

G R A C E

... it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace ... Hebrews 13:9

Issue 168 June 2010

Continuity/Discontinuity Part One

John G. Reisinger

How are we who live in the era after the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascent of Jesus the Messiah to understand God's revelation that preceded him? What effect, if any, does the revelation of God in Christ have on earlier revelation? In particular, how do we relate what God spoke through the prophets of old with what he spoke through the apostles of the new? This article is the first in a series that addresses how we read the Old Testament Scriptures, especially books such as Deuteronomy and Leviticus with their multitude of laws and applications of those laws.

Twenty years ago, John Feinburg edited a collection of essays that explored this issue. Thirteen authors contributed to the book, which approached the idea of continuity and discontinuity through six basic categories: theological systems, hermeneutics, salvation, the law of God, the people of God, and kingdom promises. Feinburg's opening comments are as appropriate for the beginning of the twenty-first century as they were for the end of the twentieth:

First, there is hardly an issue that is more fundamental to theology and OT and NT

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The Free Offer of the Gospel

Fred G. Zaspel

Introductory Considerations

In a day in which Pelagianism reigns it may seem a strange discussion indeed to debate whether the gospel should be offered freely. But hyper-Calvinism remains with us, and the resurgence of Reformed theology in recent decades has witnessed with it a resurgence of hyper-Calvinism also. And one of its characteristic marks is its hesitation and sometimes even refusal to preach the gospel to the non-elect or to the unregenerate. Some "high" Calvinists go a step further and argue that while the gospel should not be offered it should be proclaimed. The gospel makes no offer, it is argued; it issues a command to repent and believe.

We should clarify at the outset that this discussion does not concern contemporary "altar calls" or formulaic decision-

ism. Nor does this discussion question the necessity of divine initiative—unconditional election, effectual calling, and so on. Nor does this discussion question that the sovereign Spirit alone can persuade the lost to faith in Christ. On these matters all Calvinists are agreed. The question at issue is whether a sincere offer of salvation can legitimately be made indiscriminately to the lost.

Biblical Statements Related to the Free Offer

We will begin simply by citing biblical statements related to the free offer, allowing God to speak for himself to this issue. Then we will return to discuss some related theological matters.

Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and

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studies than this one... The more one moves in the continuity direction, the more covenantal he becomes; and the more he moves in the discontinuity direction, the more dispensational he becomes.¹

Preachers will often say, “The Bible says what it means and means what it says.” Sometimes they say, “The Bible says it, I believe it, end of discussion.” That sounds very pious, and I am sure it is well intended, but neither statement helps us understand what Scripture actually means. The major problem is not in not knowing what the Bible *says*, but in understanding what it *means*. Anyone can read the Bible, as well as any other book, and know exactly what it says, but that does not mean they understand what it actually means. A woman once asked me a question about a topic, which I answered by asking her a question: “What does Scripture say?” She replied in exasperation, “Pastor, I know what it says, but I don’t know what it means.”

God told Israel, in clear understandable language, to do certain things and to refrain from doing certain other things. We who live on this side of the cross have no problem understanding what we read when we read those texts. Our problem lies in knowing what those texts mean for God’s people who live AD. It seems as though much of what applied to ancient Israel no longer applies to God’s people today. How many of the clear and specific laws given to the nation of Israel should we keep today? How do we know which ones to keep and why?

I once met a young engineer who had been converted through reading a Gideon Bible. He did not know any

¹ John Feinburg, ed. *Continuity/Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments* (West Chester, IL: Crossway Books, 1988), 7

evangelical Christians. He told his wife that they were going to read the Bible and obey every thing it commanded. They started reading in Genesis, and by the time he and his wife got to the food and clothing laws, his wife said, “Either the Bible goes or I go.” In the providence of God, the young man met a Christian at work and learned some things about the New Covenant. It saved both his confession of faith and his marriage.

If we adopt the epistemological premise that the Bible means exactly what it says, we face the same dilemma as that engineer faced. What do we do when we read Matthew 5:29, 30? “If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away... And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away...” (ESV). If you are honest about your sin and you obey the commandment, you will be blind and without hands in short order. Is this what Jesus wants from his people? Most Christians read this as figured speech—hyperbole—that Jesus uses to make a point about the seriousness of sin. Regardless of which side of the continuity/discontinuity issue a Christian falls, all agree that not every law, ceremony, and promise given to Israel is given to the church. The question is not whether or not some things remain and some cease; it is what rule of hermeneutics teaches us how to know which is which. The question is how do I know what continues from the old into the new and what stops, and just as important, how do I know *why* it continues or stops in each case?

We cannot discuss a subject well unless we have first defined it. In this discussion, we need to know how we are using the terms *old* and *new*. Scripture states that something *old* has passed away and been replaced with something *new*. But what does that mean? Is the *old* that passed away the Old Testament Scriptures and the

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THE CASE OF NAAMAN—PART IX

GRACE TEACHES PROUD NAAMAN

2 Kings 5:13, 14

Dr. Phillip W. McMillin

And his servants came near and spoke to him, and said, “My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, ‘Wash, and be clean’?” So he went down and dipped seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean. (2 Kings 5:13, 14)¹

In the last lesson we saw that Naaman was exactly like any other sinner. He had his own ideas of just how God should deal with him.

He had gone to Elisha’s house expecting to be received with pomp and ceremony, and a servant met him at the door with orders that he was to go down and wash in the Jordan River seven times. He had imagined an especial healing ceremony with the prophet coming out to him, clapping his hand over the leprosy and calling on God to take it away. What happened angered him, and he went away in wrath. It is evident that not only do sinners refuse the messages of God; they grow angry at merely hearing the message.

The only reason Naaman would not go back to Syria still a leper, and still dead in his sins, is because God would not permit him to be of “those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul” (Heb. 10:39). You will see that the pronouncement of Solomon will be fulfilled in Naaman. “The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes” (Prov. 21:1). Yes, God will

1 All Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version of the Holy Bible.

have His way with the leper.

God turned Nebuchadnezzar the Great out into the hills of his own kingdom,

made him crawl about like an ox, and eat grass for seven years. Like Gideon took the elders of Succoth and thorns from the wilderness and disciplined them, God took Nebuchadnezzar and taught him who he was and who God is. That teaching brought faith and perhaps the most glorious testimony of it ever spoken by the natural man. Listen to faith speak: “And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever: For his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, ‘What have you done?’ At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my honor and splendor returned to me. My counselors and nobles resorted to me, I was restored to my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added to me. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down” (Dan. 4:34-37).

“You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful” (James 5:11). Other times He pulls them out of the fire. God disciplines every son that He receives. Sometimes He is very stern; at other times He is gentle. The intricate designs of His dealings

with sinners are tailored to the need of that sinner and his situation. Psalm 110:3 records God’s promise to Christ as the Redeemer: “Your people shall be volunteers [willing] in the day of Your power.” The Hebrew word that is translated *willing* means *an offering because of guilt*. And so all of God’s people come humbly, for Christ is their Passover Lamb; the only acceptable sacrifice that they can offer to God for their guilt.

Naaman must learn these things and must surrender his proud will to the true King at whose hand he seeks healing. The ground of Samaria is God’s ground, the river Jordan is God’s river, Elisha is God’s prophet, and the command is God’s command. “Go and wash in the Jordan seven times” (2 Kings 5:10).

The evangelism of today begs man to come forward now, lest he miss his last chance. But salvation is not by chance, but by the exceeding great and mighty power of God (see Eph. 1:19). But we will find that God tailors His message to the individual.

In verse 13 we see that message to Naaman and the messengers who bring it. Naaman has met with the God of law and found that he cannot broach His gates. He has been hemmed up in his frustrations, made helpless to use his own ideas and means for his healing.

The time has come for Naaman to hear the good news of glad tidings, that on earth peace can be found of God and that good will, which he hadn’t found in Samaria’s people, comes from the hand of the Almighty. And just look at the messengers that God sends to Naaman to convince him to obey the prophet’s direction. “And his servants came near and spoke to him, and said, ‘My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he

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new that replaces it the New Testament Scriptures? The answer is no. We do not have one Bible—the Old Testament Scriptures—for Israel and a different Bible—the New Testament Scriptures—for the church. Christians have one Bible with sixty-six equally inspired books. Every jot and title of the Old Testament Scripture is still a part of our Bible.

Is the *old* that discontinues the **Old Covenant**? The answer is yes. We then ask, “How much of the Old Covenant is brought into the New Covenant?” The answer is, “None of it is brought over as covenant law.” The New Covenant has different terms than the Old Covenant has; thus, the Old Covenant, viewed as **covenant terms**, completely ends, along with everything it brought into being. There is total 100% discontinuity of the Old Covenant even as there is, at the same time, 100% continuity of the Old Testament Scripture. It is imperative that we understand that the words **Old Covenant** and the words **Old Testament** do not mean the same thing.

Our study involves, among other things, specific laws and practices given to Israel that concerned the Sabbath, tithing, polygamy, and other such things. Do the laws in the Pentateuch govern the life of a Christian in the same sense that they governed an Israelite? **Does “one law fit all?”** The answer is no.

Some theologians divide the law of Moses into three codes of laws: a moral code (by which they mean the Ten Commandments), a ceremonial code, and a judicial code. In this interpretive scheme, there is continuity in the moral code. It remains in its entirety. Within this same scheme, the ceremonial and judicial codes end. There is discontinuity in two of the codes. The law of Moses then constricts to just the moral code. For those who adopt this scheme—Covenant Theology—the Ten Commandments written on

the tables of the covenant are the “unchanging moral law of God.” The law of Moses (newly defined) is the highest law ever given.

We should note that the issue of continuity and discontinuity affects not only morals and the Ten Commandments. Is tithing a covenantal duty for a Christian? Are the covenantal land promises made to Abraham and his seed in effect today? If so, how are we to define his seed? Answering these questions involves continuity and discontinuity.

Thus far, we have defined two terms and established three points:

1. The *old* that is done away IS NOT the **Old Testament Scriptures**.
2. The *old* that is done away IS the **Old Covenant**.
3. These two things ARE NOT the same things.

It is essential that we not do confuse Old **Covenant** with **Old Testament** and **New Covenant** with **New Testament**. Linguistically, the words *covenant* and *testament* mean the same thing. Literarily, however, the term *testament*, as we use it in the context of the Bible, refers to a collection of books. Furthermore, when we add the words *new* and *old* to either term, we create phrases that mean something entirely different.

The phrases, *Old and New Testament*, as commonly used today, have no biblical basis. Most translations of the biblical text do not contain either phrase. The KJV uses “Old Testament” one time (2 Cor. 3:14) and uses “New Testament” fourteen times. The NIV never uses either phrase. In every case where the KJV uses *testament*, the NIV uses *covenant*.

Conflating the literary use and the linguistic use of the terms Old Covenant/Old Testament and New Covenant/New Testament creates problems for understanding what the Bible means. The phrases “Old and New Testa-

ment” describe a humanly-devised division in our Bible. It is purely a literary term—convenient, but not inspired. The title page of older printings of the Bible read thusly: *The Holy Bible containing the Old and New Testaments*. The Table of Contents page of a modern NIV Bible marks the division in this way:

Contents

The Books of The Old Testament

The Books of The New Testament

It is too late in history to stop using the term *Old Testament* to refer to the thirty-nine books of the Bible written before Christ came. The usage is too firmly established, even though no writer of Scripture ever referred to those books as *The Old Testament*. To avoid confusion in our thinking and in our discussions, we should call those texts *the books written before Christ came*. In the same way, we should refer to the last twenty-seven books of the Bible as *the books written after Christ came*. Precise terminology might eliminate the problem that surfaces when we start talking about the annulment of the Old Covenant and its replacement by a New Covenant. If, in our thinking, the phrases *Old and New Testaments* and *Old and New Covenants* mean the same thing, then when someone states that the Old Covenant has been abolished, we will understand them to mean that the *Old Testament Scriptures* have been abolished.

Within what is called the Old Testament—the thirty-nine books of the Bible written before Christ came—there is a specific Old Covenant, established at Mount Sinai with the nation of Israel. That Old Covenant has been completely abrogated—ended—done away with—and replaced with a new and better covenant. The Old Testament—the Scriptures written before Christ came—have not been disestablished in any sense.

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Your Best Life Later

A. Blake White

Life is full of disappointments, and I think this is due in part to the fact that we are a forgetful people. We were made for glory, but it is vitally important to know that this glory is *not yet*. All too often we, as the people of God, have an over-realized eschatology. We forget what time it is. We confuse this age with the age to come, which results in unrealistic expectations. We expect flawless spouses, children without original sin, churches full of glorified saints, well-paying jobs that are completely fulfilling, and on and on. We need what theologian Kevin Vanhoozer calls “canon sense.” We need to know what time it is, realizing that we live “in between the times,” between the first and second coming of King Jesus. We ought to be the most content, and at the same time, the most discontent of all people, for our ultimate hope is in another world.

We also forget who God is. We forget that He reveals Himself in an instrument used to execute slaves. No one expected God to defeat His enemies

through entering the world of sinners and *dying on a cross!* The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing (1 Cor. 1:18). If we are honest, that’s not how we would have arranged things if we were on the throne. God is victorious through a bloody death. Musician Andrew Peterson recently reminded me of a scene in Mel Gibson’s “The Passion of the Christ” where Jesus is carrying his cross towards Golgotha. He is bloody and beaten. At one point, he can go no more and collapses. While the soldiers are whipping him, his mother Mary makes her way through the crowd to find her feeble son. Gasping for air, Jesus places his bloody hand on her cheek and says, “See, mother, I make all things new,” and picks himself and his cross off the ground to follow the will of his Father. God gives life through death.

We also tend to forget how God deals with the world. For the Son of God, it was suffering *then* glory, but we expect our lives to be glory *then* more glory. The pattern of our life is shaped

by our union with Christ. Our lives are to be cruciform (cross-shaped). We will be “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, *provided we suffer with him* in order that we may also be glorified with him” (Rom. 8:17 *my italics*). One of the Apostle’s goals was to share Christ’s sufferings, becoming like him in his death (Phil. 3:10). Isn’t that strange? It is certainly counter-intuitive, but Christians must work to keep this vision of life at the forefront of our minds. We should expect life to be difficult, marriage to be hard, churches to contain sinners, jobs to get old, and kids who disobey. Such is life in a fallen world, but it will not always be so. God has promised us glory, but it comes through suffering. The road to resurrection is called Calvary. So let us remember what time it is, how God reveals Himself, and how He deals with the world, and have realistic (i.e. biblical) expectations, which will save us much heartache and disappointment. We worship the God of the cross who is coming back to make all things new.

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says to you, wash and be clean?”

The entire world would be saved if great things were required which would bring glory and honor to the sinner. That is what Naaman had wanted. But salvation is for the beggarly ones (poor in spirit), the mourners, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. They are the ones blessed of God.

The messengers that God sends to Naaman to convince him that the logical and reasonable thing for him to do is to follow Elisha's directions, are his own servants. They are the ones close to him; they are friends that love and respect him, who dwell in his own house. They care whether or not he goes off in rage and remains a leper or listens to reason and is healed.

It is a tender message that they bring, and it is delivered in tenderness. They call him “father,” a term of respect, affection, and nearness. They cannot hide their feelings for him, they have no fear of reasoning with Naaman, and their message is urgent—they cannot hold it in. “Father, would you not have done some great thing? How much more when he says, ‘wash and be clean.’”

The messenger's heart is supposed to be gentle. “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!” (Rom. 10:15).

Do you remember the time God brought you to your senses by someone who witnessed to you concerning God's saving mercies? I suppose that we all have a corner of our heart where the memory of that person is kept. How well I remember Pastor Wall and the day that as he preached, God showed me I was lost and gave me grace to seek Him. The gospel sword slays pride with deep wounds, and as the old man dies, that same message becomes a hymn of praise to God.

We all remember when we ceased from our own works and rested solely on Christ. We heard the servant say, “Isn't it reasonable, isn't it logical, that if you worked so hard to gain heaven and failed, that now you may just wash and be clean?” We lay at Bethesda, paralyzed; we had no man to help us into the water. We had been there a long time in that condition, and then One came by and asked, “Do you want to be made well?” And we answered, “Sir, I have no man to help!” Then the glorious messenger, the servant of God, said, “Rise, take up your bed and walk.”

There is a fountain for cleansing, and Naaman will be cleansed in body and soul, and so will all who admit that they have no one to help them.

In verse 14 of our passage there are three things of which we need to take note.

First, we read this: “So he went down and dipped seven times in the Jordan.” This is a glorious picture of the twin gifts of God, which bring salvation. Those gifts, of course, are repentance and faith.

Naaman had been very angry when he heard the message that he was to merely go dip seven times in the Jordan. He wanted the prophet to make much ado about his healing or even to send him back home to wash in the better rivers in Damascus. The prophet's orders filled him with rage, and he went away from the door where healing was revealed.

But now God has given Naaman a reasonable mind. When Nebuchadnezzar learned of Almighty God, he said, “At the same season my reason returned to me.” Naaman has learned the same lesson, has repented of his pride and his anger, and has obediently gone down and dipped in the Jordan by faith.

The second thing we are told is of the way he went. He went according to

the saying of the man of God. We are not given a lot of details on Naaman's conversion, but we do know that when Peter healed the lame man, he preached that Jesus is the resurrection from the dead. We know that he and John preached Christ as the chief cornerstone and said, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Somehow, God revealed to Naaman the healing work of Messiah to come, and he came to Elisha from the muddy currents of the Jordan, a man renewed in body and soul, knowing the one God, beside whom there is no other.

The third thing we see in verse 14 of our passage is this: “and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child and he was clean.”

When Naaman came up out of the Jordan, all the ugliness of leprosy was gone. Gone was the disease that was his death sentence. If ever a man was a picture of health, Naaman was.

Abanah and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, now had no beauty compared to the Jordan. We will see that the rich earth of the splendid gardens of Babylon had little attraction for Naaman. He would trade all his home country for two mule loads of earth from Samaria.

Naaman heard the same message we need to hear today: the Word, which is according to the saying of the man of God. Naaman, the leper, came to God in a chariot; perhaps in our day we come in a Ferrari, but we all stop at the door of God's sovereignty. However we come, there is but one way to find favor with God, and that is in the blood of Christ. He is the only mediator between God and man. Naaman met him at the Jordan River. Ω

Consistency A Rare Gem

John G. Reisinger

I.C. Herendeen, a close personal friend of A.W. Pink, was fond of saying, “Consistency is a gem of rare value.” When I first came to understand the doctrine of limited atonement, I thought the Arminian was grossly inconsistent. It seemed to me that if he were consistent his universal atonement doctrine should lead him into universal salvation. If Christ paid the full payment for all the sins for all people without any exception, would it not logically follow that everyone, without exception, would be saved? There logically seemed to be a short step from universal atonement to universal salvation. My problem was that not a single ‘universal-tonement-Arminian’ that I knew personally had taken that short step and adopted universal salvation. All of the Arminians I knew never even gave universal salvation a second thought. It was never a problem for them. As the Dutchman said, “It wondered me how this could be.” How could all of these people be so totally inconsistent in their thinking?

The answer to my bewilderment came through a magazine called *Verdict*. This was a magazine that emphasized justification by faith. They opposed emotionalism and insisted that biblical faith looks totally outside of ourselves to a crucified Lord and Savior to find true salvation. One of the editor’s favorite expressions was the “doing and dying” of Christ. He would also often say, “It is not what you feel, it is what

Christ felt. It is not what you do, it is what Christ did.” There was a strong emphasis on the fact that Christ made a real and full redemption in his “doing and dying.” These people had a very high view of the intrinsic value of the atonement.

One issue of the magazine was dedicated to the doctrine of election and they rejected the biblical doctrine of sovereign unconditional election and accepted election conditioned on God’s foreknowledge, meaning his ability to see into the future. In the next issue, they had an article advocating the doctrine of universal atonement and universal salvation. When I read it, the light went on. I realized that my Arminian friends were not being inconsistent at all with *their doctrine of the atonement*. They were being perfectly consistent with what their view of the atonement taught. They could preach their view of a universal atonement for a thousand years and never once be tempted to believe universal salvation. Why do I say that? It is simple; *the Arminian does not have a real atonement*. He only has a *hypothetical* atonement. His universal atonement makes it possible for all men to be saved *if* they will furnish the essential faith, but the atonement itself does not make it *certain that any one individual* will be saved. In other words, the atonement is hypothetical, it is an “if” or “possible” atonement because it does not in and of itself *secure* salvation for anyone.

There are three great redemptive words that describe the atonement in the New Testament Scriptures. They are *redemption*, *propitiation* and *reconciliation*. The universal atonement of Arminianism, to be consistent with its view of the atonement, must empty these three great words of their biblical meaning. They preach a redemption that does not actually redeem but merely makes you *redeemable* if you furnish faith. They preach a propitiation that still leaves you under the wrath of God unless you “take the first step and do your part.” They preach a reconciliation that will still see some people going to hell as strangers to God’s salvation because they will not give God a chance.

I think I will try to be consistent with Scripture and preach an atonement that really atones, a redemption that actually redeems, a propitiation that totally and permanently satisfies the just anger of God and a reconciliation that brings every one of the elect safely home to glory. The great question is not “for how *many* people did Christ die?” The great question is “What did Jesus accomplish in his death on the cross?” Did he make certain the salvation of some, his elect, or did he make the salvation all a mere possibility?

I love the argument Spurgeon used. He said, “You insist my bridge to heaven is too narrow and your bridge is wide enough for the whole world. I agree, but your bridge only goes half way across, mine goes all the way.”

If you struggle with the doctrine of limited atonement, I urge you to read our booklet on the subject or listen to our CD’s, both audio and video, available from New Covenant Media, 800-376-4146.

Just as surely as there was an actual cross, an actual body, actual blood, an actual death, an actual tomb, an actual resurrection so there was an actual atonement, not merely the possibility of one.

John Blanchard

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keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever! Deut 5:29 NIV

This is an expression of the Lord's heart toward the rebellious people of Israel. In the face of their continued rejection of him, he passionately wished covenant blessing for them. Clearly God had not decreed that they would have a heart inclined to him, for if he had they would have followed him. The verse plainly describes a desire on God's part that was not in accordance with what for higher reasons he had decreed. The divine offer of covenant blessing was sincere, but it fell on deaf ears.

Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him. Ps 2:12 ESV

The call to "kiss the Son ... take refuge in him" is a call to submission and faith, and it is addressed not to believers or those who show evidence of regeneration but to the rebellious kings and rulers of the earth.

Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the Lord. Ps 4:5 ESV

Again, this exhortation is addressed not to the faithful but to the wicked who worship false gods (v.2).

Wisdom calls aloud in the street, she raises her voice in the public squares; at the head of the noisy streets she cries out, in the gateways of the city she makes her speech: "How long will you simple ones love your simple ways? How long will mockers delight in mockery and fools hate knowledge? If you had responded to my rebuke, I would have poured out my heart to you and made my thoughts known to you. But since you rejected me when I called and no one gave heed when I stretched out my hand, since you ignored all my advice and would not accept my rebuke, I in turn will laugh at your disaster; I will mock when calamity overtakes you—when calamity overtakes you like a storm, when disaster sweeps over

you like a whirlwind, when distress and trouble overwhelm you. "Then they will call to me but I will not answer; they will look for me but will not find me. Since they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the LORD, since they would not accept my advice and spurned my rebuke, they will eat the fruit of their ways and be filled with the fruit of their schemes. For the waywardness of the simple will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them; but whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm." Prov 1:20-33 NIV

Here God is depicted as passionately calling the foolish to follow him and receive blessing. Would it be over-reading this passage to look ahead in the canon and affirm that these are the words of Wisdom Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ who is wisdom incarnate (cf. Col. 2:3, 9)?

"Come now, let us reason together," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land; but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword." For the mouth of the LORD has spoken. Is 1:18-20 NIV

Here God calls the sinful to come and reason the matter with him and to consider carefully his gracious offer of forgiveness.

Declare and present your case; let them take counsel together! Who told this long ago? Who declared it of old? Was it not I, the Lord? And there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me. Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. Is 45:21-22 ESV

It would be difficult to imagine a more indiscriminate offer than this. God presents himself as the only God, the world's only savior, and he freely invites "all the ends of the earth" to come to seek him in that capacity. He is accessible to all who will come, and invitation is made accordingly.

"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David. See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander of the peoples. Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations that do not know you will hasten to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor." Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. Is 55:1-7 NIV

Amazingly God stoops to the level of a peddler on the street corner selling (giving away!) his wares, indeed, even begging the wicked and evil man to come to him for free pardon.

Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live? ... For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD; so turn, and live.... Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel? Ezek 18:23, 32 ESV and 33:11 NIV

Here God exposes his heart as lamenting the destruction of the wicked as he pleads with the rebellious nation (who eventually is destroyed) to return to him and escape his wrath. God takes no delight in destroying the unrepentant; he takes great delight in the repentance of that wicked person. And so he pleads accordingly, even though his plea goes unheeded.

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” Mt. 11:28-30 ESV

Christ’s call for the weary to come to him for rest is offered indiscriminately.

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. “Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’ “But they paid no attention and went off— one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. “Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ‘Friend,’ he asked, ‘how did you get in here without wedding clothes?’ The man was speechless. “Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’” Mt 22:1-13 NIV

In this parable Jesus describes the invitation of salvation. Blessing is offered to rebellious Israel, but it is refused (v. 1-3). The offer is sweetened, talked up, and shown to be glorious (v. 4), but still it is refused (v.5). And so he prophesies Israel’s destruction (v. 6-7). And now the offer goes out unrestricted to all (v. 8-10). Those

who respond are saved, and those who refuse the offer are destroyed (v. 11-13). The call is passionate, sotheric, and unfettered.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Mt 23:37 NIV

Whatever the identity of those whom Jesus addresses (whether Israel’s leaders or Israel at large) his claim is that he stands ready to save all who would come, and he laments the loss of those who refuse him.

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Mt 28:19 NIV

...repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. Lk 24:47 NIV

In these two passages we read of Christ’s great commission to the church to announce the good news of forgiveness to all. There is only one way to keep this command, and that is to offer the gospel indiscriminately to all and to exhort all concerning their duty of repentance.

This man receives sinners and eats with them! Lk 15:2 ESV

Surely Luke records this criticism of Jesus by the Pharisees for theological and not merely historical reasons. Indeed, the following parables (lost coin, lost sheep, lost son) are intended exactly to illustrate the heart of God toward sinners. Jesus, like his Father, maintains a compassionate and welcoming stance with regard to the lost.

Peter replied, “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. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.” With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded

with them, “Save yourselves [Gk, “be saved”] from this corrupt generation.” Acts 2:38-40 NIV

Peter’s public sermon consists simply of a free, indiscriminate offer of salvation to all who will repent.

Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord. Acts 3:19 NIV

Again the call is given indiscriminately promising salvation to all who will turn to God. The apostle does not offer salvation merely to those who already show evidence of life. He calls the unrepentant to faith and offers a corresponding promise of forgiveness.

Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. Acts 8:22 NIV

Significantly, Peter makes this offer of forgiveness upon repentance to Simon Magus who according to Peter himself was “full of bitterness and captive to sin” and whose heart was not “right before God” (vs. 21, 23). The inspired apostle offered salvation even to those who were manifestly unregenerate.

“Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses. Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you: “‘Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you.’” ... Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: *“We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles”* Acts 13:38-41, 46 NIV

Here the apostle Paul is seen to offer the blessings of the gospel to those who, as it turned out, refused it. His offer is nonetheless made indiscriminately.

Zaspel—Continued from page 9
nately and freely.

But concerning Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people." Rom 10:21 NIV

Here the apostle Paul cites the words of God through the prophet Isaiah (65:2) and pictures God as standing with arms outstretched, waiting longingly for the rebellious nation to turn to him and be saved. His offer goes unrequited, but still, amazingly, he stands with arms outstretched willing to receive any who will come.

And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of his son Jesus Christ... 1 Jn 3:23 NKJV

This verse was the text for Spurgeon's famous sermon, "The Warrant of Faith." As plainly as can be stated, warrant (command!) is given here for any person to believe and be saved.

Biblical Characterizations of Apostolic Ministry

Closely related to all this is the New Testament characterizations of the apostolic evangelistic ministry. Often Paul's ministry is described as one of *pleading, begging, reasoning, and persuading*.

The Greek word *peitho* means to persuade, to convince, to seek to win. This is a favorite word of Luke to describe Paul's evangelistic ministry.

Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. Acts 18:4 NIV

Paul's regular practice was to reason with men and women, argue his case in an attempt to persuade them to believe in Christ and be saved. Clearly, such language reflects a firm commitment to the indiscriminate and even passionate offer of the gospel to all. Repeatedly Luke uses this word to characterize Paul's work, as the following passages demonstrate.

And he entered the synagogue and for

three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. Acts 19:8 ESV

And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods. Acts 19:26 ESV

And when they had set a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God, and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening. And some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe. Acts 28:23, 24 NASB

In Acts 26:28, King Agrippa uses the same word to describe Paul's efforts with him.

And Agrippa said to Paul, "In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?" ESV

Here the apostle Paul himself uses the word to characterize his work.

Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men. 2 Cor. 5:11 NIV

Another word used regularly by Luke is *dialegomai*, which means to reason, dispute, argue.

So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present. Acts 17:17 NASB

They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. Acts 18:19 NIV

In the following two verses both of these terms (*peitho* and *dialegomai*) are used of Paul's ministry.

Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. Acts 18:4 NIV

And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning

and persuading them about the kingdom of God. Acts 19:8 ESV

Related to all this is Paul's own characterization of his ministry in his letter to the Corinthians.

We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal [parakaleo] through us. We implore [deomai] you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God! 2 Cor. 5:20 NIV

Two words are significant here. First he says that God himself is "making his appeal" through the apostle's preaching. The word used here (*parakaleo*) has a wide range of meanings. Very often it carries the connotation of pleading, begging, beseeching, entreating (e.g., Mt. 8:5; Mt. 18:32; Mk. 1:40; Acts 16:9). And it is clear that this is the meaning here coupled as it is with the next word *deomai*. But what is especially significant here is that it is God himself who is said to do the pleading. The second word (*deomai*) means to beg. And again what is significant is that Paul speaks of this begging as coming through him from God himself. God's appeal is echoed in the apostle's pleading. Paul is God's ambassador, and in his passionate pleading with sinners he preaches the gospel in the spirit of the one who sent him.

Finally of interest is Paul's characterization of his ministry in 1 Corinthians 9:19.

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win [kerdaino] as many as possible.

The term here (*kerdaino*) has the idea of winning or winning over. Paul says simply that it was his goal to win as many people to Christ as possible. He was not carefully trying to sort out who was elect. That is God's doing. Paul's responsibility, as he saw it, was to win as many as possible.

Clearly Paul was not a disinterested academic in his work. He was a persuader. He argued, reasoned, pled, begged, and he sought by it to per-

suaude men and women for Christ. This language plainly reflects Paul's practice of offering the gospel indiscriminately as he sought to "win" the lost to Christ. This work, as described, simply cannot be done selectively.

Theological Synthesis

All this is not to say that the apostles were simply after "decisions." Nor would they cheapen the gospel in order to make it more palatable to the unregenerate and thus gain more responses (2 Cor 2:17). But ministering the gospel faithfully they sought earnestly to see the lost saved—as many of them as possible. They offered the gospel to all, but it was the gospel as given and not a lesser substitute for it.

Moreover, it is highly instructive that in the same Acts narrative that characterizes Paul's ministry in terms of "persuasion" and such, Luke comments along the way that "as many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48). The gospel goes to all, passionately and indiscriminately, and by it the elect are saved. The gospel is the external means of calling, but the sovereign Spirit alone makes it effective and gives saving faith.

This is precisely how the apostle Paul characterized and explained the success of his ministry. In 1 Cor. 1:17-31, he argues that the "foolish" message of the gospel goes out to all but is made effective only when coupled with the divine (internal, efficacious) call. Or again in 2 Corinthians 2:14-16 he writes,

But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task? NIV

Or as he summarizes crisply 1 Corin-

thians 3:6,

I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. NKJV

That is to say, while the gospel goes to all God makes it effectual in the experience of his elect. As Charles Spurgeon said to his audience, "I can bring Christ to you, but I cannot bring you to Christ." The evangelist preaches the gospel to all, even pleadingly, seeking to persuade. But success in persuasion is entirely dependent on the sovereign Spirit of God. To quote Spurgeon again:

You have heard now from the preacher —
Truth by him has been made known,
But we need a greater teacher
From the Everlasting throne —
Application is the work of God alone.

In other words, the Calvinist should not fear this notion of the free offer of the gospel. It is in no way inconsistent with soteriological particularism, divine sovereignty, or human inability. That our offer of the gospel should be restricted to those whom we can recognize as elect / regenerate is a theological deduction that cannot find exegetical support and runs exactly contrary to the practice of the inspired apostles and God himself. Nor does the free offer (mis)characterize God as wringing his hands in frustration, hoping for results that he is helpless to effect. No, the Spirit of God is the ultimate persuader, but that in no way obviates the role of the free and indiscriminate offer of the gospel or the responsibility of the Christian to give it.

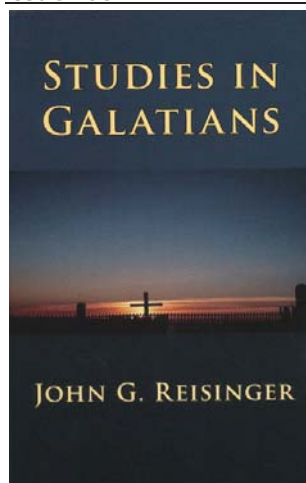
Along these same lines of thinking we should mention that it is not at all wrong to exhort carnal men to spiritual duties. Natural man's inability to obey God's commands or respond to God's offers of grace in no way precludes his responsibility to obey and come. Nor is the offer of grace therefore insincere. The offer is genuine—"Whoever you are, if you come to Christ he will give you rest.

God offers himself passionately and takes no pleasure in your destruction." This is how God positions himself in reference to the lost. Their inability in no way impugns either God's sincerity in the offer or their responsibility to accept.

Finally, some have argued that the free offer of the gospel is demeaning to God. It is beneath God, it is reasoned, to offer forgiveness to those whom he knows will refuse it. But while the concern for God's honor is commendable, two answers must be given to this line of reasoning. First, in one sense, perhaps it is beneath God to offer himself to those whom he knows will reject him. There is no reason at all why he should do this. *But the plain fact is he does*, as so many passages of Scripture inform us. He stands with arms outstretched to rebel sinners who will reject him, saying, as it were, "If you will come I will have you!" This is entirely beneath him. But amazingly, he does it. And this leads us to our second response: This gracious and compassionate stance of God toward rebellious sinners related for us in Scripture so many times is part of his self-revelation. He wants us to know that he is this kind of God. This is one aspect of his glory. We therefore cannot and will not adore him aright until we recognize and adequately appreciate this amazing aspect of his great heart of love.

Conclusion

The indiscriminate call and free offer of the gospel has strong and explicit biblical warrant, and the traditional Reformed position has rightly maintained it. The concern of some high Calvinists that a free offer of the gospel implies Arminian notions is simply mistaken. God positions himself toward the wicked as willing to save, and he pleads with them accordingly through his spokesmen. This univer-



STUDIES IN GALATIANS JOHN G. REISINGER

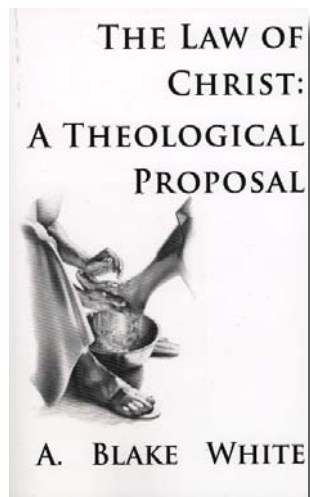
Studies in Galatians is not, nor does it claim to be, a verse-by-verse exegetical commentary even though it does comment on nearly every verse in Galatians. It is not aimed at professional theologians but at "the man in the pew." This in no way means that technical books written by theologians are not just as vital as books like Studies in Galatians. It does mean that books such as this are also vital. This book attempts to bring the message of Galatians into the twenty-first century and show how Paul's message to the Galatians is a great help in dealing with some of the identical questions and problems that Paul faced in the first century.

John Reisinger is an evangelist, theologian, and conference speaker. He is well-known for a unique ability to make profound and deep truths simple and understandable. He likes to say, "God has called us to feed sheep, not giraffes." One has remarked, "John puts the cookies on the lower shelf where all can reach them." Unfortunately, this has a down side. No one will read Studies in Galatians and say, "I do not know what he meant." The reader will clearly understand what the author means and will either love it or strongly disagree.

The one concept that readers will truly grasp is that "walking in the Spirit" and "not being under the law, but under grace" is the same thing. One will learn that biblical, victorious living begins with the biblical theology of "free from the law."

Studies in Galatians is unashamedly rooted in a commitment to the Doctrines of Grace and New Covenant Theology.

THE LAW OF CHRIST: A THEOLOGICAL PROPOSAL A. BLAKE WHITE



"What are Christians to obey? The Bible is the simple answer of course, but upon further investigation, things are not quite that simple. For example, I am sure we have all heard a Christian condemning and calling homosexuality an abomination based upon Leviticus 18:22 or 20:13. However, if one looks on the next page at Leviticus 19:27, should we not also conclude that we should not get haircuts or shave? Why is one normative, but not the other?"

"Christianity, after all, is not simply a code of ethics. It is not just a moral system. Being a Christian is not simply trying to 'do what Jesus did.' No, the foundation of the Christian life is the gospel of Jesus Christ. All else flows from the good news of Christ crucified for sinners. As Michael Horton writes, 'It is the Good News that yields good works. Salvation is not the prize for our obedience but the source.'"

"The law of Christ cannot be reduced to a list of do's and don'ts. It certainly involves specific things that can be 'listed' as right or wrong, but it is far more than a list like the ten words written on stone. The law of Christ is love, but it is also the example of Christ. Everything Christ taught is part of his law, but so is everything his apostles taught a vital part of his law. Christ himself is his law personified. The whole of Scripture, as interpreted through the lens of Christ as the new covenant prophet, priest, and king, is a part of the law of Christ."

May the Sovereign Lord be pleased to bless you, as you read and contemplate the glory of the new covenant in Christ, to see Christ more fully and more gloriously, as the full and final authoritative Word by whom God has spoken in these last days.

Blake White is a seminary student enrolled in the Master of Divinity program at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY, and a member of Third Avenue Baptist Church. He lives in Louisville with his wife Alicia and son Josiah. Blake is also the author of *The Newness of the New Covenant*.

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Reisinger—Continued from page 4

We have built upon our definitions and earlier points to establish two points about continuity and discontinuity:

1. The biblical Old Covenant is completely rescinded. If we are discussing covenants, we find complete discontinuity between the Old Covenant and the New.
2. The literary segment of the Bible we call the Old Testament remains intact. If we are discussing the Old Testament Scriptures, we find that all of them continue as inspired Scripture. We have complete continuity regarding status as Scripture between the Old Testament and the New.

The thirty-nine books of the Old Testament Scriptures were, are, and always will be an equal and essential part of the inspired word of God. Thus, they are part of a Christian's rule of life: they are useful for training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16). The fact that we must interpret the Old Testament Scriptures through the lens of the New Testament Scriptures in no way makes these Old Testament Scriptures any less an inspired part of our Bible. We have one verbally inspired Bible that has sixty-six books. I try to remember never to say Old Testament without adding the word *Scriptures*, and I never refer to those thirty-nine books as the *Old Covenant*.

We need to fix six points firmly in our minds as we discuss the topic of continuity and discontinuity.

One: Old Testament refers to the Scriptures written before Christ came. The Old Covenant refers to the covenant that God made with Israel at Sinai. The first remains; the second is gone. The first is in complete continuity, and the second is in complete discontinuity. **Do not confuse God's eternal purpose in sovereign grace**

to save his one elect people with a theological, but unbiblical, covenant of grace. We believe the former and reject the latter. The biblical authors identify the Old Covenant as the covenant that originated at Sinai.

Two: The Old Covenant was given only to Israel; it was not for the Gentiles. It established Israel as a nation, a body politic. It included a land grant, a system of government, and regulations for worship. The Israelites had always been the children of Abraham, but they had not been a nation—a body politic—until they entered into a special covenantal relationship with God at Sinai.

Three: Everything established by the Old Covenant ended when Messiah came. It ended because it was fulfilled.

Four: Nearly all components of the Old Covenant were described by the biblical authors as being eternal, or lasting forever: the priesthood, the Passover, the Sabbath, the people, the land, and other such things. The way in which these things were everlasting or eternal was that they found their fulfillment in Christ and the New Covenant age.

Five: Dispensationalism insists that the promises concerning the nation of Israel and the land of Palestine are eternal and unchangeable. Therefore, those promises are still in force. They see complete continuity in the land promise to Israel but complete discontinuity in the law.

Six: Covenant Theology posits total continuity between Israel—the Jewish church—and the Christian church. They also see total continuity in the law—"the commonly called moral law"—which enables them to bring the Ten Commandments, including the Sabbath, into the covenant with the church.

Feinburg called this issue fundamen-

tal to theology and to testamental studies. **Why is the topic of continuity and discontinuity an issue—why is it so difficult?** One reason is that continuity is so wedded to Covenant Theology, and Covenant Theology is a major systematic theology. It is impossible to discuss biblical continuity and discontinuity without discussing Covenant Theology and vice-versa. The presupposition of the category *moral law* in Covenant Theology clouds any discussion of the law of God or of the covenants that God has made with human beings. Let me give you two illustrations. First, a quotation from the *Westminster Confession of Faith*:

A. "Besides this law, [meaning the Ten Commandments,] **commonly called moral...**"²

That is how Covenant Theology accomplished continuity between covenants. They adapted a theological term, *moral law*, which had no exegetical basis in the Scriptures, and then stated, without supporting evidence, that this term commonly referred to the Ten Commandments. Since the phrase, *the Ten Commandments*, is a biblical term, it is legitimate to use its equivalent term, *moral law*, as though it were a biblical term. The concept of *moral law* and the words *commonly called* effectively take the discussion of the law of God out the realm of biblical exegesis and put it into the realm of logic and systematic theology.

Here is another illustration:

B. "*Man by his fall having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the Covenant of Grace.*"³

Again, we find that Covenant Theology has created an extra-biblical term and granted it authority through

2 WCF, Chapter 18, Section 3. Emphasis added.

3 Ibid., Chapter 7, Section 3. Emphasis added.

consensus (the appeal to “commonly called”). They link the new term, *Covenant of Grace*, to the work of God, thus granting it the status of a biblical term. No writer of Scripture ever used either of these terms, *moral law* or *covenant of grace*. One wonders, then, who did commonly use these terms, and why those users were accorded such authority. What the *Confession* actually means is this: “The idea of a Covenant of Grace and an unchanging moral law is how we make sense of the Bible. Therefore, it is essential to our system of theology. We have no actual textual evidence for either of these ideas, but both terms are widely accepted and used in theological discussion.”

The concept of a Covenant of Grace offers support for certain practices that have no explicit biblical warrant, such as infant baptism. Why does anyone believe that God requires that his people practice infant baptism? John Murray gives the standard answer. Notice the centrality of the word *continuity* in his argument:

The crucial issue concerns the baptism of infants, and on this Baptists offer vigorous dissent. The argument in support of infant baptism is based upon the essential unity and **continuity of the covenant of grace...**

...the conclusion derived from the **unity and continuity of the covenant of grace** is that the same privilege belongs to the infant seed of believers under the new covenant.... **These considerations** [the “commonly called” declarations] **are the ground for the propriety and validity of infant baptism.**⁴

Murray frankly admits that the grounding for infant baptism is (1), a theological term, the commonly called covenant of grace, which we know is never called that in Scripture,

4 John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray: Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1978), 2:374.

and (2) the unqualified continuity of that covenant throughout all ages. If we ask a Covenant Theologian if the Bible specifically commands infant baptism, he or she will answer no. If we ask if Scripture contains a clear example of an infant being baptized, again, the answer will be no. The Covenant Theologian will then offer a series of statements, supported by the concepts of *continuity* and *good and necessary consequences*, which is supposed to prove that there is one unchanging redeemed people of God under one single Covenant of Grace. Under this system, baptism has replaced circumcision as the sign of that covenant. Since the covenant is the same for Israel and for the church, and since infants (but only the boys) were marked with the covenant sign, then it is the responsibility of Baptists to show in the New Testament Scriptures where God commands us to stop marking infants (and now including girls) with the covenant sign, which has been changed from circumcision to baptism. The logic is beautiful. The premises upon which the conclusion rests are unbiblical, but the argument is still beautiful.

Charles Hodge makes an amazing admission in his *Systematic Theology* that demonstrates the importance of the concept of covenantal continuity when discussing infant baptism.

The difficulty on this subject is that baptism from its very nature involves a profession of faith; it is the way in which by the ordinance of Christ, He is to be confessed before men; but infants are incapable of making such a confession; therefore they are not the proper subjects of baptism. Or, to state the matter in another form: the sacraments belong to the members of the Church; but the Church is the company of believers; infants cannot exercise faith, therefore they are not members of the Church, and consequently ought not be baptized. **[This is not my criticism of infant baptism; this is Charles Hodge’s clear and frank admission. It seems**

as though he has no valid grounds for infant baptism. Consider, then, his next statement.]

In order to justify the baptism of infants, we must attain and authenticate such an idea of the church as that it shall include the children of believing parents. **[Hodge and his paedobaptist brethren invented a doctrine of the church that included infants as bona fide members. Here are “good and necessary consequences” deduced, not from Scripture, but from theology. The grounding for infant baptism is the continuity of the one people of God, in which Israel is the church.]**⁵

Hodge then argues, “It is not the purpose of God that the visible church on earth should consist exclusively of true believers.” It is true that we can never guarantee that everyone in any local assembly is a true believer. Human beings cannot *know* about the experiences of any other human beings. We accept what they tell us unless we have evidence to the contrary. But Hodge equates the circumstance of a local assembly that knowingly receives unsaved people into membership with the circumstance of a local church that is deceived by a hypocrite with a false profession.

The *WCF* contains more examples of theology derived from the concept of covenantal continuity. G. I. Williamson, commenting on Chapter 19 of the *WCF*, discusses the liberty that a Christian has when compared to an Old Covenant believer. Note how his argument depends on the idea of covenantal continuity.

There is an increased degree of liberty belonging to the New Testament believer. But this increase of liberty is due to the abrogation of the ceremonial law (which was borne by the Old Testament believer and not the New Testament) and not because

5 Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 3:546,47

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of any essential difference in their deliverance from the moral law, **[there must be continuity of the moral law]** from sin, or death.⁶

Compare this with a quotation from John Stott on Galatians 5:1.

This freedom, as the whole epistle and this context makes plain, is not primarily a freedom from sin, but rather a freedom from the law. What Christ has done in liberating us, according to Paul's emphasis here, is not so much to set our *will* free from the bondage of sin as to set our *conscience* free from the guilt of sin. The Christian freedom he describes is freedom of conscience, freedom from the tyranny of the law, the dreadful struggle to keep the law, with a view of winning the favour of God. It is the freedom of acceptance with God and of access to God through Christ.

Since 'Christ has set us free' and that 'for freedom,' we must 'stand fast' in it and not 'submit again to a yoke of slavery.' In other words, we are to enjoy the glorious liberty of conscience which Christ has brought us by His forgiveness. We must not lapse into the idea that we have to win our acceptance with God by our own obedience. The picture seems to be of an ox bowed down by a heavy yoke. Once it has been freed from this crushing yoke, it is able to stand erect again (*cf.* Lev. 26:13).

It is just so in the Christian life. At one time we were under the yoke of the law, burdened by its demands which we could not meet and by its fearful condemnation because of our disobedience. But Christ met the demands of the law for us. He died for our disobedience and thus bore our condemnation in our place. He has 'redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us' (3:13). And now He has struck the yoke from our shoulder and set us free to stand upright. How then can we dream of putting ourselves under the

law again and submitting to its cruel yoke?⁷

The great freedom of the New Covenant is freedom of conscience that gives boldness to approach the throne of grace (Heb. 4:14-16; 10:1-22). If Williamson is correct, then Christ's atoning work purchased the great liberty for us that allows us to eat bacon with our eggs—to be free from the ceremonial law. Williamson is correctly expressing the doctrine of the *WCF*. The following quotation from the *WCF* is a classic example of the way in which the concept of covenantal continuity denies the reality of the unique blessings of the New Covenant.

The liberty which Christ hath purchased for believers under the gospel consists in their freedom from the guilt of sin, the condemning wrath of God, the curse of the moral law; and in their being delivered from this present evil world, bondage to Satan, and dominion of sin, from the evil of afflictions, the sting of death, the victory of the grave, and everlasting damnation; as also in their free access to God, and their yielding obedience unto him, not out of slavish fear, but a child-like love and willing mind.

I can hear some folks saying, "John, I hope you are not going to criticize that part of the *WCF*! That is exactly what I believe." It is also what I believe. I agree with it. However, the next line takes away what it has just granted:

All which were common also to believers under the law; but under the New Testament the liberty of Christians is further enlarged in their **freedom from the yoke of the ceremonial law**, to which the Jewish Church was subjected; and in **greater boldness of access** to the throne of grace, and in fuller communications of the free Spirit of God, than believers under the law did ordinarily partake of.⁸

7 John Stott, *BST: The Message of Galatians: Only One Way* (Leicester, UK: IVP, 1968), 132.

8 *WCF*, Chapter 19, Section 1. The proof

When we think about Old Covenant believers, we must avoid making two mistakes: One, we must not treat the Old Covenant believer as if he sat in his tent and read the *WCF*. Two, we must not treat the Old Covenant believer as if he sat in his tent studying the notes in the Scofield Reference Bible. To do either is to treat the Old Covenant believer anachronistically.

In the section quoted above, the *Confession* is biblical until it describes the state of the Old Covenant believer. The *Confession* then eradicates the heart of the New Covenant. Covenantal continuity demands that the Old Covenant believer experiences the same blessings that the New Covenant believer does, including access into God's presence in the Most Holy Place. Notice what Hebrews 9:7-8 says.

7 But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people.

8 The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing.

According to the author of Hebrews, the veil that closed off the Most Holy Place actually closed it off. It was not opened just a little bit during the Old Covenant era, and then opened a bit wider in the New Covenant era. The "new and living way" was not opened at all until Christ offered his all-sufficient sacrifice. The *WCF* and Hebrews 9:8 and 10:19, 20 contradict each other on this point.

Look at John MacArthur's comments on this subject as it is addressed in Hebrews 6:8.

One of the key theological themes in Hebrews is that all believers now have direct access to God under the New Covenant and, therefore, may approach the throne of God boldly

6 G. I. Williamson, *The Westminster of Faith for Study Classes* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1964), 149.

texts offered are Heb. 9:8, 3:14-16, 10:1-21.

(4:16; 10:22). One's hope is in the very presence of God, into which he follows the Savior (6:19, 20; 10:19, 20). The primary teaching symbolized by the tabernacle service was that believers under the covenant of law did not have direct access to the presence of God (9:8), but were shut out of the Holy of Holies. The book of Hebrews may be summarized in this way: Believers in Jesus Christ, as God's perfect sacrifice for sin, have the perfect High-Priest through whose ministry everything is new and better than under the covenant of law.⁹

As already noted, the words "commonly called" and the phrase "one covenant with two administrations" takes the discussion continuity and discontinuity out the realm of biblical exegesis and moves it into the realm of logic and systematic theology. In Covenant Theology, the two administrations of the one covenant of grace do not differ in substance (See *WCF*, Chapter 7, Section 6). In reality, the Covenant Theologian does not have a real and true New Covenant. He has an *older* and a *newer* version of one single covenant of grace.

All of this leads to certain important conclusions. (1) Upon the basis of this one covenant, there is one true Church extending through all ages (Acts 7:38, Eph. 2:11-20; Rom. 11,

⁹ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible* (Word Publishing, 1997), 1895.

etc.)¹⁰

A covenant new in nature and substance is not possible in Covenant Theology. There must be covenantal continuity—a continuity of the single covenant of grace that exists in all ages for all people. Yet, the very term "New Covenant" necessitates discontinuity. You cannot have an Old Covenant replaced by a New Covenant without having discontinuity. Replacement entails discontinuity. This is why Covenant Theology cannot accept the two biblical covenants (the Old Covenant made at Sinai and the New Covenant established by Christ, Heb. 8:6-13 and Gal. 4:24, 25) as the two major covenants around which the bulk of Scripture is built.

When Covenant Theology adopts two non-biblical, theological covenants (a covenant of works with Adam before he fell and a covenant of grace with Adam after he fell, Gen 2:17 and Gen 3:15) as the two major covenants, they have disowned the New Covenant as a true new and different covenant. Its status is reduced to merely a new administration of a previous covenant.

In our next article, we will look at several key texts of Scripture that have a direct bearing on the subject of continuity/discontinuity. Ω

¹⁰ Williamson, 67.

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sal appeal of the gospel is the external means by which God, in his own time, sovereignly calls his elect individually into the fellowship of Christ. Ω

There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a study of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity.

C.H. Spurgeon

(Jesus) saves His people from their sins. This is His special office. He saves them from the guilt of sin, by washing them in His own atoning blood. He saves them from the dominion of sin, by putting in their hearts the sanctifying Spirit. He saves them from the presence of sin, when He takes them out of this world to rest with Him. He will save them from all the consequences of sin, when He shall give them a glorious body at the last day. Blessed and holy are Christ's people! From sorrow, cross, and conflict they are not saved. But they are saved from sin for evermore.

J.C. Ryle

The Unsearchable Riches of Christ! Ephesians 3:8

Samuel Davies

Consider what rich blessings Christ has purchased for His people; purchased not with corruptible things such as silver and gold—but with His own precious blood! The *purchase price* recommends and endears the blessings, though they are so great in themselves, as to need no such recommendation! What can be greater or more suitable blessings to hell-bound sinners, than *pardon* for the guilty, *redemption* for slaves, *righteousness* and *justification* for the condemned, *sanctification* for the unholy, *rest* for the weary, *comfort* for mourners, the *favor of God* for rebels and exiles, *strength* for the impotent, *protection* for the helpless and *everlasting happiness* for the heirs of hell!

And, to sum up all—*grace* and *glory*, and *every good thing*, and *all the unsearchable riches of Christ*—for the wretched and miserable; for the poor, the blind, and naked!

These are blessings indeed, and, in comparison with them—all the riches of the world are impoverished, and vanish to nothing!

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FORWARDING SERVICE REQUESTED

You are My friends! John 15:14

James Smith, "The Pastor's Morning Visit"

What infinite condescension in Jesus, to call us *sinful worms*—His *friends!* But He not only *calls* us so—but *treats* us as such! And expects us as His friends—to do whatever He commands us.

Is Jesus your friend? Then *visit* Him often—let Him hear your voice in prayer and praise. Then *trust* Him confidently—let Him see evidence of your faith in your dependence. Then *walk* with Him in love—let Him enjoy much of your company. Then *expect* Him to be your Friend in sickness and health, in poverty and plenty, in life and in death!

If Jesus is our Friend—we can never be *destitute*. If our father and mother forsake us—He will take us up and take us in.

We can never be *miserable*—He will receive us and be a wise and loving Father unto us.

We can never be *neglected*, for He will never fail us nor forsake us—but will do for us all that He has promised in His Word. He will defend us from foes, visit us in sickness, and cheer and support us in death!

Precious Lord Jesus, You are my Friend in life, in death, at the judgment, and before Your Father's face forever!

"Yea, He is altogether lovely! This is my Beloved—and ***this is my Friend!***"
Song of Songs 5:16