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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.

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

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 spoken about in Scripture it sometimes means ethnic Israel (the type), other times is means Spiritual Israel (the antitype Israel—eternal Israel—the elect).

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.

* **The 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.

They broke the covenant—they deserved and received the covenant curses—they were put off—they no longer are His people.

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, 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.

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 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.

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.

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.”

For and in the New Covenant, there is not specialness or advantage to being of ethnic Israel.

God decreed to save people from all nations and unite them into one people, one flock, one family, one household.

One flock, one shepherd.

Jesus is the Savior of the world, meaning the elect are from every tongue, tribe, and nation—not just ethnic Israelites.

* **The 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.

**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.

**Ephesians 2:19**

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

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.

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.

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

The Apostle Paul says 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 unlessyou have been personally united with Him by new birth and saving faith.

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. 

* **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 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.

* **A child’s relationship to a believing parent does not grant membership into the New Covenant, assumed or otherwise**
* **The Presbyterian error: Missing the newness and difference of the New Covenant unto blending 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 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.

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

The Old Covenant primarily had covenant membership through natural birth. 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”**

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.

We must 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.

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.

What Christ makes clear for the New Covenant 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**

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.

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.

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 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. 

* **The Law** **in the New Covenant**

We have the law as a blessing to us—as good and perfect instruction for how God’s chosen people should live and thrive for His glory and our good. None of the covenanted rewards of The Covenant of Grace (the New Covenant) are earned by our law keeping.

* **Positive Law**

Positive Law is law and commands based on the will of God for a particular people, a particular purpose, and a particular time.

It is good and right for us to know and honor His law, including New Covenant positive law. Christ is our King; it must be our pleasure to do His will.

* **The Two Signs of the New Covenant Are Baptism and the Lord’s Supper**

**1689 Confession of Faith:** Baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordinances of positive and sovereign institution, appointed by the Lord Jesus, the only lawgiver, to be continued in his church to the end of the world.

* **Lord’s Supper**

**The Word of Truth Catechism:** The Lord’s Supper is a holy, New Covenant ordinance from our Lord Jesus, whereby professing believers gather together regularly to remember, celebrate, and testify of the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ by the eating of bread and the drinking of wine, which symbolize the body and blood of Jesus. This is a regular practice and testimony for those who are saved by God.

* **Believers Baptism**

**The Word of Truth Catechism:** Baptism is a holy, New Covenant ordinance from our Lord Jesus, whereby a professing believer in Jesus Christ testifies of his/her faith in Christ alone for salvation and his/her union with Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection by the public testimony of immersion in water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Baptism is to be done once and in no way contributes to one’s salvation.

* **The unbiblical practice of infant baptism**

In Scripture, there is no biblical basis to say that an infant (of a believing parent even) should receive a sign and seal of the New Covenant. Infant Baptism goes beyond Scripture. It goes beyond the terms of The Covenant of Grace, it goes beyond the commanded ordinance for New Covenant baptism, and it goes beyond the teaching of other biblical doctrine. Infant Baptism—in any shape or form—is an unbiblical practice.

We have seen clearly in Scripture, that it is only by grace, through faith, in Christ that one is justified and adopted into God’s family.

It is only by the work of God to regenerate a person and give them that saving faith that a person is in the New Covenant—The Covenant of Grace.

While God is free to save the elect in infancy, no infant can:

testify to saving faith,

testify to a claim of New Covenant participation,

express desire or consent to being baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

The only commands and clear examples of baptism in the Bible are for and of professing believers.

In light of the testimony of Scripture, we must not issue (or support the issuing) of baptism or the Lord’s Supper to anyone who does not personally testify to God’s effectual call that has produced personal faith in Christ as Savior and Lord.