship established between two living parties, not one live one and one dead one. And it is preferable to the translation, *disposition*, because it denotes a binding relationship with attendant responsibilities and a

disposition doesn't necessarily involve a divine binding relationship with attending responsibilities. So both *testament* and *disposition* fail to convey the concept of mutuality inherent in the Septuagint usage of the *diatheke*.

Two further matters are worth noting. First, it has often been argued that we ought to translate *diatheke* as a disposition or a testament because of the reason that the Septuagint chose *diatheke* to translate *birith*. Have you ever heard that argument made? That the reason we know how to translate *diatheke* is because we know the reason why the Septuagint chose to translate *birith* as *diatheke* and not *suntheke*. Have you ever heard anyone stress that *suntheke* is used in Greek to talk about treaties, *diatheke* is often used to talk about last wills and testaments, and so the Septuagint chose *diatheke* because it wanted to stress, not the bilaterally, but it wanted to stress the unilateral nature of an Old Testament *birith*. So when the Septuagint guys are sitting down, trying to figure how we translate *birith*, they chose *diatheke* because it was more unilateral than *suntheke*. The essential distinction between the two, is suggested that the former, *diatheke* is one sided, while the latter, *suntheke* is two sided.

And it is further argued that the Septuagint translation actually develops the meaning of the Hebrew term. And on the basis of that reason, some have rejected covenant as a suitable translation, because it entails a bilateral meaning. But again, that argument over stretches the implications of the inferences on which it is based.

Should that distinction between *diatheke* and *suntheke* be the only or primary consideration in determining what the Old Testament means, or the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament means when it uses *diatheke*. Does that rule out the possibility of *diatheke* involving an aspect of mutuality. Let me appeal to the Old Testament scholar Walter Eichrodt. Eichrodt maintained that the Old Testament use of the covenant concept in secular life argues that the religious *birith* was always regarded as a bilateral relationship. For even though the burden is most unequally distributed between the two contracting parties. This makes no difference to the fact that the relationship was still essentially two sided. The idea that in ancient Israel, the *birith* was always and only

thought of as God's pledging Himself, to which human effort was required to make no kind of response can therefore be proved to be erroneous. In fact, in all the passages, we have seen so far, everywhere there is a pledge of God, there is a corresponding human response. So, by choosing *deithica*, was the Septuagint trying to exclude that kind of mutuality? I think that is just outlandish.

And anyway, D.J. McCarthy, who has no vested interest in this fight, says we don't know the Septuagint chose *diatheke* to translate *birith* as opposed to *suntheke*. So, we are inferring why they translated it, and then we are trying to use it as an argument against translating another way. And I think that is stretching it.

J.C. Henley has said this. We must not allow the Septuagint choice of *diatheke* to obliterate the fundamental idea of a compact leading to a mutual relationship. While, *birith* in its religious use, certainly means a relationship founded by God, and determined by Him, it nevertheless, signifies a wideness and richness of relationship which is lost, when you translate it as a decree or an ordinance or a disposition or a testament.

We can ask whether or not the objections of Dismon and Behm, and Cutch, and others have raised against the translation of *diatheke*, really apply to the English word, *covenant*. Very often, the idea is that the English word, *covenant*, implies bargaining with God about something: You scratch my back, I scratch yours. And it is very interesting that James Barr, himself, no great defender of evangelicalism says this: "In talking about biblical covenant on the other hand, I suspect that this word is for the most part, is for most users, something of an empty word. In itself, it does not convey anything specific. Such content as it has, comes from the provisions to be read in the context of the biblical passages."

So for most people, you are going to have an opportunity to introduce them to this concept for the first time. You can fill out the gaps there. And if that is the case, then a key objection to translating to *diatheke* is covenant is erased, when we conclude that the English *covenant* proves sufficiently flexible, to convey both the divine initiative and the mutually binding relationship, which is too often overlooked in the covenant.

The Covenant in the Synoptics, Acts and Pauline Writings

We have already looked at definitions of covenant and we have, or definitions of *diatheke* and *berith*, and the arguments over that translational controversy. And we have looked at one passage in the New Testament in some detail, the passage in Hebrew 9, which is difficult to translate. Many Bible translations will start in 9:15, with the word covenant, and they will switch to testament and then back to covenant again by the time they get to verse 18. But we have really not done a New Testament survey of covenant language, and I think that one benefit of doing such a survey is you can see the bare bones outline of a very clear New Testament covenant theology.

Many people, especially those people influenced by the Neo-Orthodox biblical theology movement, and those influenced, frankly, by very modern and trendy contemporary views of hermeneutics, are skeptical of Covenant Theology, thinking that it does, too much does damage to the nuances and subtleties of the text and tries to force everything into a mold. I think simply by surveying the occurrences of *covenant* in the New Testament, you will see that. A Covenant Theology is very much woven into the fabric of the New Testament and all its dimensions. And so I would like to review that language with you. And we will begin in the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and in Acts.

Covenant language in the Synoptic Gospels

So let's start by looking at the covenant language found in the Gospels, that is the synoptic Gospels, and Acts. There are thirty-three occurrences of the Greek word, *diatheke*, in the New Testament writings, and seventeen of them are found in the epistle to the Hebrews. Hebrews far and away uses the explicit languages of covenant more than anyone else. Nine are found in Paul's writings, in the 'Pauline corpus' as New Testament scholars say. They often say that because they are doubtful as to whether Paul wrote all of those letters. I do not use that term in that

way. I am not doubtful as to whether the apostle Paul wrote the letters ascribed to him. I say that because when you see that language, often times a New Testament scholar is wanting to avoid even commenting whether he believes Paul wrote something or not. So when I say 'Pauline corpuses,' I am just using it for convenience so I don't have to list every epistle that Paul wrote. So there are nine occurrences of *diatheke* in the Pauline writings. There is one occurrence of *diatheke* in the book of Revelation. And there are six occurrences of the term *diatheke* in the synoptics and Acts. In reviewing these passages, my purpose is going to be to observe the authors' theological use of the term *covenant*. How is he using, why is he using, what is he doing, when he uses that term *covenant*?

So, let's pick up now in Acts. The Abrahamic Covenant, the Abrahamic Covenant is mentioned explicitly three times in Luke's Acts. Viewing the Gospel of Luke and Acts as if it were part one and part two of a thematically unified work by Dr. Luke. We see the Abrahamic Covenant mentioned three times in that two part set of writings. The first occurrence is found in what people call the Benedictus, that is the hymn of Zacharias, Luke 1:68, where it is announced that the Lord has visited us and accomplished redemption for his people. You may want to turn there and look at the context as we go along in these various passages. Now, in that passage, in which Zacharias is singing praise to God, he goes on to say, Luke quotes, thus far, in Luke 1:72 and 73, that this redemptive visitation that is referred to in verse 68, remembering that He has visited us and accomplished redemption. That redemptive visitation, according to Luke, was in order to show mercy towards our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant, *diatheke, hagian, autou*, His holy covenant. The oath, the *orkon* which he swore to Abraham, our father. So that passage alludes to Psalm 105: 8-10 and verse 42, and that passage views redemption, New Testament redemption, the whole complex of the birth of John and the birth of the Lord Jesus. This new visitation that is occurring at the time of the advent of Christ is viewed as God's faithful response to His covenantal promise to Abraham.

Paul is not the person who came up with that idea. That is something which Paul learned from the Gospel tradition. Now even if you viewed

the Gospels as being written after the early epistles of Paul, that is fine, I have no problem with that particular projection, but you have to understand that Luke's Gospel tradition predates Paul's formulation of his theology. Now, maybe it did help Luke to have been hanging around with Paul as he was looking for some of this information, but note that the information upon which Paul's formulation of Christianity as the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Promises, predates Paul ever formulating that. That is very important to recognize, because there are still people today who want to insist that Paul invented Christianity as we know it. But the basic thrust of Paul's arguments in Galatians about the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Promise, it is there already, here you see in Luke. It is there already in the data which Luke quotes for us in his Gospel.

Now, another passage, Acts 3:25, Acts 3:25 contains a similar connection. Peter is preaching from the portico of Solomon there. And he says to the crowd, "it is you, who are the sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with your fathers. Saying to Abraham, in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed." Here it is to be noted that Peter is addressing the men of Israel, whom he identifies, how? As sons of the Abrahamic Covenant.

This passage gives a slightly altered reading of the Septuagint version of Genesis 22:18. And in the context of the sermon that Peter is preaching links the coming of Christ to what? To the Abrahamic Promise. For as God covenanted with Abraham, *diatheke* is used there, as God covenanted with Abraham that in his seed, all the families of the earth shall be blessed, and goes on to argue, so "He sent the Christ, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways," verse 26. So God covenanted with Abraham, that in his seed, all the families of the earth shall be blessed, so He sent the Christ to bless you, by turning you from your wicked ways.

H. A. A. Kennedy, who was a New Testament professor at Edinburgh, early in the Twentieth Century, says, "here the covenant idea of the Old Testament as exemplified by the promise made to Abraham is regarded as consummated in the blessing brought by Christ, the servant of the Lord. It is the blessing of complete deliverance from sin, which means unbroken fellowship with God."

So again, I am wanting you to see that right here, woven into the fabric of Luke and Acts, in a passage that it would be very easy for us to read through the Gospels and skip over and miss the significance of, is a Gospel writer recording in the events surrounding the advent of Christ, and in the first proclamation of the Gospel after the Pentecost, a linkage between the Abrahamic Covenant and the Gospel of Grace itself.

You may recall when we started off, the very first sentence I spoke in the class, was to give you Mark Dever's definition of Covenant Theology: "Covenant Theology is just the Gospel." That is not an overstatement. Right here are the very heart of the Gospel presentation, as revealed in the Gospel of Luke and in the Book of Acts, we see, God's covenant designs woven in to the plan of salvation, as revealed by the New Testament prophets and apostles, not just the Old Testament, but the New Testament prophets and apostles.

One other passage in Acts, chapter 7 verse 8, where the Abrahamic Covenant is referred to there again, this time, with the sign of circumcision in view. The narrative which recounts Stephen's speech before the Sanhedrin links the Exodus to the Abrahamic Promise. You'll notice that in Acts 7, verses 17, 25, and then 32-34. This narrative links the Exodus to the Abrahamic Promise and views the Covenant Circumcision as promissory of Isaac's birth.

Verse 8, for instance, reads this way: "And he gave him the covenant of circumcision, *diatheken peritomes*, the Covenant of Circumcision. He gave him the Covenant of Circumcision, and so, Abraham became the father of Isaac. And he circumcised him on the eighth day, and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve Patriarchs, and so, the Covenant of Circumcision looked to the provision of offspring for Abraham, which was of course, crucial to the fulfillment of God's promise that Abraham's seed would possess the land. So Stephen points you in this direction here in Acts chapter 7.

Now, these three passages are important because they provide clear examples of the New Testament term, *diatheke*, being used in the Old Testament sense of *berith*, not as "last will and testament," but in every

one of these cases it is used as a *covenant*, as a *berith*. They also, manifest Luke's connection between the redemptive visitation of the Messiah and the Abrahamic Covenant. In Luke's mind, the coming of Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah, is directly connected to the Abrahamic Covenant. These passages also allude to a link between God's fulfillment of the Covenant of Abraham, and the forgiveness of sins. So there is a link between the fulfillment of God's Covenant with Abraham and the forgiveness of sin.

Let me give you the verses to look at to see those linkages. It is not quite as clear as the others, but I think you will see the linkages there in the context of the argument. In Luke 1, if you will look at verses 72, 73, and 77, you will see the flow of argument connecting the Covenant of Abraham, its fulfillment, and the forgiveness of sins. You will also see this in Acts 3, verses 19, 25, and 26. Now why is that significant? Well, of course later on in the book of Hebrews, this will be one of the major emphasis that the fulfillment of the New Covenant. And one of its essential central features is what? The forgiveness of sins. So that the whole New Testament idea of the forgiveness of sins - and how much closer you could get to the very heart of the Gospel proclamation - is directly related to what? The fulfillment of Covenant promises in the Old Testament.

Now, Luke's record of the Song of Zacharias furnishes sufficient evidence that it is incorrect to say, that in the synoptic tradition there is no suggestion of covenant thought except in the narratives of the Last Supper. That is claimed by a gentleman named R.V. Moss, who wrote a book on the covenant conception in early Christianity. He makes that claim, "that you don't find any covenant thought anywhere except in the Last Supper narratives," in that particular thesis that was done at the University of Chicago a number of years ago. And I am sure there are others who would hold those same sentiments. That is incorrect. We are just restricting ourselves to those explicit interests. I am not saying this is all the evidence you could find. I am just saying you that can't ignore this evidence. It is right there, it as plain as the nose on your face.

However, I will not argue with the fact that those Eucharistic narratives, those Last Supper narratives, those Lord's Supper narratives are of first

importance in explaining and in providing testimony of Covenant thought in the synoptic Gospels. As we approach the three supper accounts found in the Synoptic Gospels, it is going to be our purpose to discern the theological significance of the Covenant idea in these respective texts. Matthew's form of the Eucharistic words, the words of institution, if you will, over the Supper, is usually recognized to be a slight revision of Mark's account. I don't know what your positions are on Gospel criticism, but that is sort of a standard view. Matthew's words, are a slight revision of Mark's account. In Matthew's narrative, the cup word, and by the way, I will use over and over, the "cup" word, and the "bread" word. That is just short hand for referring to Jesus' words of institution over the cup and Jesus' words of institution over the bread. I am not trying to be fancy, it is just short hand. It is a way of abbreviating. So the cup word, and the bread word, refers to Jesus' explanations and words accompanying his giving of the cup and his giving of the bread. In Matthew's narrative, the cup word, reads as follows, "drink from it, all of you, for this is My blood of the covenant." *To haima mou tes diathekes*. This is My blood of the covenant which is poured out for many, for the forgiveness of sins. You will find that in Matthew 26, the second half of verse 27, and into verse 28.

There are at least three observations worth mentioning concerning the covenant idea in that passage. So let's begin with Matthew. Matthew 26, second half of 27, and verse 28.

The "Covenant" in Matthew's cup word.

First, this phrase, this is my blood of the covenant, *to haima mou tes diathekes*, recalls the words of the sacrificial inauguration of the synoptic covenant recorded in Exodus 24:8. Moses inaugurating the covenant at Sinai speaks words almost identical. In Exodus 24:8, the terminology is, "behold the blood of the covenant, *to haima tes diathekes*." That is the Septuagint rendering "which the Lord has made with you." Here, Moses sacrificed young bulls, and after reading the book of the covenant in the presence of the people, he sprinkled the blood of these slaughtered beasts on the people, declaring that sprinkled blood, to be the blood of the covenant. Thus, the covenant was ratified.

In Matthew's narrative, then, the significance of the cup, or its contents, that which it is setting forth, that which it is representing, is relating in some way to the blood sprinkled in ratification of the Mosaic Covenant. Now that is just clear as the nose on your face. Matthew is relating this now to Exodus 24:8. That is the first thing I want you to see.

Second, and following on that previous point, you may note that Matthew's text differs from the Septuagint in the addition of only one word to the phrase, *mou*, so that the cup is said to represent not simply the blood of the covenant, but Christ's blood of the Covenant, "My blood," Christ is speaking the words. This explicit connection between Jesus' blood and the blood sprinkling at Sinai points to an understanding of Jesus' death as a covenantal sacrifice.

I. Howard Marshall expands on that very thought in his book on the Last Supper narratives, if you are interested in following that up, you will find that on pages, 91-93. Douglas Moo, says, "the covenant sacrifice of Exodus 24:8, is a unique a foundational event implying, perhaps, the taking away of sins as a necessary prelude to relationship with God, but emphasizing more strongly the establishment of fellowship."

It has been pointed out, that the narrative of Exodus 24 is the only sacrificial ritual recorded in the Old Testament in which the blood was sprinkled on the people. Furthermore, Jewish tradition ascribed atoning sacrifice to this blood. **It is not, therefore, with an ordinary sacrifice that Jesus connects His death, but with a unique atoning sacrifice that emphasizes the ultimate involvement of those who participate.** You see the richness of Jesus' words now. What is He doing? He is giving a pre explanation of what is going to start happening on the next day to his disciples. Perhaps they miss it completely that night and the next day and the day after, and even the day after. But eventually they understand the significance of what Jesus says. That is the second thing.

Thirdly, in Matthew's cup word alone, we find the phrase, "for forgiveness of sins," *eis aphesin hamartion*, "for forgiveness of sins," which serves to indicate the purpose of the shedding of the blood of the covenant, and perhaps suggestive of Isaiah 53:15, or of Jeremiah 31:34.

Both passages, of course, connect the covenant idea, the idea of the Suffering Servant and sacrifice and the forgiveness of sins. Isaiah 53:12, Jeremiah 31:34. Here again we have a connection between the covenant idea and the forgiveness of sins.

The "Covenant" in Mark's cup word.

Mark's form of the cup word, is as follows: "This is my blood of the covenant, *to haima mou tes diathekes*. The same formula as before, but now, "which is poured out for many." As we have previously mentioned, this seems to be the precursor of Matthew's cup word, and was apparently based on a primitive tradition in Hebrew or Aramaic. Joachim Jeremias argues this in his book on the eucharistic words of Jesus. So does I. Howard Marshall. We may note again the presence of the allusion to Exodus 24:8, and the addition of the term, *mou*, which is essential to the illusion that Jesus is making.

Now, we have not yet commented on the phrase found in Matthew and Mark, "which is poured out for many." But let's look at Mark's form of that phrase "which is poured out for many," *Ekchunnomenon huper pollon*, which is poured out for many. It has been suggested that this is a word of explanation, reminiscent of Isaiah 53:12, in the form that it is found in the Massoretic Text rather than the Septuagint form, Isaiah 53:12. This points to the eminent vicarious death that Jesus by which Jesus would establish the covenant.

The "Covenant" in Luke's cup word.

We turn to Luke's cup word now, Luke 22, second half of verse 19, and verse 20. There we are faced with a textual problem which warrants a brief consideration. In a small number of texts, Luke 22, 19b and 20, is omitted. And despite strong manuscript support for the longer reading, there have been scholars, who have preferred the shorter reading. In support of the shorter reading, it is probably the harder of the two readings, and so reasonably favored, according to the canons of textual criticism. One of the rules as you know, that most modern textual critics operate by is this rule: a shorter reading is always preferred to a longer reading, and a more difficult reading is preferred to an easier reading. And that maybe more difficult theologically, or it may be a difficult

reading in terms of other factors, however, on behalf of the longer reading, let me point out first of all, briefly, the weakness of the manuscript evidence for the short reading. I. Howard Marshall says, “a point of particular importance is that the manuscript evidence for the short reading is poor. It consists of only one Greek manuscript, D. some Latin versions, together with some Syriac and Coptic evidence for rearranging the verses and a variant reading with only one Greek manuscript, and a decidedly erratic one, in its favor, is decidedly weak.” Jeremias agrees. So there is the first thing. The manuscript evidence is weak.

Second, the strength the strength of the manuscript support for the longer version is impressive. The long form is attested by all the Greek manuscripts, the earliest, being P. 75, which was drafted somewhere between 175 and 225. So all the Greek manuscripts, except D, have the longer reading. All the versions, with the exception of the Old Syriac and the part of the Itala, and also all the early Christian writers, beginning with Marcion, Justin, Tatian, follow this. So you have overwhelming external evidence for the longer reading that you have today, in all of your translations. You may have a textual note in some of them indicating that these verses may be disputed, but that is why all of your versions in English today will have the longer reading. There is very strong a testation.

Let me say one other thing. It can also be argued that the presence of two cups in the longer form, the last cup of the Passover Supper, and then you have got the cup of the Lord’s Supper, that the presence of two cups in the longer form of Luke’s narrative, constitutes as difficult a reading, as the reversal of the bread cup order constitutes in the shorter form. And in fact, that may be the explanation for the shorter accounts. Perhaps somebody came along, noticed two cups in the account and said, oops, I better correct that, lops out one of the cups, and ends up with a reversed bread, cup order that actually has conflated the end of the Last Passover and the administration of the Lord’s Supper. You know, he meant well, it just proves if you are a scribe, don’t think, just write. So, it is not unreasonable to support the longer reading as the original form.

Now, I do that because Luke’s passage is so important that if you are

going to argue with somebody someday over the theological significance of it, you don't want to be undercut by somebody saying, "Well, that is textually dubious anyway." Well, if it is textually dubious, then about 98 percent of the New Testament is textually dubious. Our consideration, then, of Luke's cup word will proceed on the presupposition of the authenticity of Luke 22, verses 19 and 20. Luke's cup word, reads as follows, "this cup which is poured out for you, is the New Covenant in My blood," *E kaine diatheken en to haimati mou*. That is Luke 22:20.

There are three things I would like you to see, relating to the covenant idea in Luke's cup word. First, Luke's account includes the emphasis on the vicarious nature of Jesus' action for you. It is poured out for you, as say Matthew and Mark. They emphasize that vicarious action by what phrase? "For many." So Luke uses the term *for you*, Matthew and Mark use, *many*, but **the point is the same: this is a vicarious sacrifice**. And this of course relates to Jesus as a covenantal sacrifice.

Second, in distinction from Matthew and Mark, Luke identifies the cup with the New Covenant. Matthew, Mark take you to Exodus 24, while Luke identifies the cup with the New Covenant, apparently, looking back to Jeremiah 31, verses 31-34, the significance of which is that Christ's death is seen as fulfillment and realization of Jeremiah's New Covenant prophecy and promise. At first glance, this illusion to Jeremiah 31 in the cup word, may seem to set Matthew and Mark's account and tradition which is arguably drawing on Exodus 24:8, over against Luke and Paul's tradition. We will see this when we get to Corinthians. You know, Luke and Paul are going to have a similar form. So, do we have two traditions of Jesus' saying? Jeremias again, however, sees Luke's wording, "the New Covenant in My blood," as explanatory of "My blood of the covenant," rather than contradictory of it.

Obviously, in all the passages in the Gospel, where Jesus' sermons and words of teaching are recorded, we clearly have an outline form of them. And the authors are accurately representing something that Jesus no doubt said to the disciples in a significantly longer discourse. That He would use both phrases in the context of that discourse, one to explain the other, makes perfect sense. You do it all the time. Every time you

preach, every time you teach, every time you engage in a theological discussion with someone, you will give a phrase, you will it slightly differently later, you will explain it later. There is no contradiction at all. Douglas Moo observes that “while the covenant in Matthew/Mark is not specifically identified as new, it is idol to deny that that concept is implicitly present in Jesus’ claim that a covenant in His blood is about to be ratified. It has to be new, because it is going to be ratified in His blood, and He wasn’t around in Exodus 24:8.” So there is a New Covenant happening in Matthew and Mark, just as surely as there is in Luke.

It seems likely then, that Jeremiah 31, verses 31-34 is in the background of Matthew and Mark’s cup sayings, as well, as Luke’s cup word. Y.K. Yoo, a Korean scholar, wrote a thesis at the University of Durham on the usage of the New Covenant passage in Jeremiah in the New Testament. And here is what he says, “with regard to the close connection between the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:31 and following, and that in the New Testament, it is important to note that the Old Testament allusions to the cup word, indicate that the writer of the Synoptic Gospels and Paul understood the New Covenant established by the blood of Jesus by relating the event, not to Jeremiah 31: 31 alone, but to Jeremiah 31:31 and following in combination, with other Old Testament texts. In other words, the fulfillment of the promise of the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:31 and following in the New Testament does not seem to have been conceived of as one to one, rather, this fulfillment can be understood by relating the significance of the death of Jesus to Jeremiah 31, in light of other Old Testament covenant texts.

His argument is simply this: It is not that you simply go back to Jeremiah 31 and see this straight shot from Jeremiah 31 right into Luke’s Last Supper account. It is that Jesus’ death is linked to Jeremiah 31 in the eyes of the inspired author as Jeremiah 31 relates to other Old Testament covenant passages, so you are drawing forward actually a cluster of Old Testament texts and testimony, rather than just one in isolation. I think that is a helpful comment. The significance of this is that Christ’s death is seen as the fulfillment and realization of Jeremiah’s New Covenant prophecy and promise. This is where we started out.

Furthermore, we may note that Luke's allusion to Jeremiah's New Covenant prophecy neither excludes the possibility of reference to Exodus 24:8, nor prevents him elsewhere from explaining Christ's death in relation to the Mosaic economy. So just because Luke relates Jesus' explanation of His death to Jeremiah 31, that doesn't keep Luke elsewhere from relating the work of Christ to the Mosaic Covenant. As an example, think of Luke's account of the transfiguration. Jesus appears in His glory, Luke 9:31, talking with Moses and Elijah. Here Luke seems to be looking to the Exodus event when he says, and they were speaking of His Exodus, *ten exsodon autou*, which He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem.

So again, Jesus' work of death in Jerusalem is related there to the Exodus. Douglas Moo, argues this in his thesis on the passion narratives. And Moo is no friend of traditional Covenant Theology. Moss, I believe argues this. The context argues that more is meant by *exsodon* than *departure*. The context clearly is redemptive historical.

Third, we may suggest a connection between the covenant idea and Passover, as it relates to the Lord's Supper in Luke. We may suggest a connection between the covenant idea and the Passover in Luke as in the other synoptic Eucharistic narratives, where Jesus' words, "My body, and My blood" appear. Jeremias has argued that those words designate the component parts of a slaughtered sacrificial animal: body, blood. So when Jesus applies these words to Himself, He is speaking of Himself as a sacrifice. Listen to Jeremias again in his book, *Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, page 222. "Jesus is applying to Himself terms from the language of sacrifice as is also the case with the participle poured out, *ekchunnomenon*." Poured out. You will find it in Mark 14:24 for instance. Each of the two nouns presupposes a slaying that has separated flesh and blood. In other words, Jesus speaks of Himself as a sacrifice. This is My body, this is My blood. So, when Jesus uses those words, He is speaking of Himself as a sacrifice.

Furthermore, it is likely, given that the context in which Jesus is speaking those words is what? - a Passover meal - that Jesus is referring to Himself as the Paschal lamb. He is referring to Himself as the Passover lamb. Let me go again to Douglas Moo's comments: "It would not be

surprising if Jesus and the evangelists appeal to the Passover traditions in their explanation of Jesus' passion, in as much as this tradition was supremely influential in Jewish theology and often was regarded as a prefiguring of the *eschaton*." And Jeremias says this: "With the words, *den bisri*, this is my sacrificial flesh, and *den idmi*, this is my sacrificial blood, Jesus is therefore most probably speaking of Himself as the Passover lamb. He is the Eschatological Passover lamb representing the fulfillment of all of that which the Egyptian Passover lamb and all the subsequent sacrificial lambs were the prototype.

So, if that is the case, then it is possible to argue that the synoptic writers understand Jesus' death as the Passover sacrifice which establishes the New Covenant. *Jeremias* says this beautifully on page 226 of his book, let me quote again, "Jesus describes His death as this Eschatological Passover sacrifice. His vicarious *huper*, vicarious death, brings into operation, the final deliverance, the New Covenant of God." *Diatheke* Covenant is a correlate of *basileia ton autanon*.

Now that is an amazing statement by a non-seventeenth century covenant theologian. Listen to what he says: *Diatheke* is a correlate of *of basileia ton autanon*. The what? The kingdom of heaven. **He has just related covenant to the kingdom of heaven idea in the Gospels.** Now, do you know what that opens up for you when you go back into the Gospels? The covenant concept is now related to all of Jesus' explanations and exhortations relating to the concepts of the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven. You have just opened up a huge new world of Gospel interpretation based on that correlation. But, and this is Jeremias speaking, "Covenant is a correlate of kingdom of heaven. The content of this gracious institution which is mediated by Jesus' death is perfect communion with God in his reign based upon the forgiveness of sins."

Summary of "Covenant" in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts.

Our survey of covenant thought in the synoptics and Acts suggest the following points. One, the Christ event in Luke and Acts. And remember, many scholars, will use the phrase, "Christ event," to avoid commenting on whether they believe in the historical incarnation, death,

resurrection, of Christ, because that would mean that there is something that happened there that was significant, but we are really not sure. The Christ event. That is not how I am using it. I am using it as short hand to refer to the totality of Christ's life and ministry, resurrection, ascension, etc. The totality of that event, because it is all inextricably connected, the incarnation with the atonement, the life with His passive obedience, or His penal obedience on the cross, the resurrection, and the ascension to the value of His death, etc. So when I say, "Christ event," I am talking about that whole complex; I am not giving you liberal double-speak, I am speaking of that whole complex of what Christ did. The synoptics in Acts relate the Christ event to the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise. As Jeremias observes, "When Luke 1:72 says that God remembers His covenant, this means that He is now fulfilling the Eschatological Covenant promise."

Two. More specifically, in Acts 3:25, the coming of Christ is seen as the fulfillment of God's promise to bless the nations through Abraham. In the context of both Luke 1:72, and Acts 3:25, the idea of forgiveness of sins is present and is understood as part of the fulfillment of the covenant promise to Abram.

Third. In Matthew and Mark's cup words, the words of explanation, "My blood of the covenant" allude to the institution of the Mosaic covenant in Exodus 24:8. And Jesus' death is understood as a covenant inaugurating sacrifice, which provide the atoning basis for a New Covenant relationship between God and His people.

Fourth. In Matthew 26:28, the covenantal sacrifice is explicitly said to bring about the forgiveness of sins. In addition to the elusion to Exodus 24:8, which has already been noted. Isaiah 53:12, or Jeremiah 31:34b, seem to be in the background, thus amalgamating the idea of the fulfillment of the New Covenant with the Isianic servant concepts. So now, you see a bringing together of the idea of the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant, the fulfillment of Jeremiah's New Covenant, and now, the Isianic servant passages, all linked together. Even I. Howard Marshall, the last living Arminian sees this. The concepts of the covenant and of the Suffering Servant, who bears the sins of the many, fit in with

one another and form a unified whole. There is a fundamental unity between them, which means that they belong together theologically and neither of them need be regarded as a secondary development of an originally simpler interpretation of the death of Jesus. That is an incredibly important statement. In any case, the connection here between the covenant idea and the forgiveness of sins, is unambiguous.

Fifth. In Matthew and Mark's cup word, we also see a connection between Isaiah 53:12 in the phrase, "Poured out for many." This provides further evidence that the synoptic writers related the covenant idea to the suffering servant idea.

Sixth, Luke's cup word explicitly identifies the cup with the New Covenant. Luke 22:20. It is possible to argue, then that it looks back to Jeremiah 31:31 and 34 and that Luke understands Jesus' death as inaugurating the New Covenant spoken of by Jeremiah. The presence of an allusion to Jeremiah 31:31-34 in Luke's cup word, does not rule out the possibility that it may also recall Exodus 24:8, and it is not implausible to argue that Luke elsewhere explains the death of Christ in terms of the Exodus. Luke 9.

Seventh. In both the Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Paul traditions, the Eucharistic words and their context suggest that Jesus was understood as the Passover lamb. I. Howard Marshall, again, "The death of Jesus was probably associated with the Passover sacrifice in the context of the Lord's Supper. This conclusion can be drawn from I Corinthians 5:7. If this is so, then for the synoptic, a connection is established between the significance of the Passover and the Last Supper. That is, as the Passover recalls that the blood of the slaughtered lambs established the covenant and delivered Israel, from destruction, so also, the supper signifies that Jesus' sacrificial death as the Passover lamb brings the ultimate Passover, Redemption from sin in the establishment of the New Covenant."

And so, it may be argued that in these Eucharistic narratives, the synoptic authors see in the Passover, and in the Exodus in general a pattern for Jesus' work of deliverance. Spiritual, redemptive, covenantal deliverance. Nevertheless, Passover imagery is conspicuously absent in the synoptic Gospels outside of the Supper narratives. And it is John's

Gospel that refers to the Passover most clearly. Now, you can argue that the same reason why Jesus avoided Messianic terminology in public preaching motivated this. And it makes perfect sense then, if John's Gospel is a later Gospel, that he would be prepared to address this as the church is established than would the early Gospel writers in their accounts of Jesus' public ministry.

Eighth, the covenant idea is at the very heart of the meaning of the cup word in each of the synoptic's Eucharistic narratives. Covenant terminology is present in the words of interpretation of each. This is indicative of the importance of the covenant idea in the synoptic writers understanding of the meaning of Jesus' death. And how much closer can you get to the heart of the Gospel, than the meaning of the Lord Jesus' death? And here is what tied up with that - the covenant. You can't understand Jesus' death, without covenant theology. Covenant Theology supplies the very heart of the explanation of the meaning of your Lord's death.

Ninth, and finally, we may note that in each of these passages, in the synoptics and in Acts, where *diatheke* is employed, the context argues for *diatheke* to be translated as covenant, and there are absolutely no compelling contextual reasons for understanding it as a last will and testament.

The Covenant in the Pauline Writings

Romans

Romans 9:4 is one of only three passages in the New Testament where *covenant* appears in the plural. *Diathekai*. And all three of those passages where *covenant* appears in the plural are Pauline. The ambiguity of this rather exceptional plural usage has caused some consternation amongst commentators as they try to determine exactly which covenants Paul is referring to. A commentator named Rotesell has suggested that *diathekai* is here to be understood as ordinances, commandments, or perhaps oaths. James Dunn, who I don't normally quote approvingly, I think rightly says that, that is an unnecessary or unjustified translation. And Dunn, himself, in the W.B.C. commentary that he wrote on Romans 9-16 suggests that Paul is either referring to the

covenant given to Abraham, and renewed to Isaac and Jacob, or he says, even more likely, and this is a shocker, to the Old and New Covenants, a surprisingly traditional sort of interpretation for a radical guy like Dunn. But then again, he wrote that commentary back in 1988, and he has been moving ever since.

Most commentators, however, do not share Dunn's enthusiasm for that latter interpretation. That is, the idea that it refers to the Old and New Covenants, and see here a reference to the Patriarchal covenants. Let me give you a list of some of the commentators that do that. Headlum, in the I.C.C. International Critical Commentary Series, in the Commentary on Romans Monk, in his book, *Christ in Israel*, and Zisler, in his commentary on Paul's letter to the Romans. John Murray, in his commentary on the Romans, understands Paul's reference as either to the two distinct covenantal administrations of Abraham, or to the Abrahamic, Mosaic and Davidic Covenants. But most people see this as a reference to the Patriarchal covenants with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The references to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob which immediately follow this mention of the covenants, would seem to support that kind of reading in indicating the various extensions of the Abrahamic covenant.

Whatever the case may be, our primary concern with this passage is to note two ideas of Paul's connected with those covenants. First, Paul says that these covenants belong to his kinsmen according to the flesh, Israelites. Second, along side that assertion of the privileges of ethnic Israel, Paul stresses that the legitimate descendants of Abraham and the heirs to the promise are not children of the flesh, but children of the promise. There are other books surveying Pauline literature that are almost always easier to read, but Ritterboss has some rich stuff. Listen to what Ritterboss says on pages 354-356 in his book on Paul, translated by one of our former faculty members, Dick Dewitt. Ritterboss says this, "the remarkable thing is that while Paul's pronouncements on faith and belonging to Christ as the only criterion of what in an enduring sense may count as the seed of Abraham, seem to warrant the conclusion that natural Israel has lost its function in the history of redemption in every respect." But he, himself, time and again, feels the need to guard against the thought of such an exclusion of imperial and national Israel as the

people of God and to deny it as not consistent with the historical election of Israel.

Now no matter what your eschatological views are, I think that is an interesting comment. Paul's statements here are certainly antagonistic in the sense that one of the classic marks of Marion and the Gnostics was to deny that Israel ever sustained a unique relationship with the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And clearly, Paul wipes that out here in Romans 9, verses 3 and 4. In Romans 11, verse 27, we find the only other usage of *diatheke* in the book of Romans. Paul quotes from Isaiah, "and this is My covenant," *e par emou diatheke*. Literally, "this is the covenant from Me with them when I take away their sins." The first half of the verse, the first half of the phrase is verbatim from the Septuagint version of Isaiah 59:21. The second is close to Isaiah 27:9, again from the Septuagint.

Here, covenant is mentioned in a context here where Paul is discussing the election of Israel. We may make two observations about the covenant idea in this passage. First, it is explicitly linked to the forgiveness of sins. In this case, Romans 11, 27, it is linked to the forgiveness of the sins of all Israel, to whomever that refers. And we won't get into that argument right now. Second, Paul's emphasis here is clearly on God's faithfulness to His covenantal promises. That is, the unilateral aspect of God's covenant is in view. God's covenantal initiative brings forgiveness, it Removes ungodliness from His people. John Murray, with a beautifully nuanced phrase says this, "in a way consistent with the concept of covenant, the accent falls upon what God will do." In a way consistent with the concept of covenant, the accent falls on what God will do. Yes, it is a two sided relationship. But the accent falls on what God will do.

I Corinthians

Let's turn to the Corinthian epistles, and look first at Paul's account of the Lord's Supper, in I Corinthians 11. Since we have already given some consideration to the covenant idea in the synoptic Eucharistic narratives, our treatment of Paul's cup word in I Corinthians 11:25 is going to be relatively concise. The text reads this way: "This cup is the New Covenant in "My blood," *e kaine diatheke estin en to emo haimati*, "Do this as

often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me” The first clause is very close to the reading we found in Luke 22:20, but the second is a distinctive part of Paul’s cup word.

Here, just as in Luke’s explanation, the cup is said to represent the inauguration in the New Covenant, by the blood, that is, by the death of Christ. And so Paul’s account also alludes to the covenant inauguration by sacrifice in Exodus 24:8, and to the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s New Covenant. Paul’s cup word, however, does not include a phrase parallel to Luke’s “poured out for you.” You remember, we said that explicitly indicated the vicarious nature of Jesus’ death. Nevertheless, the concept of Jesus’ vicarious death, His death on our part, is clearly implied, both by comparison with Paul’s bread word, in chapter 11, verse 24, which says what? “For you.” And in Paul’s understanding of Jesus as the eschatological Passover lamb, evident in I Corinthians 5:7, “For Christ, our Passover also has been sacrificed.”

As previously mentioned, “do this in remembrance of Me,” is unique among the cup sayings, though it is found in both Paul’s and Luke’s bread words. A.R. Mallard sees in that memorial emphasis, that remembrance emphasis, a recollection of the ancient covenant formula, or, as the covenant ritual is enacted, you are to remember the basis of its establishment. Whatever the case may be, it serves to remind us that the supper is about the significance of the Lord’s death, which is reiterated by Paul in the phrase, “as often as you eat this bread, and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes,” verse 26.

II Corinthians

When we turn to II Corinthians 3, we encounter for the first time, in our present survey of *diatheke* in the New Testament writings, a comparison between the New Covenant and the Old. Here, Paul is commending his ministry to the Corinthians, and he says, “our adequacy is from God who also made us adequate as servants of a New Covenant, *diakonous kaines diathekes*. Servants of a New Covenant, not of the letter but of the spirit, “for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life,” II Corinthians 3:5b and 6. The verses which follow expand on the theme that is announced there. In the phrase, “servants of a New Covenant,”

Paul is again drawing on Jeremiah 31, verses 31-34. By this appeal to Jeremiah's New Covenant, Paul defines the character of his ministry. As Moses was God's minister of the Old Covenant, established at Sinai, so is Paul a God's minister of the New Covenant, which was prophesied by Jeremiah and established in Christ's death.

Indeed, the very mention of his new covenant ministry sets the stage for the comparison of the old and the new administrations of God's redemptive plan that is going to follow in His argument. In chapter 3, verses 7-11, Paul, demonstrates the superior glory of the service of the New Covenant, by pointing to distinctions between the older ministry and the new. According to Paul, the Old covenant administration was a ministry of three things: death, verse 7, condemnation, verse 9, and transient glory, verse 11. Death, condemnation, transient glory. The new Covenant administration is one of spirit, verse 8, righteousness, verse 9, abiding glory, verse 11. It is significant, but not necessarily remarkable that Paul is here to contrast the old and the new covenants. Geerhardus Vos, in his *Biblical Theology*, page 301, says this of Paul's argument here: "Paul, is in the New Testament, the great exponent of the fundamental bisection in the history of redemption and revelation, thus, he speaks not only of the two regimes of law and faith, but even expresses himself in consecutive form of statement after faith is come, Galatians 3:25, it is no wonder then, that with him, we find the formal distinction between the new *diatheke* and the old *diatheke*." Here also to be sure, we have in the first place, a contrast between two religious administrations, that of the letter and that of the Spirit, that of condemnation, and that of righteousness.

Now, because of the diversity of scholarly opinion concerning Paul's conception of the Old Covenant, his understanding of the relationships between the Old and the New Testaments, or the Old and New Covenants, his view of the Mosaic law, the precise meaning and implications of his bold distinction here between letter and spirit, these matters warrant at least brief consideration in so far as they pertain to our understanding of the covenant. Paul, it seems to me, in his discontinuity, in his dichotomy here, is often been over read by people. They have read more into Paul than there is there with regard to

discontinuity. Our Dispensational friends, it seems to me, especially, and our Antinomian friends especially.

In chapter 3, verse 14, Paul speaks of the reading of the Old Covenant, *tes palaias diathekes*. Now some interpreters have suggested that Paul means by that phrase, not the Mosaic writings themselves, but a legalistic self righteous attitude in the handling of those writings. Now, let me just stop and say just a couple of things about that.

We Reformed folk, when we come to a passage like this, are naturally reactive to those who want to drive a hard wedge between Old Covenant and New Covenant and basically break in part the covenant of grace, and see the Covenant of Grace as merely a New Testament thing. And so while our hearts are pulled towards reading Paul, in as much continuity as possible, the problem with that is, sometimes you lose the emphasis that Paul, himself, wants to give you. You can rest assured that Paul is not going to be against your construct of the continuity of the Covenant of Grace. Just let me put your hearts at ease on that. And having put your hearts at ease about that, you can let Paul have as much rhetorical force as he wants to have here, because Paul wants to stress discontinuity right now.

Let me give you some example of Reformed expositors who have, I think, not caught Paul's emphasis, because they are so concerned to stress continuity between the old and the new. Buswell, in his *Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, says, "Paul is not distinguishing the Old covenant writings, and the New Covenant, he is distinguishing a misreading of the Old Covenant writings and the New Covenant." Now, surely that kind of thing, is criticized in the New Testament. Jesus constantly criticizes the Pharisees' reading of the law, though He never brings strictures against the law of God. So, that kind of thing certainly happens in the New Testament.

But is that what Paul is doing? Wilbur Wallace also argues that the Old Covenant does not indicate a body of Scripture, per say, here, but takes on a special disparaging ironic sense, expressive of unbelief's distorted understanding of those scriptures. Robert Rayburn attempts to argue that in his Ph.D. dissertation from the University of Aberdeen, entitled,

The Contrast Between the Old and the New Covenants. The problem with this, is it leaves you with a flat view of covenant continuity, where there is no redemptive development. Old covenant, new covenant, it is just the same. There is no development.

Paul wants to stress discontinuity at this point, and there are good reasons for our not reading Paul in this suggestive way. Paul is not contrasting Old covenant, the Mosaic Covenant writings of Moses, with the New Covenant. He is contrasting a legalistic, self righteous attitude as you read those writings with the New Covenant. There are good reasons for not understanding Paul's use of the term, Old Covenant, in that way. First, the passage makes it clear that the Old Covenant here is something that can be read. Look at the context again. The Old Covenant here is something that can be read. Now, look, you can read Moses, and misunderstand him, but you can't read a legalistic attitude expressive of a misunderstanding of Moses. You may have a legalistic attitude expressive of a misunderstanding of Moses as you read Moses, but you can't read a legalistic attitude expressive of a misunderstanding of Moses. So whatever Paul is talking about here, he is talking about something you can read.

Second, Paul's parallel in verses 14 and 15 between the phrases, "the reading of the Old Covenant," and "whenever Moses is read," strongly argues for an understanding of Old Covenant here as Mosaic law. The Mosaic law. Consequently, when Paul alludes to the economy of the Old Covenant here and elsewhere, he is speaking of the redemptive administration typified by the giving of the law at Sinai. The redemptive era, that redemptive administration, typified by the giving of the law at Sinai. In connection with II Corinthians 3,

Delbert Hillars has suggested that Paul contrasts the Mosaic and the Christian economies so sharply that there is no apparent continuity left between the Sinai covenant and the New Covenant in Christ. Now, of course, that is precisely what those reformed guys that I just quoted to you were attempting to protect against. That type of a break up where Paul is saying, well, Old Testament, that doesn't have anything to do with us, Moses' law, that doesn't have anything to do with us in the New Covenant. And that is wrong too. That is the other extreme problem.

A closer look at this passage reveals that despite Paul's obvious stress on discontinuity, between these two redemptive administrations, the Mosaic and the New, there is an underlying continuity that is necessarily assumed by Paul. For instance, Paul is insistent that the old administration reflected the glory of God. Look at verse 7 and then compare it with verse 18. It reflected the glory of God. He uses an *a minori ad maius* argument, from the lesser to the greater. He employs that argument in this passage, and that assumes the continuity of Old Covenant glory and New Covenant glory. You can't say lesser and greater if they are of two different kinds or *genera*. Lesser to greater assumes continuity, even if the emphasis is discontinuity. For example, you can't say, "I used to have fewer apples, and now I have more oranges." I mean, you could say that, but the linear nature of the argument would make no sense. You have got to have something of the same kind to use that type of argument from the lesser to the greater. Alongside of the contrasts of verse 7 and 8, *e diakonia tou thanatou*, the administration of death, and the *e diakonia pneumatos*, the administration of the Spirit, and the contrast of verse 9, Condemnation and righteousness, with the contrast of verse 11. Paul repeatably argues "if-then." If then the Old Covenant was glorious, how much more glorious is the New Covenant? Do you see the continuity there? "If that was glorious, this is more glorious." It is not, "no glory to glory." It is "less glory to greater glory, of the same kind." Repeatedly, "if-then." *Eide*. Verse 7, *Eide*, verses 9 and 11. If the Old Covenant was glorious, how much more, *pos ouchi mallon*, verse 8. *Pollo mallon*, verses 9 and 11. If then, how much more glorious is the New Covenant? The difference then, between the two economies is in the degree of glory. The Old Covenant was glorious. Glorious indeed. So glorious that the sons of Israel could not even look on Moses face. But by comparison, the New Covenant super abounds in glory. It is misleading to say then, that for Paul, the New Covenant is the opposite of the old. Wrong.

There has also been much discussion over Paul's attitude over towards the Mosaic law, as evidenced in his comments in II Corinthians 3. R. V. Moss, for instance, says that "Paul spoke disparagingly of the written code and the reading of the Old Covenant." Referring of course, to the

Jewish law. But, a close review of the passage will reveal that Paul never criticizes the Mosaic law. His concern throughout is to demonstrate the superiority of the New Covenant economy, which is characterized by the letter, written by the Spirit on human hearts, and hence, designated as the ministry of the Spirit. And some sort of an absolute discontinuity between letter and spirit cannot be sustained either, because what is it that the Spirit writes on our hearts? The letter of the law of the Old Covenant.

So Paul is concerned to show the superiority of the New Covenant economy over the Old Covenant economy. The Old Covenant economy was characterized by the letter of the law written on tablets of stone. The New Covenant is characterized by the letter of law, written on the tablets of our hearts by the Holy Spirit. So his point is not to depreciate the law. The law which had been externally administered in the Old Covenant, has now been internalized by the Holy Spirit in the New Covenant.

The closest thing to disparagement of the Mosaic law comes in verses 14 and 15. Where Paul speaks of the veil at the reading of Moses. But even there, it is arguable that Paul's criticism is of the veil which remains, rather than the law itself. Those verses are notoriously difficult. Knox Chamblin grapples with this in his article, "*The Law of Moses and the Law of Christ*," in Feinberg's book, *Continuity and Discontinuity*. And he argues that "that veil over the reading of Moses is removed in Christ."

Finally we may note that Paul's contrast between the letter and Spirit has produced some curious interpretations. The estimable Robert Grand, for example, suggests that "Paul means by letter the literal verbal meaning of Scripture, and that by Spirit, he means the freedom which the spirit brings in exegetical freedom." Bizarre. He argues, in other words, the only way to understand the Old Testament is under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who removes the veil of literal legalism from the minds of believers. The Spirit gives exegetical freedom. He destroys the tyranny of words. He makes possible a Christian exegesis of the Old Testament intuitive rather than based upon words.

Paul's distinction between letter and Spirit, as Cohen has pointed out, is not unlike that made by Filo and others between the literal and the true

meaning. Wrong. That sounds like the deconstructionist's dream for the apostle Paul. Now, Robert Grant, a New Testament and Patristic scholar usually knows better than that. But how he got into that, I don't know. He did this in his book, *The Letter and the Spirit*. Now, this view hardly does justice to the context of Paul's discussion in II Corinthians 3 which shows absolutely no concern with establishing principles by which to interpret the Old Testament Scriptures.

Paul is not teaching us new exegetical tricks here. Rather, Paul is appealing to the Eschatological glory of the New Covenant, as the grounds for the adequacy of his ministry to the Corinthians. As Victor Paul Furnish has said, "the description that Paul gives of the New Covenant does not so much reflect his hermeneutical perspective on the law, or Scripture in general, as it does his eschatological perspective on God's redemptive work in history."

Galatians

Now, turning from Corinthians, let's go to Galatians 3. Here, we first encounter a passage in which the meaning of *diatheke* has been disputed. In Galatians 3:15, Paul says, "Brethren, I speak in terms of human relations, even though it is only a man's covenant, *diatheken*, yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it. Now, in some of your translations, that passage may be translated as testament or will, or last will and testament. So the *diatheke* there, instead of being translated *covenant*, may be translated as *a testament* or *a will*."

But in the context, Paul is arguing that the Law of Moses, the law of the Mosaic economy does not nullify the terms of the covenant previously established with Abraham. That is his point in verse 17. In the process, he appeals to the example of a human *diatheke*. A human covenant. And that has led many interpreters to suppose here that Paul intends *diatheke* not to be understood as covenant, but as testament, since, testaments would have been more common in the Greek world in Paul's day, than would covenants. So, even worthy commentators like, F.F. Bruce, will argue here in Galatians 3:15, "Since it is a human analogy that Paul is using, *diatheke* in this immediate context is likely to have had its

current secular sense of will, testamentary disposition, rather, than it distinctively biblical sense of covenant.” However, Paul’s appeal to the sphere of human relations does not rule out the possibility that he is referring to a covenant rather than a testament between men, of which there are many Old Testament examples:

I Samuel 20, Genesis 21, Genesis 31. Paul’s argument depends, and this is even more important, depends on *diatheke* in verse 15, being the same kind of *diatheke* as he is speaking about in verse 17. And the reference in verse 17, is absolutely, certainly and clearly a reference to God’s *berith* with Abraham. The understanding of *diatheke* as covenant in verse 17, then favors a rendering of covenant in verse 15. E.D. Burton, who in his commentary on Galatians, of all the people I have read on this issue, Burton has a clearer grasp of the linguistic issues involved than anyone. And his commentary was written a long time ago. Burton has an appendix in which he deals with this and he also deals with it in the context of the passage. Let me just read you a snippet of it. Burton argues, “by *diatheke* must be understood, not testament, not stipulation, not arrangement, in a sense broad enough to cover both will and covenant, but as the usage of the New Testament in general and of Paul in particular, and of the context here require covenant in the sense of the Old Testament *berith*. Paul’s argument again here is from the lesser to the greater. It is clear enough. If it is absolutely improper to tamper with a human *diatheke*, then a divine *diatheke* surely cannot be nullified or modified.”

In verse 17, Paul continues the same line of argument. “What I am saying is this, the law which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise.” It is the Abrahamic Covenant to which Paul refers here. If you will look at verses 14, 16, and 18, his point is that the Mosaic Code, the Mosaic law, given at Sinai did not alter the covenant promise given to Abraham and his seed, which promise Paul has already argued has come to the Gentiles in Christ. Furthermore, Paul says, if the stipulations for receiving the inheritance promised to Abraham were modified by the law of Moses, then God’s covenant promise to Abraham was contradicted.

Now, here, Paul’s opposition of the Abrahamic Covenant and the Mosaic

law is so sharp that he pauses to clarify that relationship in verses 19-25. Paul makes two negative assertions, concerning the relation of the law to the Abrahamic promise in verse 3. He has already stressed first, that the law does not invalidate the covenant so as to nullify the promises, verse 17. And he adds a second thing to that in verse 21, that the law is not contrary to the promise. That is, since the Abrahamic Covenant entailed a promised blessing which Paul says was the gift of the Spirit, for it is the blessing of the Abrahamic Covenant, the gift of the Spirit. And since that covenant, provided that its promise was to be received how? - through faith, verse 14 - and since a covenant cannot be modified, verse 15, then Paul argues, the coming of the Mosaic law doesn't do either of two things: one, it does not make invalid the Abrahamic Covenant. It doesn't make invalid the Abrahamic Covenant by adding law fulfillment as a condition for receiving the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant, because the promise is entailed and assured in a previously ratified covenant that cannot be changed; and secondly, the law does not provide an alternative way to receive the same blessing.

Paul's third and final usage of *diatheke* in Galatians occurs 4, chapter 4 verses 21-31. Here he sets out an allegory, that is the term that he uses, but don't think that Paul is using allegory in the sense that we normally think of it. This is not *Pilgrims Progress*; this is typology. He sets out a typology of two covenants, the *duo diathekai*. And you will see that in verse 24. Paul contrasts, again, Moses' covenant, the Covenant of Sinai, and the New Covenant. The former is by the bond woman, Hagar, verse 24, is according to the flesh, verse 23, leads to slavery, verse 24 and 25. The latter is by the free woman through the promise, verse 23, and leads to freedom, verses 26, and you will see this again in chapter 5, verse 1.

In this passage, Paul may be intending to censure the Judaizer's misunderstanding of the function of the Mosaic law in God's redemptive economy, as evidenced by his antithesis between the present Jerusalem and the Jerusalem above. Whatever the case, though, Paul's connection of freedom, the promise, and the Spirit to the New Covenant is absolutely evident. The only other place where *diatheke* occurs in Paul's writings is found in Ephesians 2:12. That passage, speaking of Gentile believers reads, "remember, that you were at that time, separate from Christ,

excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world," the plural, *ton diathekon tes epangelias*.

The Covenants of Promise, may like Romans 9:4, indicate the various Patriarchal administrations of the Abrahamic Promise. In the context at least two things should be stressed which relate to the covenant concept. First, the Gentiles, by the blood of Christ, have become recipients of these covenantal promises according to Paul. Westcott, for instance, "the Gentiles were brought into the same position as the chosen people in the blood of Christ." The second is that by virtue of Christ's covenantal death, the Jews and the Gentiles have in Christ been made into one. One new man. One body. One household. One building.

Summary of the "Covenant" in Paul.

Let's summarize Paul then. Eleven points of summarization. There is, you can see already, more there than you would guess. And we are just scratching the surface. First, in II Corinthians, Paul sees his ministry as based on the realization of the New Covenant promised by Jeremiah. As Moses was the messenger of a covenant characterized by the law, so Christ, or so Paul is the messenger of a New Covenant characterized by the Spirit.

Second, according to Paul, this New Covenant was established by the death of Christ, I Corinthians 11:25. That is, Jesus in His sacrificial death effected the New Covenant relationship and all its attendant blessings which had been predicted by Jeremiah. Elsewhere, Paul speaks of Christ's death in Passover terms.

Third, the New Covenant is, for Paul, the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. Paul makes this clear in his identification of Christ as Abraham's seed, to whom the promises were given. This can also be seen from Paul's view of the nature of the Abrahamic blessing in the ministry of the New Covenant. The Abrahamic Covenant entailed a blessing for the Gentiles, and that blessing, according to Paul, is the gift of the Spirit, Galatians 3:14. The New Covenant ministry, the ministry of the Spirit, is based on the realization of the promise of the Spirit.

Fourth, Paul uses the covenant idea to provide structure for his presentation of redemptive history. He identifies three covenants, points of epochal significance in God's dealing with man: The Abrahamic Covenant, Galatians 3:17; the Mosaic Covenant, Galatians 4:24; and the New Covenant, II Corinthians 3:6. Those covenants, in turn, indicate different economies in salvation history.

Fifth, when I gave this to Knox Chamblin to work over a few years ago, Knox felt that I was emphasizing that this was the only way that Paul structured his redemptive history. That is not what I am asserting. I am simply saying that this is a way that Paul structures his redemptive history. And there are other ways, for example, in Romans 5, the Adam/Christ parallel. What I am going to argue later on is that you have to relate that Adam/Christ parallel to this covenantal structure, or it makes no sense.

Fifth, Paul does not designate these economies as covenants, but refers to them by implication. Before faith came, there was the Mosaic Economy, Galatians 3:23. Now that faith has come, there is the Christian Economy, Galatians 3:25. When Paul employs the term, Old Covenant, in II Corinthians 3:14, he means the Torah, or that covenant of which the Torah is the typical event, or essential event. When he speaks of New Covenant, as in II Corinthians 3:6, he means the New Covenant established by Christ. And by that, I mean that New Covenant relationship established by Christ. He is not meaning just the era, he is referring to the relationship itself. You see that distinction. It is not just the era, typified by the relationship, but he is talking about the relationship itself. You can use covenant in different ways. We have talked about this. Covenant can refer to the era in which God dealt with Abraham in such a way, or it can deal with, it can refer to the relationship which God had with Abraham. Paul is here using it in that relational sense instead of simply a time or a chronological sense.

Sixth, for Paul, the fundamental dividing point of salvation history is the incarnation of Christ. And hence, there are two redemptive economies which we designate for convenience as the old economy and the economy of the new covenant. The former was temporary, spanning the time before, and terminating with Christ. The New Covenant economy is

permanent and was initiated in Christ.

Seventh, within redemptive history in the Old Economy, Paul sees a distinction between the Abrahamic Covenant and the Mosaic Covenant. The Abrahamic Covenant is characterized by promise, while the Mosaic Covenant is characterized by law. Now, don't miss the subtlety of this. Paul is not contrasting law and grace. He is contrasting the things which were the distinct and essential emphases of those two administrations. I will explain this in point eight.

Eighth, Paul stresses discontinuity when comparing the Old Mosaic economy with the New Covenant economy. The old economy, he characterizes by law, death, condemnation, fading glory. The new economy is superior, being characterized by the Spirit, life, righteousness, and unfading glory. That doesn't mean however, that Paul's view of the relationship between God's redemptive economies with Israel and the church is essentially one of discontinuity, because he stresses continuity when relating the Abrahamic Covenant to the New Covenant. Discontinuity is expressed in the principle of promise, covenantal promise to be precise and fulfillment. The principle of promise and fulfillment. And there is your continuity principle in Paul.

Ninth, Paul in some passages, tends to stress the sovereign disposition of the covenant. We saw that in the Romans 11:27 passage, and he links the covenant idea to the forgiveness of sins, in Romans 11:27, as well.

Tenth, Paul simultaneously affirms the historical election of Israel, Romans 9 and 11, and asserts that the promise of Abraham is not to his descendants according to the flesh, but to the children of promise.

And eleventh, Paul's usage of *diatheke*, again, suggests that he uniformly uses it to mean covenant.

The Covenant in Hebrews

The Marriage Feast of the Lamb

As we have already mentioned, Hebrews has more occurrences of *diatheke* than in the rest of the New Testament. This relative prominence of the covenant conception in Hebrews may be attributed to the authors' preoccupation with the comparison with the old and with the new religious systems of Judaism and Christianity. I mean it is natural that you would revert to the covenant concept to help you describe the distinctives of the era brought about by the advent of Christ. In Hebrews 7:22, *diatheke* occurs for the first time. In connection with the priesthood of Melchizedek and here the author says, "Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant," *kreittonon diathekes*. In the context the covenant idea is introduced in a discussion of the superiority of Christ's priesthood over the Aaronic priesthood. Jesus' priesthood that is according to the order of Melchizedek, the author of Hebrews argues, brings a change of law and a better a hope. Ultimately, Jesus' priesthood is superior to the older priesthood, because it was established by divine oath. It is this oath that brings to the author's mind the idea of the establishment of a better covenant. This covenant is mentioned only in passing but will dominate the discussion that follows.

The Mediator of a Better Covenant

The covenant idea is picked up again in Hebrews chapter 8, verse 6, where the author reiterates that Jesus is the mediator of a better covenant. Again, same phrase, *kreittonon diathekes*. A better covenant which has been enacted on better promises. Paul had spoken of Moses as a covenantal mediator. He had used the technical term, *mesites*, mediator, in Galatians 3:19 and following. Now Hebrews applies that same term to Christ. Another argument for the author of Hebrews being a Pauline trainee. In 8:5, the whole of the Mosaic cultus, the whole ceremonial ritual, religious system, the whole Mosaic cultus is said to be a copy and shadow *hupodeigmati*, of Christ's heavenly ministry, copy and shadow, and of Christ's heavenly ministry.

As Christ's ministry is superior to that of the priests, so also is the covenant of which He is a mediator. Christ is superior; His covenant is superior. This covenant is superior, in particular, because it has been founded on better promises. Verse 6. The author spells out these better promises by quoting Jeremiah 31, verses 31-34, and he does that in verses 8-12. But before quoting from Jeremiah 31, he asserts in 8:7, that if the first, covenant implied, had been faultless, there would have been no occasion for a second covenant implied. In this way, the quotation of Jeremiah that follows, functions as proof of the imperfection of the Old Covenant. If the old were faultless, why did God speak through the prophet of a new one, not like the old one, and as an inventory of better promises of the covenant? So the imperfection of the covenant is in view and the better promises of a better covenant are in view.

There are four promises given in the quotation. The first is that God would put His law in their hearts. Verse 10b. Second, that He would be their God, and they His people. 10c. Third, that all would know Him, from the least to the greatest, verse 11. And fourth, that God would forgive their sins. Verse 12.

The second promise expresses continuity with the Old Covenant. You remember the covenant formula, the Emmanuel principle, "I will be your

God, and you will be My people,” had been given to the people under the Mosaic economy, Exodus 6:7, Leviticus 26:12. The other three promises evidenced the discontinuity between the New Covenant and the Old Covenant, because they represent blessings which the Mosaic system was incapable of producing as the author of Hebrews is going to argue for the next two chapters. So the author concludes, when God said a New Covenant, He made the first now obsolete. Verse 13. In the following section, the author of Hebrews, illustrates the obsolescence of the Old Covenant.

The covenant (*diatheke*) concept in Hebrews

Just a few preliminary observations concerning Hebrews use of the covenant idea. First and most obviously, the author views Christ’s ministry explicitly in terms of Jeremiah’s New Covenant. Second, the idea of covenant as a relationship is prominent in the discussion. The author is concerned with what? People doing what? Drawing near to God. The whole thrust of his argument is that there is greater access to God by virtue of Jesus’ ministry in the New Covenant. Third, the binding character of this relationship is manifest in the author’s reference to the divine oath in establishing Christ’s priesthood. You remember, he says, one of the ways that Christ’s priesthood is better than the priesthood of the line of Aaron, is what? Because God made an oath to Jesus in making Him a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek. He has sworn an oath in establishing Him as our Mediator, and that is something you never did with the Old Covenant priests. The better covenant is a better covenant, because among other things, it is permanent. It is eternal. And it is permanent because of the oath by which God bound Himself to make Christ a priest forever.

In showing the superiority of the New Covenant, the author of Hebrews now compares the priestly ministry of Christ to the priestly ministry of the tabernacle. By focusing on the worship of the Old Testament, of the Old Covenant, and particularly that of the tabernacle, Hebrews is able to bring into bold relief the temporary character of the former order. *Diatheke* is employed twice in Hebrews 9:4. First with reference to the Ark of the Covenant. And again in mentioning the Tables of the Covenant. The latter usage of the term reminds us of the close

relation in which the Mosaic law and covenants stood.

The author reviews the tabernacle furnishings and the rituals of the Day of Atonement in Hebrews 9, verses 1-7, and he concludes by commenting on the role of those ordinances in Old Testament religion. First he says, that the Old Covenant ceremony was symbolic. That only the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies, only by blood, only once a year, for him that symbolized, it signified that the way into the most holy place had not yet been disclosed. So as long as the first tabernacle was standing, and that by metonymy, by part for the whole argument, that means what? As long as the Levitical system is in operation, the way into God's presence, the real way, into God's presence has not been revealed. You see that argument in verses 8 and 9.

Second, the author says, that the old ordinances were ineffective. That is, the Levitical atonement ritual was unable to make the worshiper perfect in conscience. In Hebrews 10, and this is a fundamental argument of that passage; the old ordinances were ineffective. They couldn't make you perfect in conscience. They couldn't deal with the guilt of sin. Third, he argues that the old ordinances are temporary measures. They were until a time of Reformation he says. And hence, the Old Covenant ceremonies inherently imply the need for a new order. As T.W. Manson says, "the lesson which the writer to the Hebrews draws from the whole facts is the self attested insufficiency of the old order of grace."

And then as we have commented on this before, but beginning in verse 11, of Hebrews chapter 9, the author proceeds to demonstrate the supreme effectiveness of the New Covenant. Christ is the High Priest of the temple, not made with hands, verse 11. He enters into the Holy Place, not by the blood of animals, but by His own blood, verse 12. His sacrifice was not repetitious, but once for all, it obtains eternal redemption, verse 12. If the blood of bulls and goats was effective for ceremonial cleansing, verse 13, how much more will the blood of Christ effect the cleansing of the conscience. And here, in contrast to the symbolic, ineffective and temporary character of the Old Covenant ritual, Christ's priestly work and sacrifice are seen to be actual, effective, and eternal.

And then in verse 15, he says, "for this reason, He is the mediator of a

New Covenant.” That is, the basis of His mediatorship is His sacrificial death. Through His mediation, the better promises of the New Covenant have been effected. He has earned His place by His obedience as Mediator. Furthermore, you remember all the way back when we were looking at Luke, we noticed that Luke tied together the idea of the Abrahamic Covenant being fulfilled in the coming of Christ, in the work of Christ and the forgiveness of sin. Now listen to what the author of Hebrews says in verse 15. His death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant.

Now this is huge. The author of Hebrews is not satisfied to say, that now that Christ has come, His sacrifice serves as the atoning sacrifice, as the atoning offering for all of God’s people present and future for the work of Christ. He wants you to understand that Christ’s sacrifice actually works proleptically. It works backwards in time, as well as, forwards in time. So that Christ’s sacrifice is not only the sacrifice for all of those who are under the New Covenant, but is actually the real sacrifice that brought about union with God, under the Old Covenant, and the Old Covenant sacrificial system was merely a shadow of that real sacrifice. This is why Hebrews is the key book in the New Testament to teach you how to understand typology, because it teaches us that the relationship between Old Testament shadows, and New Testament realities.

Now, another term. Old Testament *types* and then New Testament *antitypes*. The relationship is not simply that this happens, the Old Testament shadow happens, and it predicts accurately this thing that is going to happen here in the New Testament. The New Testament reality which is a heavenly reality actually invests the Old Testament type with the only usefulness that it has. You need to read Murray on this, and you need to read Clowney on this as you work through your biblical theology, because it will transform the way you see the relationship between the Old and the New Testaments. Not just that the Old Testament is predicting something that is going to come, but it is that the effectiveness of the Old Testament system itself is dependent upon the heavenly reality of the work of Christ, which is fulfilled in time, after the Old Testament event, but because it is a heavenly reality, it already has significance before it actually occurs in time. And that is why the author of Hebrews

can so confidently say, all the Old Testament sacrifices offered from here to here could not forgive sins, and yet at the same time, could be so confident that all the believers in God, from here to here, were indeed accepted in God, because Christ's heavenly work pertained to them, just like it pertains to us. Now that is mind-boggling stuff. But it is rich. So it is worth pondering.

Question. What about Gentiles in the Old Testament. How did they have access to God? Thank you. I mean all the Gentiles, who trusted in the Lord God of Israel, in accordance with the teaching of His prophets, and yes, proselytes, too, Naaman, and Ruth. Of course we don't know how many were there, we only have a certain number of them listed for us in the Old Testament, and those are good examples. You know, God clearly discriminates in favor of Israel in that sense, because Israel is given revelation that the other nations are not given. And so their access to God must be through, mediated through, Israel.

Now, we have already taken a good long, hard look at verses 16 and 17, and the translation and meaning of *diatheke* there, so I won't belabor that, except, just to say this, to reiterate this. One point emerges clearly from verses 16 and 17 of Hebrews chapter 9: the connection between the inauguration of the covenant of Sinai, the Mosaic Covenant, the connection between that and the inauguration of the New Covenant by Christ. The first covenant's mediator, Moses, inaugurated it with the sprinkling of blood of calves and goats. The New Covenant's Mediator, Christ, inaugurated it by the shedding of His own blood. The superiority of the New Covenant sacrifice of Christ is manifest in that it brings cleansing from sin, which the sacrifices of the first Covenant could not accomplish. Its efficacy is permanent in duration, and the author reiterates this in the next usage of *diatheke* which you find in Hebrews 10, verse 16. The author reiterates this as he quotes from Jeremiah 31, verses 33 and 34, and he emphasizes the covenantal promise of the law written on the heart and the forgiveness of sins.

And he concludes, "now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin." Now the forgiveness of sins has been realized in the New Covenant, there is no longer any need for the sacrifices of the Old Covenant. And that is his argument: in the

termination of the repeated sin offerings, the finality of the sacrifice of Christ is confirmed.

But Hebrews is not finished with the covenant idea yet. Alongside the greater blessing of the New Covenant, there is a severer penalty for the covenant breaker in the New Covenant. Hebrews 10, verses 28 and 29: “Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses, dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant, *to haima tes diathekes*, the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified and has insulted the spirit of grace.” That is a hard passage any way you cut it. The author here brings back into view the mutuality of the covenant. Covenant loyalty, covenant faithfulness, and covenant fidelity is expected of those who have united themselves to the New Covenant community. When the covenant is repudiated, the curses come into play. For Hebrews, this is just as true, and indeed more so under the New Covenant, as it was under the old. So the argument that the Old Covenant was the covenant of wrath and curse, and the New Covenant is the covenant of love and mercy, is dispelled. In fact, his argument is that the punishment is severer in the New Covenant for rejecting the revelation of God.

In the next occurrence of *diatheke* in Hebrews, the author again contrasts the Old Covenant and the New. Christians come not to ominous Mt. Sinai, verses 18 – 21, but to glorious Mt. Zion, verses 22 and 23. And as several of you were pointing out to me, this is picking up on a major theme in the book of Isaiah, and the idea of the mountain of the Lord to which the nations will stream. Christians come not to Sinai, but to Zion, and to Jesus the Mediator of a New Covenant, verse 24, *kia diathekes neas mesite Iesou*. It is His sprinkled blood which has inaugurated the covenant, and this blood speaks better than Abel’s blood which cried to God from the ground. The author’s final use of *diatheke* comes in his closing prayer. Where he speaks of the “God of peace who brought up from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant” *en haimati diathekes haioniou*, “even Jesus Christ our Lord.” Once more, Hebrews emphasizes the everlasting

character of the covenant which has been established by the blood of Christ. Our own Sam Kistemaker observes this, “Two major themes dominate this epistle. The high priestly work of Christ, summarized in the expression, blood, and the covenant that is eternal.” In this verse, once again, and for the last time, these themes are highlighted. God’s covenant with His people will remain forever. That covenant has been sealed with Christ’s blood which was shed once for all.

So for the author of Hebrews, the first covenant has been set aside in order that the second might be established, chapter 10, verse 9, and the second covenant is the New Covenant inaugurated in Christ’s blood and it is a better covenant. Not only because it is effective in accomplishing what the first covenant couldn’t do because it wasn’t designed to do, but it is better because it is an everlasting covenant.

Seven points of summarization.

One, the author of Hebrews sees the priestly work of Christ as the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s New Covenant. And also, though less prominently, a fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise.

Second, the sacrificial death of Christ establishes the New Covenant. As the blood of the covenant sprinkled at Sinai inaugurated the first covenant, so Christ’s blood shed at Calvary inaugurated a New Covenant. Christ also functions as the mediator of the New Covenant, as Moses, the high priest did under the old.

Third, the New Covenant is superior to the first, that is, the Mosaic covenant, because whereas the first was unable to effect a cleansing of the conscience, the New Covenant brings to us the realization that our sins are forgiven. Hence, in Hebrews, the New Covenant idea is closely connected with the forgiveness of sins. Furthermore, the first covenant was temporary, while the New Covenant is permanent. In it, the whole religious process comes to rest. In both of these, the New Covenant author stresses its discontinuity with the old order.

Nevertheless, fourth, there is continuity between the first and second covenants. In both economies, God has revealed Himself. You remember

the opening words of the book, “in past times, God has revealed Himself, many times, and in many ways,” so in both economies, God has revealed Himself, though the latter revelation is ultimate. In both, drawing near to God is the aim of the priesthood in the covenant. In both, “I will be your God, and you will be My people” is the motto, though its fullness is only realized by Jesus’ priesthood in the New Covenant.

Fifth, following on this, the idea of covenant as a relationship is manifest in Hebrews. The mutually binding character of the covenant is illustrated on both the divine and human sides. God binds Himself by oath, to covenant faithfulness in establishing Christ’s priesthood. Those who repudiate the covenant relationship into which they have been brought by virtue of Christ’s blood, are liable to the full force of the covenant curse.

Sixth, every occurrence of *diatheke* in Hebrews can be reasonably rendered *covenant*, though it is possible to translate it, *testament*, in verses 16 and 17 of chapter 9. However, even that passage is better translated as *covenant* and the idea of covenant is clearly dominant in the author’s general usage of *diatheke*.

Seventh, finally, the importance of the covenant idea in the author’s presentation of redemptive history is readily apparent. The first covenant, and the second covenant, the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant, both translate his concepts as epics in salvation history. The New Covenant abrogates the Mosaic Covenant, **but** it does so by fulfilling it. Listen to that again. The New Covenant abrogates the Mosaic Covenant, but it does so by fulfilling it. In this way, Hebrews asserts simultaneously the continuity and discontinuity of the divine plan. As Geerhardus Vos has said, “more than any other New Testament document, Hebrews develops what might be called ‘a philosophy of the history of Revelation.’ It teaches us about what changes and what stays the same, what is constant, what develops.” The only occurrence of the term *diatheke* in the book of Revelation is found in Revelation 11:19, in reference to the Ark of the Covenant, and the Temple of God, when heaven was opened and the Ark of His Covenant appeared in His temple and there were flashes of lightening and there were sounds and peels of thunder and an earthquake and a great hail storm. I won’t say much

about that except to say that instrument which was such a tremendous symbol of God's presence with His people in the Old Covenant is picked up upon by John and shown to us in the heavenly temple as a picture, as a reminder, as a symbol of the union with God which is accomplished in the New Covenant. So there again, even the Ark of the Covenant, the Old Covenant patterns, are picked up by John to emphasize New Covenant realities.

Let me do a grand summary in conclusion on what we have done so far. Having surveyed each occurrence of the word, *diatheke* in the New Testament, it will be appropriate to draw together some common themes related to the covenant idea in the Synoptics, Acts, Paul, and Hebrews.

Conclusion – Common covenant themes in the Synoptics, Acts, Paul, and Hebrews

First we may note that in the Synoptics, in Acts, Paul and Hebrews, the “Christ event” is seen as fulfillment of the Abrahamic Promise. Hence, each evidences belief that the blessings of God's covenant with Abraham are now coming to rest on all the followers of Christ. Now, let me just draw an implication here. There is exegesis that suggests that God never had in view the blessing of the Gentiles in the forming of them into the Church in the Old Testament, but that the Abrahamic Promises are always and only intended for the physical descendants of Abraham who believed. What you hear me describing is a form of a Dispensational exegesis. It cannot not account for this New Testament pattern which is uniform. Those Abrahamic promises are fulfilled in Christ and they are for all who are followers of Christ whether Jew or Greek. Slave or free. Male or female. The Abrahamic Promises come to rest on all of these.

Second, in the Synoptics, Paul, and Hebrews, the New Covenant established in the blood of Christ is identified as the fulfillment of the New Covenant prophecy in Jeremiah 31. And thus, in the explanation of the meaning of Christ's death, given by Christ Himself, He relates the meaning of that death, to the covenant, and especially the covenant promise of Jeremiah 31.

Third, the Synoptics, and Hebrews, interpret the death of Christ in light of the Covenant inauguration ceremony of Exodus 34. While there may be hints in the Synoptic, in the Eucharistic narratives, that Christ's death was also viewed in terms of the Passover lamb of the Exodus, explicit Passover imagery is more readily identifiable in I Corinthians 5:7, I Peter 1:19, and in the writings of the Apostle John.

Fourth, in the Synoptics, Acts, Paul, and Hebrews, the covenant idea is explicitly linked with forgiveness of sins. This forgiveness of sins is seen as a fulfillment of both the Abrahamic Promise, and Jeremiah's New Covenant prophecy, and is a hallmark of the New Covenant established by Christ.

Let me just come back again and draw a conclusion from that. Do you see why, again, we say that Covenant Theology is just the Gospel? I mean, can you preach the Gospel without addressing the forgiveness of sins? No. Well, here in the New Testament, that concept of the forgiveness of sins is inextricably linked with the fulfillment of God's covenant initiatives. **So Covenant Theology is at the heart of preaching the Gospel of the free forgiveness of sins through the costly work of Christ.**

Fifth, throughout the New Testament writings, *diatheke* is best rendered *covenant*. There are perhaps, two passages, where it is possible to render *diatheke* differently: Galatians 3:15, and Hebrews 9:16-17. But even there, the preferred rendering is covenant.

Sixth, Paul, in II Corinthians 3, in Galatians 3, and Hebrews, interprets the history of redemption in covenantal terms. For each of them, the New Covenant is vastly superior to the old. When they are contrasting the new redemptive economy to the old, they represent the era before Christ, in the form of the Mosaic economy.

Seventh, Paul tends to stress discontinuity between the Mosaic economy and the new, between the letter and spirit, while emphasizing continuity between the Abrahamic Covenant and the new, promise and fulfillment. On the other hand, Hebrews while acknowledging continuity between the Abrahamic Covenant and the new, displays both continuity

and discontinuity with regard to the Mosaic and New Covenants. For the author of Hebrews, the New Covenant, not only sets aside the Old Covenant order, it fulfills it. And proleptically invested it with meaning.

Eighth, you may recall that we read that statement by Delbert Hillers, when he argued that “when the new comes, all the old shadows pass away and that one of the shadows that passed away in the coming of Christian revelation was the covenant.” Well, contrary to the view of Delbert Hillers, in none of the New Testament traditions is the covenant idea itself seen as one of the shadows which passes away with the coming of the new era in redemptive history. It is appealed to in the Synoptics, Acts, Paul, Hebrews, and Revelation, as an adequate expression of the relationship between God and His people established by the work of Christ. In both Hebrews, and Paul, the covenant relationship transcends the temporal characteristics of the Mosaic administration and finds its ultimate realization in face to face communion with the God of the New Covenant. And so, for the New Testament theologians, the covenant idea is inextricably tied to the death of Christ. His blood inaugurated the New Covenant, and without that blood shed, there would have been no New Covenant. It is His death which is the ground of forgiveness of sins in the New Covenant, and His covenant mediation which assures everlasting communion with God.

Now that is the barest of surveys of the New Testament as to explicit references to the term *covenant*. Can you imagine what we would come up with if we did a more extensive search of ideas connected to *covenant*. The only reason I wanted to go through that long exercise, not only does it give you a rich resource to work from as you preach the Gospel from the New Testament, but it reminds us of just how pervasive the covenant idea is in the New Testament and when you think about the Gentile character of so many of the early converts to Christianity and to those receiving these letters, it is all the more remarkable that the covenant idea is so woven throughout the New Testament.

The Supper of the New Covenant

Now, to Luke 22. I want you to look closely at this narrative,

beginning in verse 14.

“And when the hour had come He reclined at the table, and the apostles with Him. And He said to them, ‘I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.’ And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He said, ‘Take this and share it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes.’ And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, ‘This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood. But behold, the hand of the one betraying Me is with Me on the table. For indeed, the Son of Man is going as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!’”

Let me remind you that the place where Jesus was standing when He delivered these words on the night in which He was delivered up, was packed with redemptive historical significance. God had sent Abram to the land of Moriah in Genesis 22 to sacrifice his son Isaac on Mt. Moriah. David, when he had taken the census of his people in pride, and the Lord had determined to send the avenging angel to punish David and Israel for their pride and trusting in fighting men and in horses and in human might, had offered up a thank sacrifice on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite in II Samuel chapter 24. God had spared Israel, you will recall. Seventy thousand had already died. But God spared Jerusalem. And so David offered a sacrifice. You remember the incident, Ornan wanted to give him the field. David said, “Ornan, I will not offer a sacrifice to the Lord that costs me nothing.” And therefore he paid for Ornan’s field and he built an altar and sacrifices of thanksgiving were offered to the Lord. In II Chronicles 3, verse 1, we are told by the Chronicler that Solomon built the temple on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite on Mt. Moriah. The temple mount in Jerusalem is on Mt. Moriah, the same place where the angel of death had withheld his hand from Jerusalem, the same place where Abraham had offered up Isaac in obedience to the Lord and where a substitute had been found for Isaac.

And here we are at the Last Passover in Luke 22, verses 14-18. This is the end of the old covenant sacrament of Passover. I want to point out three or four things to you that are striking about Jesus in this passage.

First of all, look at the words of verse 15 very closely. Jesus says, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you.” Do you note Christ’s earnest desire for this event? Christ genuinely earnestly has been anticipating sitting down to this Passover feast with His disciples, even though He knows what it is going to cost Him. Gethsemane is the window which God gives us on the almost paralyzing effect of Christ’s foreknowledge. In Gethsemane we see Christ’s soul bared for a moment, and you see how terrifying the process or prospect of His abandonment to covenantal judgment is to the heart of Christ. And yet that is just one window, and when Jesus says, “I have eagerly desired to eat this meal with you,” you have to recognize that alongside all the genuine paternal love that He has for these men, and with all the genuine divine love that He has for these men, when He says, “I have earnestly desired to eat this meal with you,” alongside of that He knows exactly what that means for Him. He knows that when He sits down to eat this meal with them, He is less than twenty-four hours away from the most fearful event that has ever occurred in the history of the universe. And yet He says, I have eagerly, I have earnestly desired to eat this meal with you. We don’t have a clue. We don’t have a clue as to how glorious that is.

Secondly, notice Christ’s love for His disciples, for His people manifested in this passage. Verse 15 again, “I have eagerly desired to eat this meal with you.” That ought to be enormously encouraging to you, because Jesus knew that not simply Judas, but every last one of His disciples were going to abandon Him that night. And in the hours to come, they would flee, Matthew tells us, they would all depart from Him and He would be left alone. Notice Matthew’s description. Matthew 26, verse 56:

“But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled. Then all the disciples left Him and fled.”

His hour of need. All the disciples left Him and fled. Can you imagine what it must have been like for the inspired author, Matthew, to

have to pen those words about himself? And yet Luke says, that the Lord Jesus looked at them that night in full knowledge of what they would do and said, “I have eagerly desired to eat this meal with you.” I know you, I know your hearts, I know what you are going to do, and I want to eat the meal with you. Does that impact how you perceive the love of Christ for you? He knows your heart and all its ugliness and all its sin. And He not only goes to the tree for you, but He desires to sup with you. Now as painful as that is to think about, it is also comforting. **Because if He know what I am like, and He knows what I will be like, and He still desires to sup with me, can there be anything of which I am afraid? Can there be anything that separates me from the love of God in Christ?**

Thirdly, again, in verse 15, we see here a reminder. Christ’s reminder to, and encouragement of the disciples. Notice His words, “I have eagerly desired to eat this meal with you before I suffer.” Three little words: Before I suffer. Christ is reminding the disciples again of His coming crucifixion and He is offering this as an encouragement for His disciples’ later reflection, so that when they are restored, when after the resurrection, they are drawn back in again, the disciples can remember, He told us that this was going to happen before it happened. This was not an accident. He did not simply fall into the hands of the Romans. He did not simply fall into the hands of the Jews. This is not a great cosmic glitch. This is not something that God did not foresee. This is not something that He did not foresee. He told us this would happen. Why didn’t we see that at the time? You see what an encouragement this would be to them. How discouraging it would be to them for this to happen and not to have been warned. They were faithless enough as it is.

Fourthly, in verses 16-18, we see a glorious pledge of Jesus Christ to all His people. Here, He expresses His complete commitment to our redemption. “I shall never eat it again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” As Passover symbolized Israel’s Exodus from Egypt, so also it pointed forward to the ultimate deliverance from sin and death which was to be accomplished by Christ. Christ asserts here that He will not eat that Supper until total salvation has been visited on all His people. Then He will sit down and sup with His people in the Marriage Feast of the

Lamb. And there is an interesting passage, and I just want to share it with you in passing, found in Luke 12, when Jesus is telling the disciples to be ready for His coming and He says this about the Marriage Feast of the Lamb. Verse 37

“Blessed are those slaves whom the master shall find on the alert when he comes; truly I say to you, that he will gird himself to serve, and have them recline at the table, and will come up and wait on them.”

Now, I want you to see the rich investment of that chapter. You remember the great controversy of the Upper Room was whether Peter would allow the Lord Jesus to wash his feet at the table. Peter was struck by the inappropriateness of the Lord, his maker, his master, his Savior, washing his feet in the manner of an oriental slave. And Jesus is saying to His disciples, this is not the last time I will serve you. I will serve you in the Marriage Feast of the Lamb. You will recline at the table. The Bridegroom himself will serve His people. And you will be there, friends, if you trust in Christ.

Now let's look at the Lord's Supper itself. Verses 19-20. Now remember the disciples still have the taste of the Passover lamb in their mouths. And Christ takes bread and breaks it, and He says something that had never ever been said before at a Passover meal. Not for fourteen hundred years had anything like this ever been said at a Passover meal. He says, “this is My body, which is for you.” Now the disciples could not have missed the connection that Jesus is making for them there. They could not have missed the fact, that fact is they still taste the Passover lamb and the bitter herbs, and here is Jesus breaking this bread and saying, “this is My body.” **He is drawing as close a connection between His death and the slaughter of the Passover lamb as you could possibly draw.**

The Bread

So let's look at the bread. When He says, this is my body, which is given for you, do this in remembrance of me, in verse 19, what does He mean? Well friends, first of all, He doesn't mean transubstantiation.

Jesus is standing in front of them. He doesn't mean that this bread has magically transformed itself into "My flesh." He was standing before them. They clearly understood the representative nature of what He was saying. He was no more saying that the bread has turned into His body, than He meant that He was a gate, or that He was a door, when He used that type of representative language in the Gospels. He is standing before them and the purpose of doing this is to do what? To explain the meaning of what He was going to do tomorrow. All the disciples' hopes were going to come crashing down around their ears, tomorrow. Why? Because all their preconceptions about what Christ was here for and about the kingdom of God were going to be brought to nothing. And Jesus is absolutely determined to explain to them again the meaning of what was going to happen, the meaning of His death, the meaning of His sufferings, and the theological, the redemptive historical significance of what He was going to do.

And the first thing that He does, in the breaking of the bread and giving it, is point them to the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, who was "bruised for our iniquities." Now, I know that my dear brother, Knox Chamblin likes to stress the fact that the best manuscripts do not speak of this phrase, "This is my body, which is broken for you." He likes to stress that the Passover lamb and the sacrificial animals of the Old Testament all had to be perfect with no broken bones and of course, that is a stress of the Gospels themselves, which make it very clear that in the way that Christ was treated on the cross, no bones were broken, He was a perfect sacrificial body. But at the same time, we need to understand that the broken bread here and the body which is going to be killed, is directly corollary to the bruised, to the crushed servant of Isaiah 53. His body will be metaphorically broken for the sake of His people. By His stripes, we shall be healed. By His death, we shall be raised to newness of life.

Furthermore, the vicarious, the substitutionary nature of His actions are stressed. This is My body which is *given for you*. This stresses the substitutionary character of His actions, His sacrifice, precisely in the language of Isaiah 53, verses 4-12: "All we like sheep have gone astray. But the Lord has laid on Him, the iniquity of us all." He is a substitute. And then Christ calls them to remember. And that is ironic as well,

because they forgot. “Don’t ever forget the meaning of what I am doing tomorrow, and every time you come to eat this meal together, from hence forth until the marriage supper of the lamb, you remember the meaning of what I did for you.” That is what He is saying. Do this in remembrance.

The cup.

And then the cup in verse 20. “This cup, which is poured out for you, is the New Covenant in My blood.” Christ is saying to the disciples that His blood, symbolized in the wine of that cup, His blood will seal the covenant. This cup is the new covenant in My blood. For six hundred years the godly of Israel had been waiting for the fulfillment of the promise given to that broken nation through the weeping prophet Jeremiah. And Jesus, to this tiny little circle of the remnant of Israel, announces on this night “the promise has arrived in Me. And the promise will be inaugurated in My death.” This is so shocking. This is so surprising. It is so glorious. This promise, this glorious promise accomplished in the death of the Messiah. That is what He is saying to His disciples. This cup is the new covenant in My blood. His death is substitutionary. It is stressed here again in the cup word, “this cup is for you, My blood is poured out for you, the cup is poured out for you.” I am not having to do this for Myself. I am doing this because I love you, I am doing this in your place.

And I want to stress that, friends. **This is strictly substitutionary atonement.** It is not simply that Christ is doing this for our benefit. He is doing it in our place. And the horror of what the Lord Jesus is doing here, the greatest horror is the curse which He receives from His Father in order to fulfill the requirement of the atonement. You see, we so often focus on the physical dimensions of the Lord’s suffering. And I don’t mean to down play those by any stretch. And we focus on His physical death and the anomaly of that. Death is brought into the world by sin, and Jesus didn’t sin. By no right should He have had to have died. But you see, those things are not the horror.

It is very important for you to understand that the cross itself is not the curse. It is but the instrument of the infliction of human suffering on

Christ. The greatest horror of what Jesus endured for us, and even the cross itself, that cruel, that torturous instrument of punishment, the great suffering which Christ underwent was the divine censure of His own Father. And that is why He cried out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" That is why Paul can say, "He made Him, who knew no sin, to be sin for us. That we might become the righteousness of God in Him." The horror of the cross is that on the cross, the wrath of God strikes out at the one place in the universe where it has no right to strike out. And the only explanation of that is for us. The Father loves us so much that He is ready to do that. The Son loves us so much, He is ready to take our place. And how this relates to the *perichoresis circumincessio*, the Father, of the Son, and of the Spirit, I have no idea. I have not the foggiest. How that eternal, unbroken communion of the Father, Son, and the Spirit relate to that moment of divine damnation of the Son. But I know that it is the most real moment in the history of the universe, in some ways, almost eternal, and the blackness, just as in the plague of death in Egypt. And so Jesus says, this cup is the new covenant. This cup points to the act of atonement. And that act of atonement is the long awaited event that brings about the realization of the promises given by God by the prophet Jeremiah.

Words of warning.

Two words of warning based on the truth of this passage. And the first warning is to the self righteous. There are a lot of people in the world, relatively moral people, people that we tend to call in the South, good people, salt of the earth people, who think that they can come into fellowship with God by their own righteousness. Such is their conceit. They don't see themselves as utterly offensive and estranged from God. And they think that somehow on their own merits, they might be received before Him. There are many ways up the mountain. Many ways into fellowship with Him. But you see, the Lord's table is set out there on the floor of the sanctuary to say there is one way into fellowship with God, and to come in your own righteousness is the supreme offense that God will not tolerate. Because to come in your righteousness and say, "Lord I don't need your Son, I am acceptable on my own merits," is to say, into

the Father's ears, "Your Son's cry of dereliction wasn't necessary for me." And the Father will not hear that. Had there been any other way, to save you, I assure you the Father would not have heard that cry. And to say, "Lord, you must accept me though I have not embraced Your Son," is to say, "Lord, that cry was a waste." And the Lord will not allow in His presence any who are ambivalent about His Son's damnation.

And so the Lord's table, you see, rubbishes all human righteousness. It stands as a perpetual reminder of the one immortal, incomparable, indescribable irrepeatable transaction, and our embrace of Christ as He is offered in the Gospel, which is what it represents, teaches us that every time we cry out, "Abba, Father," that the Father remembers that the reason why He is now our Father, is because there was a time when His own Son, couldn't call Him Father, for your sake. So anyone who comes to Him and says, "you're my Father, but I don't need your Son as my Savior," has no idea of the wrath that they are inviting upon themselves. Self righteousness is not a good plan at the judgment day.

One other word of warning. For those who hate their brothers, and this is a standing issue in the Christian community, the Lord Jesus and the disciples wouldn't have written about it so much if this were not a perennial pastoral problem. We know it ourselves friends, even amongst those with whom we are called to minister. We hurt one another. It is hard to love the saints. I shared with you before the words of the godly Highland lady to the minister at the door: "You know, the older I grow, the more I love the Lord's people and the less I trust them." Because the Lord's people will hurt you. You will be pouring your heart to minister to them and they will break it and they will step all over it. And it produces a bitterness. The Lord Jesus at the table asks us to look at our relationships with our brothers and sister, even our feeble and weak and sinful and immature brothers and sisters. Look at those relationships through the crucible of what He has done on the cross, because all who are united to Him in His death are irreversibly united to all who are united to Him in His death. We can't get away from one another. We belong to one another. And that means that my experience, that my gifts, that my abilities, that my love, that my loyalty, they belong to you, brothers and sisters. They are not mine. "We are not our own," Calvin

said, “we are God’s, we belong to Him. And because we are His in Christ, we belong to one another.” No wonder the early Christians in Jerusalem sold all they had and shared with one another. They understood that there was nothing that they could selfishly employ now for their own enrichment at the expense of others, because they belonged to one another. They had been bought with a price. And so my pain, and my comfort, which I gain from God, my walking through the valley of the shadow of death and my experience on the mountains, it all belongs to you. To be used for your blessing and edification. And so I can’t afford to hate my brothers, because I have been bought with a price. And now I must encourage my brothers to love and good deeds.

Words of encouragement.

Two words of encouragement. Christ’s death, that scene that we see in the Last Supper in the Last Passover in the inauguration of the Lord’s Supper, that scene which we are reminded of every time we come to the Lord’s table, doesn’t it remind us of God’s sovereignty in our lives even in the worst of times. Jesus makes it so clear to His disciples. He says, “don’t be misled by the events that are about to occur. I am going to be betrayed, but this is according to the predetermined plan of God. “ You remember His words, in Luke 22:22, don’t forget them: “The Son of man is going as a complete and total accident.” NO. That is not what it says. “The Son of man is going because God only controls good things and not bad ones, and He is going to fall into the hands of bad men.” NO. That is not what it says. “The Son of many is going as it has been determined. Not by some impersonal universal force of fate, but by the heavenly Father, it has been determined.” And so He says to His disciples. Don’t forget that what is going to happen to Me is not by accident, but by the predetermined plan of God.

And is it a coincidence, my friends, that the first two chances Peter has to preach the Gospel, he mentions just that. Is that just coincidence? That when you turn with me to Acts chapter 2, and in verse 23, when Peter is preaching his heart out in this evangelistic sermon and says, “men of Israel, listen to these words. Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested

to you by God and with miracles and with wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know, this man delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to the cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.”

Is it an accident that Peter, who betrayed his Savior, Peter who heard his Savior tell him that he would not betray him, who contradicted his Savior and put to shame, not once, not twice, but thrice, who was later restored by his Savior, not once, not twice, but thrice, could not refrain in this evangelistic message, from reminding everyone there, believer and unbeliever alike, that what had happened to the Lord Jesus Christ was according to the determinate counsel, foreknowledge, and eternal decree of the Sovereign God of heaven and earth?

And if the Lord Jesus’ death, the wickedest event, the blackest event, the wrongest event in the universe is under the sovereign and determinate control of the almighty God, is there anything in our life and experience that is outside that control? And do you understand that if there is just one thing outside of that control, then we cannot sing with Paul, “neither death, nor life, nor earth, nor hell, nor times destroying sway, can ere efface us from His heart or make His love decay.” If there is something out there outside the sovereign control of God, then maybe there is something out there that can snatch us out of the hand of God. And Paul says, “Nothing such exists. Not one molecule in this vast universe is outside of His control.”

But the second thing is this. Perhaps, you are one of those Christians, or perhaps you minister to those Christians who struggle with a lack of assurance. I have just been written to by one, in the last week, a dear earnest child of a preacher struggling with assurance, who just can’t believe, just can’t believe that Christ’s grace is for her. And they sense their unworthiness, and they don’t even want to come to the Lord’s table, and for believers who are troubled by their struggles with sin and they feel unworthy to take the supper, remember this.

First, Jesus knew His own disciples would fail Him and abandon Him. He told them that they would and yet He loved them and it was to those wretched disciples that He said, “I have eagerly desired to eat this meal with you.” Because their participation in that meal was not ultimately dependent upon their worthiness, their worthiness was not the determining factor. His love was. May I translate that? Your worthiness is not the determining factor in coming to the table. Because the table of the Lord is not about your worthiness; it is about His worthiness. And that is why David Dickson said something like this. “When I come to Christ, I take all my evil deeds and all my good deeds and I pile them up in a heap and I flee from them to Christ.” Because the table is not about my worthiness, or my deeds at all; it is about the deeds by which He earned me. You all know that famous provocative statement by Rabbi Duncan of New College when he said, “sin is the handle by which I get hold of my Savior.” Now that is a striking saying, isn’t it? What did he mean? He is saying this, “when I open my Bible, I don’t see anywhere written, ‘God loves John Duncan,’ but when I open my Bible, I read ‘God loves sinners and has given His Son for them, and if those sinners will trust in Christ, then I will save them.’ And then I insert my name into those passages, because I am a sinner and I read, ‘God loves John Duncan, because John Duncan is a sinner who has trusted in Jesus Christ,’ and therefore I may be assured of His love, so it is my sin by which I get hold of my Savior. It is my recognition that I am a sinner that deserves to be condemned and it is that very recognition which Satan tries to use against me, which is in fact, the handle whereby I realize that all the benefits of God’s grace are for me.” They are not for the righteous, they are for sinners.

And so he could say to that godly Highland woman who was struggling with assurance and had not come to take the Lord’s Supper for years, and elders had urged her to come to the Lord’s table, but she kept saying, “I am not worthy,” and Duncan approaches her at the communion season, and she says, “but I am a sinner.” And he says, “take it woman, it is for sinners.” That is the whole point.

You see, the table teaches us that it is Christ who stands us before God. The covenantal mediator becomes the covenantal curse so that we

might stand covenantally righteous before Him. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf in order that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. That is Covenant Theology. Believe it. It is the Bible. Preach it. Revel in it. Let's pray.