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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**

As we learned last lesson, it should be understood that the terms *New Covenant* and *The Covenant of Grace* are synonyms.

* **The New Covenant Is Made With (Covenanted To) the Eternally Chosen Ones: *Spiritual Israel***

**Hebrews 8:8** “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”

Here we see that God promised a new covenant and said He will establish it with the House of Israel and with the house of Judah—or, shorthand, Israel.

* **Hermeneutics: Which “Israel”?**

When “Israel” is being spoken about when we read of it in Scripture, it sometimes means ethnic Israel (the type), and other times it means Spiritual Israel (the antitype Israel—the elect).

As with many words in Scripture, the usage/meaning of the title Israel is known correctly by the context of the passage and the teaching of the whole of Scripture.

We need to identify which Israel God is speaking about: Who makes up this New Covenant group referred to as Israel in many of the prophetic passages and some New Testament passages?

We saw clearly in our Covenant of Redemption lesson that God has chosen who His true eternal people are—they the elect of God

* **Covenant relationship with *ethnic Israel* has truly ended**

God’s choosing of ethnic Israel in the way that He did in the Old Testament was for temporary purposes, as the Old Covenant was temporary. Additionally, we saw that they broke the covenant; they deserved and received the covenant curses—they were put off—they no longer are His people.

**Hebrews 8:9** “… For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them ...”

**Jeremiah 3:8** (NASB) “… for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away and given her a writ of divorce …”

**2 Kings 23:27**And the Lord said, “I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and I will cast off this city that I have chosen, Jerusalem, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there.”

The Old Covenant was abolished and covenant relationship with ethnic Israel has truly ended.

Some of ethnic Israel are a part of the eternal people of God, such as Abraham and any others with saving faith in Christ alone, but not all ethnic Israelites are.

* **There is one, united yet diverse, forever people of God**

When Scripture talks about the people of the New Covenant, it is speaking of *Spiritual Israel*—that is the antitype Israel.

Spiritual Israel is the one united people of God: some from ethnic Israel and some who are not of ethnic Israel.

Spiritual Israel is all of the elect Jews and all of the elect Gentiles that God chose before time for eternal redemption: They are God’s forever people.

Paul, as one example, teaches the “Israel” clarities in the New Testament:

**Romans 9:4**They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises.

**Romans 9:6-8**But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, 7and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” 8This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.

What God is teaching through Paul is not all who are descended from ethnic Israel belong to spiritual/eternal Israel. He is teaching that not all of ethnic Israel is of Spiritual Israel—the eternally chosen people of God.

This passage teaches that the flesh (meaning being born of a particular family or ethnic line) is not the basis on which a person is in God’s eternal family—Spiritual Israel. Rather, the basis for this is if you are included in God’s eternal promise, based on the Covenant of Redemption, to be brought into the New Covenant. “The children of the promise” are those God chose for spiritual adoption and eternal salvation in the Covenant of Redemption; they are Spiritual Israel.

**Romans 9:23-24** in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— 24even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles

Paul tells us directly that God calls Jews and non-Jews to Himself for salvation. Salvation is by grace, as it is only for those “he has called.”

**Romans 9:25-27** As indeed he says in Hosea, “Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’ and her who was not beloved I will call beloved.”  
26“And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.” 27And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: “Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved”

Here, God is teaching through Paul that Spiritual Israel is made up of some from ethnic Israel and some who are not of ethnic Israel: Jew and Gentile.

**Romans 10:11-13**For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” 12For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. 13For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Paul states that salvation is through faith, and that it is for *both Jews and non-Jews*—people of ethnic Israel and Gentiles (non-Israelites). For and in the New Covenant, there is not specialness or advantage to being of ethnic Israel.

**Romans 11:1-2, 5-7** I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. 2God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew …

5So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. 6But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace. 7What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened

**Romans 8:29** For those whom he foreknew he also predestined ...

In Romans 11, Paul asks rhetorically if there is no covenant relationship/salvation possible for any of ethnic Israel? And he answers that God has indeed chosen some of them: verse 2 says, "God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew." Verse 5 says, "… at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace."

And definitely in verse 7: "The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened."

Ethnic Israel, as a whole, failed to have God and thrive with God ongoingly, but the elect of them (that is the certain ones who were eternally chosen for redemption) obtained having God in a better, eternal way—they obtained salvation by grace alone.

There are no longer any special lands or national groups. Because the Old Covenant has been abolished, being of ethnic descent from Israel no longer, *in and of itself*, means anything unique in relation to God, covenant with God, or special benefits from God.

**Romans 11:25-27** Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. **26**And in this way all Israel will be saved …

Verse 25 “Israel” is *ethnic Israel*, and verse 26 “Israel” is *spiritual Israel*.

(We saw this same kind of format in Romans 9:6: “For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel.”)

There are Gentiles who also belong to *spiritual/eternal Israel*!   
That means all of the elect Jews and all of the elect Gentiles God has chosen before time for redemption will be saved; there is one united people of God.

With this biblical insight, consider what we said previously in this study: With the divine insight given in Romans (as well as the rest of the New Testament), we can see what God means when He makes prophetic claims and promises in the Old Testament regarding the future blessing and salvation of “Israel.” We come to have insight and understanding in the typology of Scripture—in the Prophetic Idiom of the Old Testament.

Scripture interprets Scripture for us. *The perfect interpretation of Scripture is provided by Scripture, by the Holy Spirit inspiring the New Testament authors to directly interpret prior Scripture and give us hermeneutic principles*.

Scripture says, “There is no distinction between Jew and Greek.” “In this way all Israel will be saved.” All of the elect Jews and all of the elect Gentiles are of the one people of God: Spiritual Israel.

There is a way Scripture uses the title or name "Israel" that means something different than ethnic Israel. In these cases, it means Spiritual Israel: the elect, the eternally chosen ones, those chosen before time began in the Covenant of Redemption—the antitype people.

There is significant beauty in this. God decreed to save people from all nations and unite them into one people, one flock, one family, one household.

**Colossians 3:1, 3, 111**If then you have been raised with Christ ...**3**… your life is hidden with Christ in God. **11**Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

**Galatians 3:26-29** for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. 27For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

God’s Covenant of Redemption chosen ones are one by one united to Christ, and there is no difference or eternal benefit in ethnicity, circumcision, social status, gender, etc.

By the New Covenant, God draws His chosen ones from all kinds of people, not just one. That is certainly what Jesus taught.

**John 10:16** “… I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also,and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.”

This point is also the informed way to understand a commonly misunderstood passage in 1 John:

**1 John 2:2** [Jesus] is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

John’s point here is not that Jesus paid *for the sins of every person who ever lived*; rather, he is teaching that Jesus is the Savior of people from within ethnic Israel AND non-Israelites—those scattered throughout the world. The elect are from “every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (**Revelation 7:9**).

God has now shown the world more didactically who His eternally chosen people have always been—that is the worldwide/diverse people chosen in the Covenant of Redemption for the New Covenant.

* + **The Church**

Spiritual Israel is the true Church (capital “C” Church)—theologically called the universal Church.

The universal Church is all the actual members of the body of Christ, made up of people from all times and around the world. It is all who are called out of darkness, regenerated, and set apart by God’s saving grace.

The formal declaration of the Church began outwardly with the coming and the death of Christ, but its existence began long before that—going all the way back to the first person in creation ever effectually called and redeemed on the basis of the Messiah to come.

**1689 Confession of Faith**: “The universal church, which (with respect to the internal work of the Spirit and truth of grace) may be called invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ, the head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.”

* + **The Church didn’t replace Israel; rather, the Church existed before Israel**

The Church existed before Israel’s covenant time period, and during, and after. Some of ethnic Israel are of the Church, but not all ethnic Israelites are.

Old Covenant Ethnic Israel was the type; the Church is the antitype. Ethnic Israel shadowed a people (the Church) that God was actively gathering for eternity all along, by grace alone, through the perfect covenant of Christ.

All of the elect Jews and all of the elect Gentiles (Spiritual Israel) are brought into and make up the Church.

All those redeemed in Christ, “… are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (**Ephesians 2:19**).

* **How Is a Person Brought Into the New Covenant? Who Should We Regard as Being in the New Covenant?**

The New Covenant is the covenant by which God does His redeeming work—the covenant by which God is just to eternally forgive and save sinners. This means that redemption—union with Christ and eternal life—is only mediated to the elect through this New Covenant.

In the Covenant of Redemption, Jesus was appointed as the Federal Head of the New Covenant.

* **Membership of a given covenant is determined by Federal Headship**

God sovereignly determines how someone is brought into the covenant—that is, who are under or made to be under the Federal Head of the covenant.

When we look at the New Covenant (in both who it was planned for and how it works), it should be clear that membership for the New Covenant was determined by God’s pre-creation election. There are specific individuals whom God chose before time in the Covenant of Redemption to eventually redeem—to eventually covenant with in the New Covenant. In time, then, New Covenant membership happens when God truly and unchangeably *effectually calls* a person into the covenant.

* **New Covenant membership happens when God effectually calls a person**

Each elect person, one by one, is transferred to be under Jesus’ New Covenant Federal Headship when God the Holy Spirit causes new birth, gives saving faith, and unites him/her to Christ Jesus eternally.

**John 3:3-8** [Jesus said] “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” **4**Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?” **5**Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. **6**That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. **7**Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ **8**The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Jesus definitively declares that new birth by the Spirit of God is the only way to be Christ’s—to be of Christ’s kingdom—to be in Christ’s covenant. First birth (natural birth) does not grant access into Christ’s Covenant of Grace; we are not naturally born into the New Covenant.

*Apart from union with Christ (the Federal Head of the New Covenant), a person is not in the New Covenant.*

The Apostles Paul says plainly in **Romans 8:9** that, “Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.”

You do not belong to Christ (that is, you are not under His Federal Headship—you are not in the covenant He makes with humans for eternal life, The Covenant of Grace) *unless* you have been personally united with Him *by new birth and saving faith*.

A person is not in the New Covenant until the effectual call. The effectual call is God covenanting with an individual: bringing them into Christ’s Covenant of Grace (the New Covenant)—uniting them to Christ Jesus eternally.

The effectual call of God is His effectual drawing:

**John 6:37“**All that the Father gives me will come to me …”

**John 6:44-45 “**No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. 45It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me”

By grace and according to the plan and will of God, one by one, the Father draws the elect, through the work of the Holy Spirit giving new birth, illumination of truth, and saving faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ alone, who then mediates the New Covenant to them.

*Therefore, no one should be assumed to be in (or considered in) The Covenant of Grace outside of personal testimony of new birth and saving faith.*

Membership in the New Covenant, union to Christ, and being under Jesus’ Federal Headship are all the same thing—and that hinges upon the gracious effectual call of God alone.

* + **Taught by God**

**Hebrews 8:11 “**… they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.”

A unique feature of the New Covenant is that the Holy Spirit illuminates the truth of God in the effectual call—the elect come to know Christ in a saving way—they are “taught by God.”

**John 6:44-45 “**No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him… [This drawing—this effectual call—is linked to a certain kind of knowing God:] **45**It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me”

The marker of being in the New Covenant is knowing God in a saving way—having personal testimony of new birth and saving faith.

* **New Covenant membership = brought unchangeably under the Federal Headship of Christ**

New Covenant membership happens to God’s chosen and is not revocable. God makes no mistakes; those He effectually calls are indeed redeemed.

New Covenant membership equals redemption.

New Covenant membership equals eternal life.

New Covenant membership equals not being able to be snatched out of God’s hand.

Membership in the New Covenant is not an “in and out” kind of thing. A person is either truly in or not in. There is not a “partial in” or an “outwardly in” membership. If you are in the New Covenant, you have been brought unchangeably under the Federal Headship of Christ.

While we cannot know for certain whom God has saved, only those with a credible personal testimony of new birth and saving faith should be considered to have New Covenant membership. According to that, only those considered to have New Covenant membership should partake of the signs of the New Covenant.

* **A child’s relationship to a believing parent does not grant membership into the New Covenant, assumed or otherwise**

Our beloved confessional Presbyterian brothers and sisters believe children of a Christian parent are, in some way, in the New Covenant prior to new birth and a personal testimony of saving faith.

* + **The Presbyterian error:** **Blending covenant realities due to missing the newness and difference of the New Covenant**

The Presbyterian error is to look at how God work previously, in other covenants, and bring distinctives from the past into the New Covenant.

Presbyterians believe the Old Covenant and New Covenant are of the same substance, which leads them to think God’s choice to work and covenant on the basis of family line in the Old Covenant time is maintained in the New Covenant time. *But that is not what Scripture teaches.* *A person is not in the New Covenant until the effectual call.* Only those with a credible personal testimony of new birth and saving faith should be considered to have New Covenant membership.

In biblical study, it has been critical to see the differences between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.

The Old Covenant primarily had covenant membership through a family line, but the New Covenant has exclusive covenant membership through adoption into a new heavenly family.

The Old Covenant primarily had covenant membership through natural birth, but the New Covenant has exclusive covenant membership through spiritual birth.

Proper, biblical Covenant Theology lets Scripture define each covenant on its own terms according to the word of God alone.

* + **Jesus: “I have come to set a man against his father”**

In addition to studying the terms of the covenants, we can also see that covenant membership is *not based on or assumed of* family line or parental belief *because God makes clear in Scripture that the New Covenant actually divides families*. Christ’s own words are clear on this point:

**Luke 12:51-53**“Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. 52For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. 53They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

We must remember that we are all God’s creation, and He works according His perfect plan and wisdom; His ways are according to the counsel of His perfect will.

God ordained it best to not covenant on the basis of family in the New Covenant.

**Matthew 10:35-36 “**For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. **36**And a person's enemies will be those of his own household.”

What Christ makes clear for the New Covenant (helping us see a particular error of our beloved confessional Presbyterian brothers and sisters) is that God’s plan was to send Christ to divide families to various degrees, *not to covenant to children based on the belief of their parents.*

* + **Jesus** **forms a new family in the New Covenant**

God not giving New Covenant assumption or entitlement to children based on the belief of their parents *is based on His election of various individuals to create a diverse new family.*

God’s sovereign choice of how and who to covenant to in the New Covenant highlights His design to form a new family—an eternal family (an eternal family of diversity)—not linked in any way to bloodline or the belief of other family members.

**John 1:12-13** … to all who did receive [Jesus], who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, **13**who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Spiritual birth unto entrance into The Covenant of Grace is not based on “blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” *A person is not in the New Covenant until the effectual call.* Only those with a credible personal testimony of new birth and saving faith should be considered to have New Covenant membership.

**Mark 3:31-35**[Jesus’] mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. 32And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you.” 33And he answered them, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” 34And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! 35For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.”

This speaks to what we have previously declared in this lesson. Namely, no one should be assumed to be in or considered in The Covenant of Grace outside of personal testimony of new birth and saving faith. Those of saving faith are in the New Covenant—it is they who do the will of God; they are in the eternal family.

In His time here on earth, Christ Jesus boldly taught that He came to divide earthly families *for the forming of the eternal family.*

The covenant Jesus mediates is only for those He came to save. It is not right to assume that a child of a believer is also part of the New Covenant. Scripture teaches plainly that only those saved by grace through *personal* regeneration and faith in Jesus are in the New Covenant.

If and when a child understands and credibly testifies to saving faith in Jesus Christ, we rightly should celebrate that. But until then, we cannot assume they are in the New Covenant.

* + **Acts 2 and Presbyterian confusion**

The context of the following Acts 2 account is that many are using the apostolic miraculous gifts and that startles the unconverted observers, some even mocking claimed they must be drunk. So, Peter says:

**Acts 2:15-18 15 “**For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. 16But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: 17‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams;  
18even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.’”

What have here is Peter beginning his sermon by referencing a promise made through the prophet Joel. *That promise is that many believers in the Apostolic time would have the Holy Spirit-empowered miraculous gifts*.

**Acts 2:32-33** “This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. **33**Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. “

Peter is saying that they are witnessing fulfillment of the promise to believers spoken through Joel.

**Acts 2:37-38** Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” 38And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

This is incredible; we are reading here an actual account of God effectually calling many to Himself.

Peter called them first to repentance (that is short for saving faith), and then baptism (that is a public testimony of the claim to have personal saving faith). That order is important: personal testimony of faith, and then baptism to testify to that.

Then Peter says (being that they are in the Apostolic time period), they too will receive the promised Holy Spirit-enabled miraculous gifting. “Repent and be baptized … and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

It is the promise that Joel was prophesying about (the particular work of the Holy Spirit) that is the promise of focus throughout this.

Then, with the next verse, we get to the passage that our Presbyterian friends try to use for family lineage/parent belief covenant membership:

**Acts 2:39** “For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”

Here is where they go wrong. Presbyterians read “promise” and “for your children” in this verse, and they think back *past* Joel to Abraham. They think about how God used family lines in Abraham’s covenant, and they think that Peter’s statement, “the promise is for you and for your children,” is talking about family line covenant membership. In this, they make the significant error of trying to use this verse to blend covenant realities in order to establish family lineage covenant membership in the New Covenant. But that is not what Peter is at all saying! The PROMISE that Peter is preaching about is Joel’s prophecy of the gift of the Holy Spirit for miraculous gifts. To say otherwise is to ignore the actual context and teaching of this verse.

Joel promises that many will be given the unique gift of Holy Spirit-empowered miraculous gifts. Act 2:39 is not saying there is a promise that children of believers are in The Covenant of Grace.

And look, *Peter qualifies His statement with the same qualification that we have seen in this lesson!* That is, it is only those whom God effectually calls will be gifted with spiritual blessings: “For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself” (**Acts 2:39**).

“Everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself.” That’s the qualifier of who the promise is for. This is not a generic promise for all children of believers.

This should be very clear. This passage is not teaching that spiritual gifting or

covenant membership belongs to unbelieving children of a believer.

We are not in the New Covenant *until* the effectual call. The effectual call is God covenanting with an individual: bringing them into the New Covenant—uniting them to Christ Jesus eternally.

No one should be assumed in or considered to be in The Covenant of Grace outside of personal testimony of new birth and saving faith, and that hinges upon the gracious effectual call of God alone.

“Everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” That’s the qualifier!

In our study, you should have seen by now, that union to Christ, being put under Jesus’s Federal Headship, and membership in the New Covenant—The Covenant of Grace—is not based on ethnic lines, not based on the faith of one’s parents, not based on fallen man’s own will, and not based on the will of another human; rather, it is based solely on God’s before-time choice of specific humans from all people groups of the earth, and it is actualized throughout human history for each of these persons in their life on this earth, according to God’s predetermined timing.

Each elect person, one by one, is transferred to be under Jesus’ New Covenant Federal Headship when God the Holy Spirit causes new birth, gives saving faith, and unites that person to Christ Jesus eternally.

* **Setting Us Up for Next Week**

**Acts 2:41-42** So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. **42**And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Personal faith in Christ, then believer’s baptism, then local church membership/Christian obedience; that’s the order and model for the New Testament church.