Section: Divine Covenants (Covenant Theology)

Wednesday, March 18, 2020

M. Kirstine

**TEACHING 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.

**Jeremiah 31:31** “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”

**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.”

**Hebrews 8:6** But as it is, 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.

**Luke 22:20** And likewise the cup after they had eaten, [Jesus said], “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”

**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 he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

**Galatians 3:14** so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

(Further study: Genesis 3:15; Ezekiel 36:25-28; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ephesians 2:11-22; Hebrews 8; John 10:27-30; Hebrews 9:28)

**This covenant is sometimes called** the Covenant of Grace.

* **Introduction**

Tonight, we continue looking at the New Covenant—the perfect covenant that does what no other covenant offered or could do.

There is a lot left to see and consider about the New Covenant, and in the implications of our study as a whole.

In this lesson we will further consider some more New Covenant features and really focus in on *who* is in this covenant.

As we learned last lesson, it should be understood that the terms *New Covenant* and *The Covenant of Grace* are synonyms. I’ll continue to use them interchangeably…when I say one, I mean the other, as they are the same thing.

Last time I taught this content it was a shorter teaching that did not include very much apologetic type work of mentioning some other views and showing why the confessional Baptist view is correct—but this time around we’re including a bit more of that.

In this lesson (and some next week as well), we will be discussing some wrong views that exist, related to portions of what we’re are studying.

It is in love that we want to bring these elements in and while I will speak boldly and decisively, that should not be interpreted as uncaring towards those holding those views.

We want to include these elements so that the people of our church have insight that may prove to be helpful now or in the future.

Jumping right into the lesson, then, we need to see that:

* **The New Covenant is made with (covenanted to) the *eternally* chosen ones: Spiritual Israel**

We see in Hebrews 8 that God says He makes the New Covenant with particular people, verse 8:

**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)*, other times is means *Spiritual Israel (the antitype Israel—eternal 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.

With this, 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? This is very important. God will establish the new covenant with *Israel*…**so we need Scripture to teach us what this means**.

We saw clearly in our Covenant of Redemption lesson that God has chosen who His true eternal people are—they the elect of God. In eternity past, God chose all the individuals that He would redeem and make His everlasting people. That has never changed—God cannot and does not change.

But who are these people exactly?

* **The covenant relationship with *ethnic Israel* has truly ended**

We later saw in our study that in God determined to make a covenant with an earthly people—ethnic Israel. That was the Old Covenant.

Now, because the Old Covenant was made primarily with ethnic Israelites, for some this has caused a great misunderstanding about who God’s *eternally chosen people* are.

Some (such as dispensationalists) have wrongly tried to conclude that God has two eternal people: Ethnic Israel and separately the elect Gentiles. This is a serious error and is often based on not knowing biblical Covenant Theology.

As we have learned, 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** tell us for example, “For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them.”

That’s significant: “I showed no concern for them.”

We saw declarations of cursing and putting off ethnic Israel in prior lessons, for example:

**Jeremiah 3:8**

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.”

We should know by now in our study that the Old Covenant people broke the covenant they were in,

so God

casted them off,

showed no concern for them,

divorced them and sent them away.

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

Now also consider this from the standpoint of eternity: Many of Abraham’s line, all through history, have died without saving faith in Jesus, the Messiah. Since there has never and will never be another way to be eternally reconciled to God, all those of Abraham’s line (in the past and all in the present and future) WHO DO **NOT** HAVE SAVING FAITH IN JESUS, **prove that ethnic Israel**, ***as a whole***, are not of God’s eternally chosen ones.

Based on all these factors, it should be clear that ***the whole*** of ethnic Israel is not the (or of the) eternally chosen people of God—***the whole*** of ethnic Israel is not.

Now, to be clear:**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**

So then, Who makes up this New Covenant group referred to as Israel in many of the prophetic passages and some New Testament passages? We will see tonight, from Scripture, that 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.

So, let’s see this in Scripture. Scripture goes to great lengths to show us this is all sorts of ways, but Romans 9-11 is a primary place of this teaching.

Paul begins in Romans 9 by acknowledging ethnic Israel’s Old Covenant history:

**Romans 9:4**

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

Paul highlights the fleshy, earthly things that ethnic Israel had claim to.

But, Paul goes on to make clear that God ultimately had a bigger plan and intention:

**Romans 9:6-8**

**6**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**.

So, the Romans 9 passage starts by acknowledging ethnic Israel’s Old Covenant history, but then it turned a very important corner to say, verse 6, “For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel.” This may seem odd at first, but I an assure you that Paul is not schizophrenic, or confused, or otherwise out of touch with reality.

What **God** is teaching through Paul is: For 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.

As we have said, in the Bible, the title of “Israel” or “House of Israel and Judah” can be a way to speak about God’s temporary ethic people (the type), or God’s eternally chosen people—Spiritual Israel (the antitype).

The Bible gives us clarity as to this title, especially the New Testament. For example, verse 7, we just read, gives us this clarity.

So also, does verse 8, which says, “This 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.”

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. We’ll see this further in the text.

As the chapter continues, Paul then gives examples of God's sovereign working to prove God is the one who decided who will be saved and has the freedom to do with His creation as He wills.

In **Romans 9:23-24** Paul says that God has chosen who He has “**23**in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— **24**even us **whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles**”

In this 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.”

Then Paul quotes Old Testament prophesy that declares, first, that the scope of God's true elect also includes those beyond ethnic Israel.

And second, that only some of ethnic Israel are a part of the true elect:

**Romans 9:25-27**

**25**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.’”

**27**And 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

There we have it again; Not all who are descended from *ethnic Israel* belong to *spiritual/eternal Israel*. *Spiritual Israel is made up of some from ethnic Israel and some who are not of ethnic Israel—****Jew and Gentile****.*

Skipping ahead again for time,

**Romans 10:11-13**

**11**For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” **12**For 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. **13**For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Here Paul states that salvation is through faith, and that it is for BOTH JEWS AND GREEKS—people of ethnic Israel and Gentiles (non-Israelites).

“There is no distinction between Jew and Greek” is a huge statement. That affirms what we taught a couple of lessons ago, namely, for and in the New Covenant, there is not specialness or advantage to being of ethnic Israel.

Skipping ahead again, now in Romans 11, we get to some very sharp and helpful verses. In light of this very significant teaching about ethnic Israel, gentiles, and Spiritual Israel, perhaps one may feel the weight of it thinking back to the Old Covenant relationship. Paul anticipates this, so He proactively gets to it:

**Romans 11:1-2, 5-7**

**1**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.

**2**God **has not rejected his people whom he foreknew**… [Then Paul gives an example from Scripture about how God *previously* kept the some of the typological Israelite people for His purposes and possession, and then Paul says:]

**5**So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. **6**But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.

**7**What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened

To the question of “has God rejected his people—ethnic Israelites?” In verse 2, Paul answers, “God has not rejected his people **whom he foreknew** … The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened” He gives a qualifier.

Foreknew here is the same word used in the famous **Romans 8:29** verse "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined..."

As we have studied before, used this way, this word is speaking to God’s *choosing*, His choosing of individuals, predestining them for *eternal redemption* from sin and punishment. God set His loving choice on them before time began—that is the meaning of foreknew in these verses.

So, in Romans 11, Paul asks rhetorically if God rejected his people—meaning, is there is no salvation possible for any of ethnic Israel? And he answers that **God has indeed chosen some of them**, verse 2 "God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew."

And verse 5, "… 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."

He’s teaching that a new understanding of who is in Q “His People” is needed.

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. By God’s sovereignty, as Paul says, “chosen by grace…the elect obtained it.”

After so much time of the Israelites being temporarily God’s chosen people, this teaching was very significant. Many to this day still reject it. They want there to be something unique about ethnic Israel and/or the land where they dwelled in Old Covenant times. But that mindset denies Scripture. So many of the passages we have studied in this series has made it clear that there is 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.

See now, Romans 11:25-27, which gives more very helpful clarity to the name Israel.

In talking about the forever people of God, the name of “Israel” is still used in Scripture, but the clarity of who this is ***spiritually*** has been clearly given by Scripture.

**Romans 11:25-27**

**25**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*.

Same kind of format as chapter **9:6**, “For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel.”

See here now, Verse 25: "… a partial hardening has come upon [ethnic] Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

That means, not all who are descended from *ethnic Israel* belong to *spiritual/eternal Israel*. **And** there are Gentiles who also belong to *spiritual/eternal Israel*!

Verse 26, “And in this way all Israel [spiritual Israel] will be saved."

**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 9-11 (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. To say it simply: 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.** What we have seen in this study is not a system imposed on Scripture, but an interpretation and position **formed *from and by* Scripture**—especially in how later revelation of Scripture informs us how to interpret earlier revelation. To deny that method of hermeneutics and theology is to claim to be wiser than God, for He inspired all of Scripture, and that includes the New Testament.

Since God gave further revelation in the New Testament, we must use it for our understanding. We must use the whole—the complete—revelation from God to interpret the parts of Scripture—Tota Scriptura. *Later revelation that gives clarity to earlier revelation* must be honored and prioritized, not ignored or written off.

In what we’re seeing in the text in this lesson it should be even clearer now that those who try to claim that God has two eternal people: Ethnic Israel and separately the elect Gentiles are in significant error. No, there is one united people of God. 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**. (Which by the way is called many things in Scripture, such as those of the household of God, the beloved, the sheep, the elect, and so on)

What Paul is doing here in these chapters is a brilliant declaration of many important points, several of which have been a part of our Covenant Theology study.

Main points we are looking at here is that the inspired Paul:

-Declares God's absolute and decisive sovereignty over who is saved for eternity.

-Paul declares this choice happened before creation began, before time.

-Paul declares that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus alone.

-Paul declares that ethnic Israel as a whole are not the elect.

-Paul declares that some of ethnic Israel are of the elect.

-Paul declares that some gentiles are of the elect.

-Paul declares that the elect Israelites and elect Gentiles make up the one eternal people of God.

And the first and last portions we saw, declares that 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—that is 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.

We see this in other places of the New Testament as well.

See a few examples.

First, Colossians 3.

For some context, verse 1 tells us:

**Colossians 3**

**1**If then you have been raised with Christ...

verse **3**…your life is hidden with Christ in God. 

Verse 11 now **11**Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

See also:

**Galatians 3:26-29**

**26**for in Christ Jesus *you are all sons of God, through faith*. **27**For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. **28**There 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. **29**And **if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring**, heirs according to promise.

There it is again!

See the connections? 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.

So, being of ethnic descent from Israel plays no factor to if you are in the true, eternal, Spiritual Israel. By the New Covenant, God is draws His chosen ones from all kinds of people, not just one; Uniting us into one family again.

That is certainly what Jesus taught: Jesus’ claimed to have other people (non-Israelites) to gather into His *one* flock:

**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.

“**One flock, one shepherd**.”

This point is also the informed way to understand a commonly misunderstood passage in 1 John. John wrote this to an ethnic Israel audience:

**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**).

Despite what some people think because of the historic existence of the Old Covenant, Jesus is the Messiah for the eternally chosen ones throughout the whole world. This teaching was so significant, and that’s why it is emphasized so much in the New Testament books.

Jesus is the Savior of the world, meaning **the elect** from every tongue, tribe, and nation—not just ethnic Israelites. I hope you’re seeing that connection more clearly now AND why the Bible takes important steps to teach this.

As Jesus said, “one flock, one shepherd” (John 10:16).

Get this Church….Remember how we saw at the Tower of Babel the human race split into different nations and ethnicities?

See this now: By the New Covenant, God is drawing in His chosen ones from all these people groups, not just one. *Uniting us into one family again*.

See how this comes full circle? It’s glorious. God has now shown the world more didacticly who His *eternally chosen people* have always been—that is the people chosen in the Covenant of Redemption for the New Covenant—a people, again, who are from “every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (Revelation 7:9).

* + **The Church**

These people (Spiritual Israel) are the true Church (capital “C” Church)—theologically called the *universal Church.*

While there are local gatherings of believers that we call “the church”, what we are talking about here is the spiritual Church—those who *truly* make up Christ’s bride, those brought in under Jesus’ New Covenant Federal Headship.

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 after the death of Christ, but inwardly, its people 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.

HN 1689 Quote.

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**

Therefore, (this is really important), **see that 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**.

Look at:

**Ephesians 2:19**

All those redeemed in Christ, “… are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God ”

Ok….Now that we have allowed Scripture to identify the WHO (that is: the New Covenant is made with the eternally chosen ones: Spiritual Israel) (which speaks to some Dispensationalism error)…now let’s turn to allow Scripture **to identify in detail HOW one is brought into the New Covenant** *and* **WHO *we* should regard as being in the New Covenant**. (which speaks to some Presbyterian error)

* **How is a person brought into the New Covenant?—Who should we regard as being *in* the New Covenant?**

Let me remind you again that the terms *New Covenant* and *The Covenant of Grace* are synonyms.

As we well know by now,

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*.

As Hebrews tells us plainly, Jesus is the mediator of the New Covenant, the “better covenant” established on “better promises.” And that is based **on Jesus being appointed as a Federal Head** 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**

As we have seen in this series, the membership of a given covenant is determined by Federal Headship—all those represented by the Federal Head—all those under the Federal Head of the covenant.

And, for each covenant, we have seen that **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 them to Christ Jesus eternally.

The connection of 1) the need of new birth and 2) entering the kingdom of Christ (being brought in under His Federal Headship, into His Covenant of Grace) is made clear in Scripture, for example by Jesus in John 3 in a conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus:

**John 3:3-8**

**3**…[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.”

In this, Jesus definitively declares there 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. This should be clear.

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.

This means 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 elect willingly go to Jesus by the **effectual call** of God:

**John 6:37**

Jesus said to them,  **37 “**All that the Father gives me will come to me…”

The **effectual call** of God is His effectual drawing:

**John 6:44-45**

**44 “**No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me **draws him**. And I will raise him up on the last day. **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**”

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, being under Jesus’s Federal Headship are all the same thing—and that hinges upon the gracious effectual call of God alone.

* + **Taught by God**

Notice that in John 6 it says, “It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.’”

If you look again at our Hebrews 8 passage, which is quoting the prophetic words of Jeremiah 31, speaking of the people in the New Covenant, we see it says:

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

This is speaking of the reality that the New Covenant is not like the Old Covenant. 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.”

A marker of being in the New Covenant, **is knowing God—Knowing God in a saving way.** Again,

**John 6:44-45**

**44 “**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”

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

And another unique feature of the New Covenant is that the Holy Spirit continues this sovereign illumination work in the members of the New Covenant, effectually teaching us truth using the means that God has ordained (like studying Scripture, hearing the preaching of Scripture, the admonishment of a bother or sister in Christ, etc). We’ll talk more about that next week.

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

I hope you can see in all of this that 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 *in and out* kind of thing. A person is ether 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.

Therefore, while we cannot know for certain who God has saved, only those with 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. (We’ll discuss the signs next week.)

Those who partake of the signs of the covenant who are not in the covenant, are sinning against the Mediator of the covenant.

In all what we have seen, it should be clear that not only does ethnicity not mark out New Covenant membership, neither does any other earthly or natural factor. In this, see that:

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

There has been nothing about membership of the New Covenant that should lead a person to think that a child’s relationship to a believing parent grants some kind of membership or even assumption into the New Covenant, but sadly, 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: Missing the newness and difference of the New Covenant unto blending covenant realities**

This error is drawn primarily from them looking to Old Covenant realities. 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 have faulty views in some points of Covenant Theology in which they do not rightly see the differences of the Old Covenant and New Covenant. In short, they 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 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**.

As we have seen, the New Covenant—that is The Covenant of Grace—is a covenant entirely other and different from anything that had come before it between God and man.

Taking realties from the Old Covenants and applying them to the New Covenant where Scripture doesn’t is not biblically faithful.

Each covenant needs to be defined by Scripture. 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**

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

Now, this can be a hard truth **for all of us** because we love our family, we want the best for our family. Christian mothers and fathers have a love, care, and hope so deep and true for their children—more real than most things on the horizontal. It is a great blessing to have the privilege to have family that you know and love. Surely, we *must* love our family.

But we must also *not make family an idol*. We must not have an over affection for our children or our other family members.

All of us are susceptible to this. It seems common in our culture that all types of people (no matter their Covenant Theology understanding or lack thereof) tend to idolize family. So, this passage can be hard truth **for many of us**.

But 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.

He ordained it to be best that not everyone is saved, so it is.

He ordained it best for families to be divided along the lines of the lordship of Christ, so it is.

He ordained it best to **not** covenant on the basis of family in the New Covenant, so it is.

**Matthew 10:35-36**

**35**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, not to covenant to children based on the belief of their parents.

* + **Jesus has come to form a new family**

But, *let us surely know* that God has reasons for working this way. Wise and perfect reasons, as He is wise and perfect.

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***. That CoR election was not based on conditions in the chosen ones, and that included not being based on the condition of believing parents or what family line you have or what ethnic group you are from.

His 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—an eternal family not linked in any way to the belief of other family members.

See Christ highlight the importance of the eternal family over the natural family in:

**Mark 3:31-35**

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

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

Family line, blood, parent’s faith, so-called odds, Old Covenant methods……none of these things can lead us to treat an unbelieving person (young or old) like they are IN the New Covenant. It’s a simple as that.

* + **Acts 2 and Presbyterian confusion**

You may be thinking: What is a primary New Testament passage that Presbyterians point to for their view?

Well, again, they do not *primarily* look to the New Testament for these positions, many solid Presbyterian theologians even admit that there are not clear or substantial passages in the New Testament for the giving of the New Covenant signs to unbelieving children of believers. (I’d be happy to share those quotes when there is time.)

However, some point to a verse in Acts chapter 2 as a New Testament basis for their position, claiming that it shows some continuity in covenant membership based on family lines.

But, when the passage is understood, it certainly does not affirm their position, rather it is quite a strong example of what we have already seen in Scripture, that is, a person is brought into the New Covenant **by God’s individual effective call**, not by family linage or any other factor *other than* God’s effective call.

Let’s look at Acts 2. The text is in a portion of Peter's Sermon at Pentecost.

Let me point out a few things and then get to the verse they use to try to support their positions.

First, the context of this 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. **16**But **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;  
**18**even on my male servants and female servants  
    in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.

Ok, 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.

Because this promise is hinged upon a person having saving faith, Peter then goes on to explain the gospel of Christ, including His sacrifice and resurrection, and Peter eventually says:

**Acts 2:32-33**

**32**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**. Again, that promise is that many believers in the Apostolic time would have the Holy Spirit empowered miraculous gifts. And so, they did.

(As we have studied in detail in past midweek lessons, this particular gifting of the Holy Spirit for *miraculous* gifts was unique to that Apostolic time period. That teaching is available if you’d like to study that further.)

In light of Peter’s preaching, by the work of God, many of the unbelievers among them were convicted.

**Acts 2:37-38**

**37**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?” **38**And 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.

And notice the order of things there, “Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized”

Peter called them first to repentance, (that is short for saving faith), and *then* baptism, (that is, a public testimony of that 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**.”

See that **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 (or parent belief) covenant membership*:

**Acts 2:39**

**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.”

So, here is where they go wrong. Presbyterians hear “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 and twist Scripture to mean something other than what it means. Peter said:

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;  
**18**even on my male servants and female servants  
    *in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy*.

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, (this I think is doubly helpful), 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**. Look: “**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**.”

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**.

Who of those hearing Peter’s sermon will receive the promise? Only those “whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”

Who of THEIR CHILDREN will receive the promise? Only those “whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”

Who of those who are far off will receive the promise? Only those “whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”

Church, this should be very clear. This passage is not teaching that spiritual gifting or covenant membership belongs to unbelieving children of a believer. **No**, it teaches what we have taught:

First birth does not grant access into Christ’s Covenant of Grace—we are not naturally born into the New Covenant.

**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.

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

**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*.**

For all the reasons we’ve seen tonight, and others, Presbyterians claiming that children of a believing parents are in the New Covenant in some way prior to the children professing personal saving faith in Jesus…are not honoring Scripture.

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

In our study, you should have seen by now that, 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 them to Christ Jesus eternally.

* **Setting us up for next week**

To close our lesson, the next part of Acts 2 actually sets us up very nicely for next week:

**Acts 2:41-42**

**41**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.

Notice how they, first, believed (they “received his word”), and then were baptized, *and then* they showed ongoing fruit of salvation by devoting themselves to sound doctrine and the regular gathering of the saints—that is, the local church. Personal faith in Christ, then believer’s baptism, then local church membership—that’s the order and model for the New Testament church.

Next week we will further consider some more New Covenant realities *including* what we have to look forward to in eternity!

Let’s pray…