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Section: Divine Covenants (Covenant Theology)

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**HANDOUT NOTES**

**Q59. What is the New Covenant?**

It is the covenant by which God saves the elect, by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The New Covenant was planned before creation, promised in Genesis after the fall, and formally established by the blood of Christ when the work required of Him was complete.

* **Introduction**

By God’s decree, the fall was needed, the preservation of mankind promised to Noah was needed, the choosing of a temporary people—an ethnic line to preserve—was needed; all the happenings of the Old Testament served to point to and bring about the incarnation of God the Son, Jesus Christ. This is the great story of Scripture. This is the grand metanarrative of the Bible.

* **Prophecy of the New Covenant**

As found in the Old Testament books of Prophecy, God promised several times in a variety of different ways, often with Prophetic Idiom, that He had yet to complete a mighty work for “Israel.” In these prophecies, we see decelerations of a New Covenant through a future Messiah that would bring new life, peace, and unending enjoyment of God's presence. Particular blessing-filled declarations of the prophets spoke to a promised reality beyond their present situation: something truly everlasting, restful, righteous, and guaranteed.

**Jeremiah 31:31-34** “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, 32not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. 33For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

These prophesies, and the others like it, declare that God is going to make a New Covenant that isn't like the old one—a covenant eternally better, with unfailing promises and eternal rewards.

No other covenant offered these things; surely, this is the covenant fallen man needs.

The use of the name or title of Israel in these New Covenant prophecies and the prophetic idiom statements about the blessings they would receive through a new covenant was pointing to, not the ethic nation as a whole, but a mixed people of all nations marked out before creation and blessings not terminating on earthly things, but spiritual things. God used ethnic Israel as a shadow of His eternal chosen ones; therefore, the way He speaks about Israel in the Old Testament is *sometimes* not about the ethnic nation, but for/about the true eternal people of God.

The basis for this perfect New Covenant would be on One who would do all that is required to earn forgiveness and redemption for those to whom God planned to covenant.

This One, this someone, this Servant, is Christ Jesus Himself.

**Isaiah 42:1, 6** 1 “Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.”

6“I am the Lord; I have called you [my servant] in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations”

The spiritual promises and New Covenant prophecy in the Old Testament pointed to Christ Jesus and the work He would do (required of Him in the Covenant of Redemption), in order for Him to make The Covenant of Grace with His eternally chosen people.

It is the Promised seed of the woman, Christ, who is “a light for the nations” (Isaiah 42:6), who brings “forth justice to the nations” (Isaiah 42:1). He is the One in whom “shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 22:18).

The Messiah who would come out of Israel will unite those eternally chosen of both Israel and of the other nations to all be “members of the household of God” through this New Covenant (Ephesians 2:19). They, together, make up true Israel—spiritual Israel—the antitype Israel. And this New Covenant would be unto them a covenant of eternal forgiveness, righteousness, and fellowship with God.

**Matthew 1:1** The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Finally, the Messiah has come.

As He walked the earth, Jesus repeatedly told those around Him that He was there to do a specific work. In this, He taught the gospel good news of the Kingdom of God. He spoke of His sacrifice and resurrection to come for the salvation—the eternal life—for all who don’t work to earn it, but rather have saving faith in Him.

* **What is the New Covenant/The Covenant of Grace?**

**Q59. What is the New Covenant?**

It is the covenant by which God saves the elect, by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The New Covenant was planned before creation, promised in Genesis after the fall, and formally established by the blood of Christ when the work required of Him was complete.

**Hebrews 8:6-13** … Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. 7For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. 8For he finds fault with them when he says: “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, 9not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. 10For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 11And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. 12For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.” 13In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

* **The Fault of the Old Covenant**

In this Hebrews passage we see God declare in verse 9 that the New Covenant is “not like the covenant that I made with their fathers … For they did not continue in my covenant.”

In verse 7 we read, “For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second.” The “first covenant” language is talking about the Old Covenant. Verse 7 here is telling us why the New Covenant was needed. The *why* is because of *fault* in the Old Covenant. The fault was both with *the type of covenant* and *with the earthly people* in the Old Covenant.

The Old Covenant was faulty in that it could not do what mankind ultimately needs—it was not designed by God to do this; it only offered temporary benefits, and it was a covenant of works.

* **The New Covenant Is Because of and Based on Christ**

**Hebrews 8:6** … Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.

The whole plan and justification for redemption rests on the person and work of Jesus Christ alone.

Our Covenant of Redemption answer said, “The Covenant of Redemption is the plan and decree … based on the work required of Jesus.”

* **The New Covenant is established by the Covenant of Redemption** **being accomplished within human history**

When Jesus completed His work on this earth, He met the terms—the conditions—of His covenant of works (that is the Covenant of Redemption), so that He could covenant to and be a covenant of grace to the people of God’s choosing.

The New Covenant is a reality because it is based on the Covenant of Redemption.

* **The work required of Jesus**

When we say we are “not saved by works,” we could say more preciously that “we are not saved *by our own works*.” We are in fact “saved by works,” but it is not our own work; rather, *we are saved by Jesus’ work*.

It is by the New Covenant that God makes with certain sinners that Jesus’ work, His record, and His righteousness is credited to us—imputed to us.

Grace is experienced by us. We are not receiving payment for something we’ve personally done or earned. Salvation is only possible because of the person and work of Jesus.

What was His work? As Christians we know; it’s what we talk about within the gospel. It is the incarnation, His perfect life and obedience to God’s commands, it’s His sacrificial substitutionary death, and it’s shown victorious in His glorious resurrection.

**John 10:17-18** “for this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

Jesus mentions the need for and the doing of His work several times:

**John 4:34** Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.”

**John 5:36**“… For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me.”

**John 6:38** “For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.”

**John 17:4** “I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.”

In passages like these, Jesus affirms He had a mission—a work—that He was assigned in the Covenant of Redemption. To be the sufficient substitutional sacrifice for wicked sinners like you and I, He had to take on flesh and live a perfect life.

* **Jesus had to perfectly obey law**

When we say He had to live a perfect life, a perfect life according to what standard—what law? *What law did Christ have to perfectly obey*?

Christ came under the terms of His own covenant assignment, not according to a prior covenant made with mankind, but to fulfill His own covenant terms.

Just as the other covenants we looked at had terms that differed one from another, so it is with the terms of Christ’s Covenant of Redemption—the terms (both the work required and the blessings offered) differed from all the other covenants.

* + **Universal Moral Law**

First, Jesus came to obey the Universal Moral Law perfectly. This is the same moral law that we are required as humans to obey but can’t perfectly in our fallen nature.

This law is a blessing: It outlines God’s good moral design for mankind. This moral law is the eternal, foundational law that has and will always exist. The Universal Moral Law cannot and will not be set aside; it cannot be abolished.

Jesus, therefore, did not come to abolish this law, but to fulfill it—and He did, perfectly obeying it. This is a crucial part of His work.

* + **Positive Law**

Second, in addition to the Universal Moral Law, Jesus had to obey certain positive laws.

* + - **Of that time**

Jesus had to obey all Positive Law that was applicable to Him during the time He was living bodily here on earth. This included Positive Laws that were abrogated eventually by the New Covenant—things specific to the Old Covenant—Positive Law that was still in place and applicable to a male born of Abraham’s line.

Now, to be clear, this was not about Jesus striving to revive or maintain the Old Covenant, nor was His mission to earn the Old Covenant’s rewards. *Jesus obeyed these things perfectly to prove His righteousness and worthiness*, not because the Old Covenant was His assignment or offered any rewards of eternal value.

* + - **And assigned to Him in the Covenant of Redemption**

Jesus had to perfectly obey other positive law—other commands—uniquely assigned to Him in the Covenant of Redemption.

He had His own, *unique* Positive Law to obey. These Positive Laws were the additional things required of Him alone so that salvation is earned for and justly granted, in the proper time, to the eternally chosen ones. This included Him having to die on a cross as a sacrifice for the sins of many. Jesus had to do that; *no one else could do that as a sufficient sacrifice, nor has anyone else ever been in a covenant requiring that*.

**Matthew 5:17** “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."

In this passage, Jesus is speaking about law and prophecy that was declared in the Old Testament that would be perfectly honored and fulfilled in His coming to complete His mission.

He came to be the fulfillment of the law required of Him and to be the fulfillment of the prophecies concerning Him.

When we say Jesus had to live a perfect life, it means that Jesus had to perfectly obey the Positive Law that was required of Him and the Universal Moral Law.

Since Jesus had to obey law to earn or receive rewards, the Covenant of Redemption was a covenant of works to Him.

Jesus had a work to do on which the New Covenant is dependent. *In order for God to covenant redemption to any sinners, the justice of that has to be earned.* And it has—based on the work of Jesus.

Christ was given His role as Federal Head for a people of a covenant that God would make with certain sinners and He earned the rewards of His covenant of works. Christ was appointed to be the Mediator for His people, and as Mediator, to be the ultimate Prophet, Priest, and King.

In all of that, let us see that, based on the person and work of Christ Jesus, God is just to forgive and save sinners by grace alone.

The Covenant of Redemption was a *covenant of works* to Jesus, so that the New Covenant can be a *covenant of grace* to the specific people God covenants it to.

* **The New Covenant Is Different Than What Has Come Before in Time; It Is Truly New**

In Jeremiah 31, God is speaking through a prophet about the disobedience of the members of the Old Covenant and telling of the New Covenant God covenants to a particular people—the antitype people.

**Hebrews 8:8** “… the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant ...”

This is a great declaration of the true newness of this New Covenant. This is a plain and clear deceleration of a new and different covenant.

* **The** **New Covenant is entirely other and different from anything that had come before it between God and men**

The New Covenant was promised in times and covenants of old, but it was not any of those covenants.

**Hebrews 8:6** … Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.

**Hebrews 8:13** In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

**Hebrews 9:15** Therefore [Christ Jesus] is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance …

We see how there is a clear distinction made between the Old Covenant made with the ethnic Israelites—called the “first covenant” in some Hebrews passages—and the New Covenant that Christ mediates.

The Old Covenant began to fade away, until eventually, being abolished altogether. God found fault with the people in the temporary Old Covenant, and furthering His plan, He brought about the New Covenant—a covenant entirely other and different than the Old Covenant.

While the New Covenant was not formally established until the cross, since gospel prophecy—gospel declaration—existed in Old Testament times (all the way back to in the Garden [Genesis 3:15]), the eternally chosen ones living before the cross were saved by grace through faith in the coming Messiah. The work required of Christ had not been completed in time and space yet, but the New Covenant worked in time and space before it was formally established. It existed beforehand in the form of a promise, not in the form of a ratified covenant.

The New Covenant is entirely other and different from anything that had come before it between God and man, and it worked retroactively in time *because God promised it and He is unchanging*.

**1689 Confession of Faith**: “God was pleased to proclaim the promise of Christ, the seed of the woman, as the means of calling the elect and producing in them faith and repentance. In this promise the gospel in its substance was revealed and made effectual for the conversion and salvation of sinners.”

**1689 Confession of Faith**: “The price of redemption was not actually paid by Christ till after his incarnation. Yet the virtue, efficacy, and benefit of it was imparted to the elect in every age since the beginning of the world, in and by those promises, types, and sacrifices that revealed him and pointed to him as the seed that would bruise the serpent’s head and the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. He is the same yesterday and today and forever.”

* **The New Covenant Rewards the Members of the Covenant with Eternal Blessings**

The New Covenant is the substance and realization of entirely different and better things—eternal things!

In Hebrews 8, we are told the New Covenant “is enacted on better promises.” And in Hebrews 9, we are told that “those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance” brought only in the New Covenant.

The benefits are eternal in the New Covenant, not temporal! *Finally*, a covenant that forgives and redeems fallen men *eternally*!

Some of these New Covenant blessings are in verses 10-12 of Hebrews 8:

**Hebrews 8:10-12** “… I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. **11**… they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. **12**For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.”

**Ephesians 1:3**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us *in Christ* *with every spiritual blessing* in the heavenly places

Some of the better, spiritual, eternal, blessings of the New Covenant are: regeneration/spiritual life/new hearts; saving faith; full forgiveness of original sin guilt and personal sin guilt; the imputed righteousness of Christ; justification; redemption; eternal reconciliation to God; the Holy Spirit to dwell within; perseverance; the causing of love for God’s law and an obedience to His commands; eventually new glorified bodies; life in the new creation to come; no more pain, suffering, or tears; being in presence of Christ Jesus in the flesh; glorious worship of God like we have never experienced … the list goes on and on!

The blessings can be spoken to in many different ways, but Scripture often sums them up by saying “eternal life.” Those to whom God covenants the New Covenant get ETERNAL LIFE with Christ Jesus.

**Romans 6:23** For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In speaking about those God calls into the New Covenant, Jesus says this:

**John 10:28** “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”

* **The New Covenant Works Much Differently Than the Old Covenant; It Is a Covenant of Grace**

The Old Covenant was a covenant of works to the members of it: It depended upon fallen human obedience to have and remain within the covenant blessings. But the New Covenant is a covenant of grace for those with whom God has chosen to covenant.

In a covenant of grace, a party covenanted to receives rewards/benefits without them earning the rewards/benefits.

**Sam Renihan**: “In a covenant of grace, the blessings are external to the covenant partner and are imputed to him apart from [his own] merit or works. One does not need to earn the blessing of the covenant, but rather one simply receives the blessing of the covenant.”

In New Covenant, we (those God has chosen to covenant with) enter into the New Covenant and remain in it eternally entirely on the basis of grace.

Even when we consider the imperatives of Christianity, it is God who works in us:

**Philippians 2:13** for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Scripture makes these things definitively clear:

**Romans 3:10-12** … “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”

**Romans 3:20** For by works of the law no human being will be justified in [God’s] sight …

**Galatians 2:21** … if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

**John 1:17** For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

**Ephesians 2:8-9** For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

**John 6:63** “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all …”

**Romans 9:16** So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.

**Ephesians 1:6** to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

By grace alone, God chose a particular people in eternity past.

By grace alone, God does what is required to redeem us.

By grace alone, God gives us new life and saving faith in Jesus—the Mediator of the New Covenant.

By grace alone, God grows us and sanctifies us.

By grace alone, God keeps His redeemed.

By grace alone, God gives us eternal life.

The New Covenant is a covenant entirely of grace to the members of it for the rewards it provides.

There are no conditions in us or by our own works that have to be met for God to covenant this New Covenant to us, *or for us to maintain in the covenant rewards.*

**Pascal Denault**: “The unconditional nature constitutes a new and unique element of the new covenant. [By unconditional he means the rewards are not earned or kept by fallen man’s own work].

The promises of the old covenant were preceded by an ‘if’ that made them conditional on man’s obedience, while the promises of the new covenant were marked by divine monergism:

**Jeremiah 31:33-34 ‘**33For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God … 34… I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.’

The elements that make up the substance of the new covenant are works supremely operated by God and are presented by a series of declarative statements, not conditional clauses. *None of these promises depends on a condition that had first to be met by [fallen] man*.”

* **“The” Covenant of Grace**

Since the New Covenant provides those God covenants to *eternal blessings by grace*—blessings to be enjoyed forever, blessings we can never lose—the New Covenant is called *The Covenant of Grace*.

Thank God that the New Covenant is a covenant that provides all we need, keeps us securely in it, and is entirely of grace to the members of it. It is fitting then, that we see the emphasis highlighted in the theological name given to this New Covenant; it is *The Covenant of Grace*.