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The Covenant of Grace A Key to Understanding the Bible

By **Calvin Knox Cummings**

The young Christian who has come to know Christ the living Word will want to know more of the written Word, the Bible. But as he examines his Bible there may sometimes come over him a feeling of confusion and discouragement. The Bible is composed of many books written over a long period of time. What does it mean? How can the young Christian master the Bible? How shall he begin its study?

This little booklet is designed to aid the young Christian in his initial study of the Word of God. It is the humble hope and earnest prayer of the author that the message of this booklet may encourage and assist young students of the Bible in their study of God's Word and send them on their way declaring with greater clarity and fullness the glorious gospel of the grace of God.

It is essential in any study of the Scriptures that one first has an understanding of their underlying message. There will be little profit in mastering the details of the Bible if we have missed its central message. Throughout the entire Bible there is one underlying message; it is the message of salvation by a Redeemer. The Old Testament prophesies that the Savior will come. The New Testament tells us that he has come and what he has done.

This underlying message of salvation serves as a unifying principle, connecting the various revelations of the Bible and uniting them into a harmonious whole. Like a winding stream it connects the many rivulets and streams of thought that run throughout the Bible and unites them into one mighty river.

"The covenant of grace" is the most accurate and comprehensive term to describe that one plan of redemption which runs through the Bible. An understanding of this covenant will acquaint one with the central message of the Bible and at the same time provide an outline of its history and revelation. In this little study our primary interest will be in the history of this covenant of grace. This emphasis, we believe, will afford a clearer survey and outline of the Bible.

MODERN ATTACKS UPON THE UNITY OF THE COVENANT OF GRACE

Today, there are widespread and determined attacks being made upon the teaching that there is but one way of salvation in the Bible, but one "covenant of grace."

The first and most deadly attack upon the covenant of grace has been made by the arch-foe of Christianity, Modernism (unbelief in the supernatural power of God). Modernism denies the

whole idea of God ever revealing in a supernatural way a plan of salvation by grace. The Modernist denies that man has fallen from grace; therefore man does not need to be restored to grace. The Modernist hates the teaching that "Christ died for our sins," and thereby destroys the basis upon which we receive the blessings of the covenant of grace. To the Modernist the Bible is not a history of God's supernatural revelation of himself; it is simply an account of man's varying religious experiences. To the Modernist the Bible presents merely the evolution of religion. The well known Modernist Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick has stated: "To take a trip through the Bible now is to move from the presence of primitive religion to the noblest expression of the religious spirit in the life of man. It is the most fascinating journey that the mind of man can take. To see men's thoughts of God grow from the time they thought of him as a man upon a mountain until they thought of him as the Father of all creation ..." ("Progressive Christianity" [a sermon], p. 10).

There is another attack being made today upon the teaching that there is but one way of salvation, but one covenant of grace. This attack comes not from the camp of those who oppose the supernatural and miraculous element of the Bible, but rather from some who believe in the supernatural revelations of the Bible as supernatural revelations. In many ways these men are our friends and not our enemies in the great conflict between Christianity and Modernism today. The men in this camp believe that the Bible is the Word of God and that there is only one way for men to be saved today and that is by the grace of God. For this we give thanks. These men are popularly known as dispensationalists.

In what respect do these men differ from those who emphasize that there is only one way of salvation, only one covenant of grace? In what respect can they be regarded as dangerous teachers of Christian truth? The difference and the danger is simply this. The dispensationalist does not believe that there always has been or always will be but one way of salvation. He believes that the Bible contains essentially two different ways of salvation. He states that there has been and will be another way of being saved than by the sheer unmerited favor of God. Briefly and simply, the dispensationalist states that there is one covenant for saving Jews (in the past and in the future) and another covenant for saving Gentiles. Dr. Lewis S. Chafer, one of the leading teachers in this school of thought, gives some clear statements of the dispensational teaching on this point. He states, "There are two widely different, standardized, divine provisions, whereby man, who is utterly fallen may come into the favor of God ... To such a degree as the soteriology of Judaism and the soteriology of Christianity differ, to the same degree do their eschatologies differ ..." (*Bibliotheca Sacra*, vol. 93 [1936], pp. 410, 421). In another source of dispensational teaching, the Scofield Reference Bible, it is also implied that there are two ways of salvation (see the Scofield Reference Bible, p. 1323). Dr. Chafer holds that the Old Testament order of things will apply also in the future kingdom of David (see *Bibliotheca Sacra*, vol. 93 [1936], p. 443). According to the dispensational teaching, then, men are saved by grace during the present age, but the Jews of the past and of the future are made right with God by obeying the law.

The purpose of this little study is to present a constructive substitute for these popular but erroneous conceptions of the message of the Bible. In doing this the writer is aware that he is not presenting anything essentially new. He is merely presenting a key to an understanding of the Bible which is in harmony with the historic creeds of Presbyterian and Reformed Christianity.

MEANING OF THE TERM "COVENANT OF GRACE"

As we take our Bible in hand, we observe that it is divided into two parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The word "testament" is a translation of the Greek word *diatheke*. This word occurs many times in the Septuagint (a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) and in the Greek New Testament. This Greek word *diatheke*, however, can more accurately be translated "covenant." The American Revised Version so translates it except in one passage. The Authorized Version translates many of the New Testament passages "covenant" (e.g. [Heb 8:6](#)). So we may accurately say that the Bible can be divided into two parts: the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.

The word "covenant" means a disposition or an arrangement. This arrangement is made by God alone. Man has no part in its making. Man must either accept the arrangement God has made or receive no covenant at all.

The word "grace" means undeserved favor. The grace of God is divine favor manifested to sinners who deserve just the opposite: his disfavor and wrath.

The "covenant of grace," then, is that arrangement whereby God planned to save man from the just consequences of his sin; namely, immorality, misery, death, and damnation.

MAN'S NEED FOR A COVENANT OF GRACE: THE COVENANT OF WORKS, THE FALL

If we are to understand the covenant of grace we must first understand the covenant that is called the "covenant of works." Only as we understand the covenant of works will we understand why man needed a covenant of grace if he were to be saved unto everlasting life.

When God created man, he created him perfect. Man knew what was right and what was wrong, and God gave him the ability to do what was right. Having equipped him with this knowledge and this holy character, God decided to test man. He wanted to demonstrate whether man would glorify his Creator by obeying him.

God put man to the test by entering into a covenant with him. The first covenant that God made with man in the garden of Eden is called the "covenant of works." It is called the covenant of works because man had to perform certain works of obedience if he were to receive the promised blessing of the covenant. Others call this same covenant the "covenant of life" because in this covenant God promised eternal life to man if he would obey. In this covenant God declared to Adam, "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" ([Gen 2:17](#)). Disobedience would mean death; obedience would mean life.

In this covenant of works God asked just one thing of man: obedience. "Adam, simply submit to my authority and believe in my word of promise." In return for this simple faith and obedience, God promised to give to Adam a blessing out of all proportion to the little that was required of him. If man would obey he would have everlasting life; he would never die. Not only would this life be everlasting; it would be a more abundant life than Adam originally was given. He would be brought to a state where it would no longer be possible to sin and where he could have fellowship with God upon the basis of abounding grace.

Adam failed to keep his part of the covenant. In rebellious unbelief he ate the forbidden fruit (read [Gen 3](#)). He preferred to believe the lie of Satan who promised him that he would not die. In so doing he called God a liar. He preferred to submit to Satan's authority rather than to God's; he preferred to obey Satan and to disobey God.

God remained sovereign and fulfilled the threatened curse upon man. Adam died. He died spiritually; he was driven from the garden and cut off from the presence and fellowship of God. Man could not do anything else but sin now. He died physically; his body was separated from his soul and returned to the dust from whence it came. This death was to be eternal; man was never to partake of the tree of life, but a "flaming sword ... turned every way to keep the way of the tree of life."

Adam, unfortunately, was not the only one who suffered on account of the fall. The covenant was made with Adam not only for himself but for all of his descendants. Adam represented us all just as a diplomat today represents all the people of a nation. What that representative does is considered the act of all the people, and they share the consequences of his acts for better or for worse. Adam represented us before God. His sin is our sin just as really as Christ's righteousness is our righteousness. "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" ([Rom 5:19](#)).

All the consequences of Adam's sin fell upon us. We inherit his same sinful rebellious nature so that we cannot help but sin. We commit the same sins and suffer the same miseries in this life. We have been cut off from fellowship with the Father. Death—spiritual, physical, and eternal—is our just reward. As summarized by the Westminster Shorter Catechism, "All mankind by the fall lost communion with God, are under his wrath and curse and so made liable to all the miseries of this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell forever" (Q & A 19; cf. [Eph 2:3](#), [Rom 6:23](#), [Mark 9:47-8](#)).

When man fell in sin, the covenant of works was no longer sufficient for his salvation. Never could he of himself measure up to God's standard of perfect obedience. This covenant of life was now a covenant of death. How then could man be saved? Would God leave all mankind to perish in their sins?

THE CONTENT OF THE COVENANT OF GRACE

"God, having out of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace, to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer." In these words of the Westminster Shorter Catechism we have set forth the purpose and the content of the covenant of grace.

God's purpose, then, in devising the covenant of grace, was not for the purpose of saving all of mankind but rather a portion of mankind. In eternity God chose from among fallen mankind those whom he purposed to save. As the Scriptures declare: "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world ... in love having predestinated us unto the adoption of children" ([Eph 1:4-5](#)). Christ prayed, "I pray not for the world but for them which thou hast given me" (John 17:9). Christ declared to his disciples: "Ye have not chosen me but I have chosen you and ordained you that ye should go and bring forth fruit" (John 15:16). Paul affirmed: "Whom he did predestinate, them he also called, and whom he called them he also justified ..." (Rom. 8:30).

This truth is rejected by Romanists and many Protestants today. It is clear, however, that those who reject this teaching are rejecting the Word of God and denying that God is God. Certainly it is in the Bible. Further, if God purposed to save all mankind and has failed in his purpose, he is no longer God. There is a power greater than God. God ceases to be God.

In time God revealed to man the plan whereby man could be saved. This plan as conceived in eternity and revealed in time contained three elements. He gave to man certain promises. He revealed that the blessings of these promises could be received only upon the basis of the work of his Son, the great Mediator of the covenant of grace; he then demanded that man meet one and only one requirement before he could receive these promised blessings; namely, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

All of the promises of the covenant of grace may be summed up in the oft-repeated words, "I will be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee" ([Jer 31:33](#), 32:38-40; [Ezek 34:23-25](#), 30, 31; 36:25-8; [Heb 8:10](#); [2 Cor 6:16-18](#)). He promised to receive men back into his favor and fellowship. He promised forgiveness and life eternal. Included in this promise to be our God are all the more specific blessings of the covenant of grace such as justification, adoption, sanctification and glorification.

Only upon the basis of Christ's sacrifice and obedience could man inherit the blessings of the covenant of grace. Christ became "the mediator of the new covenant" ([Heb 9:15](#)). Through his work we receive the blessings of salvation. God in his justice demanded that the penalty for sin be paid; namely, death. He further demanded that man must be perfectly righteous before he could come into his majestic presence. Christ died in our place, paying the penalty due to us for our sin, declaring in his own words, "This is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for many for the remission of sins" ([Matt 26:28](#)). Then, when we could not, he performed perfect righteousness for us, which is laid to our account by faith: "not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness of God which is by faith" ([Phil 3:9](#)); "By the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" ([Rom 5:19](#)).

The one requirement that God in this covenant made of man was faith. Faith is simply receiving something as true and trusting in it. God did not require that we merit eternal life through our own works of obedience to the law. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done but according to his mercy he saved us" ([Tit 3:5](#)).

The content of the covenant of grace finds its clearest expression and summary in the words of our Savior, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" ([John 3:16](#)).

THE UNITY OF THE COVENANT OF GRACE

The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments contain only one way of salvation and that is according to the terms of the covenant of grace. The Bible knows of only one Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. To that Savior the believers of the Old Testament looked and in him they trusted. Speaking to the Jews of his day Jesus said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it and was glad" ([John 8:56](#)). The saints of the New Testament looked back upon the historic fact of the finished work of Christ and saw in him their "sacrifice to satisfy Divine justice and to reconcile us to God." As Paul testified, "Christ died for our sins" ([1 Cor 15:3](#)). Peter, speaking for ancient Jew and for modern Gentile, declared, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" ([Acts 4:12](#)).

This one covenant of grace is administered in different ways during different periods in the Bible. It is important that we understand, however, that these are simply different methods of administering the same covenant of grace. The character of the covenant is not changed by these different methods of applying it. An example may clarify this important point. In the United States we have a Constitution. This Constitution is of long standing and has not essentially changed throughout the years. But there have been many different administrations of varying political platforms that have applied the principles of the Constitution. So there is one covenant of grace but different ways of administering that covenant.

There are essentially two different ways in which God administered the covenant of grace in the Bible. During most of the period of the Old Testament the covenant of grace was administered in one way. During the New Testament period, the covenant of grace was administered in another way. Let us look at the covenant of grace in the Old Testament and then at the covenant of grace in the New Testament. The Bible speaks of these covenants as the "old covenant" of grace and the "new covenant" of grace (see [Jer 31:31](#); [Heb 8:13](#)).

THE COVENANT OF GRACE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

From Adam to Abraham

Man had scarcely fallen into sin before God approached him with his overtures of grace. He promised Adam and Eve that he would send a mighty deliverer and redeemer. In Genesis 3:15 we have God's first revelation of the covenant of grace to man. God definitely promised man that there would be a conflict between Satan and the seed of the woman and that the seed of the woman would be victorious. "It [a descendant of Eve] shall bruise thy [Satan's] head, and thou [Satan] shalt bruise his [Christ's] heel." God manifested his grace here in two ways. First, he would make Adam and Eve enemies of Satan and therefore friends of God. Second, through the promised Redeemer God would break the power of Satan over men. When Christ died on Calvary's cross, Satan's power was broken. Wherever the gospel of the crucified One is preached with the blessing of the Spirit, Satan is powerless to enslave.

This covenant of grace to Adam gives us but a bare outline of God's plan of redemption. There is not revealed in this covenant all that we might like to know. It is rather general and indefinite. We might wish we knew just what kind of redeemer Adam and Eve expected. We might wish that we were told clearly the precise conditions that Adam and Eve had to fulfill before God regarded them as his friends once more. These details are not revealed. But of one thing we may be certain; God reveals elsewhere in his Word that "no man cometh unto the Father but by me [Christ]"; therefore, Adam and Eve must have trusted in the promised Deliverer for salvation, for otherwise they never could have become friends of God, reconciled to him.

From Abraham to Moses

The covenant of grace in the Old Testament comes to its clearest and fullest expression in God's covenant with Abraham (see [Gen 12:1-3](#); 17:1-14). This covenant may be summarized in the words of [Genesis 17:7](#), "I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." In this covenant God is more specific as to the blessings that he will give. In this covenant, too, faith suddenly becomes more prominent as the condition which man must meet if he is to receive the promised blessings.

The blessings that God promised Abraham in this covenant were both temporal and spiritual, earthly and heavenly, external and internal. Abraham's temporal or earthly blessings consisted in a "seed," a "land," and in the promise that he would be the father of "a great nation." These promises were partly fulfilled in the giving of Isaac as the son of Abraham's old age, in bringing Abraham to the land of Canaan, and in making Abraham the father of the mighty Hebrew nation. It would be a serious error, however, to maintain that these temporal blessings of Abraham stand in contrast to the spiritual blessings of salvation in Christ. Bound up in these very earthly blessings were heavenly blessings. While "in the land of promise, as a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles," Abraham looked beyond this earthly land "for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God," even the heavenly and eternal Jerusalem (see [Heb 11:9-10](#)). What is more, the true Seed of Abraham through which all the families of the earth would be blessed was not the Hebrew nation but Christ. Paul, writing to the Galatians, said, "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." The blessings that God promised would come through the seed of Abraham were not essentially material blessings but the blessings of eternal salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Not only were there heavenly and spiritual blessings bound up in the earthly and external blessings given to Abraham; at the very heart and center of God's covenant with Abraham was the promise of reconciliation and salvation. The most important element of God's Covenant with Abraham was the promise to "be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." This is the blessing without which all other blessings would be empty and worthless. God was at enmity with man because of man's rebellious unbelief and disobedience. God in his justice had placed all mankind under his holy curse. He had cut man off from himself. But now he will become reconciled to man and deal with him as a friend. "I will be thy God and thou shalt be my people" is the echo that reverberates through the Old Testament. He will restore man into his favor and fellowship once more. He will save men through his Son, "that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ" ([Gal 3:14](#)). To that appointed Savior all the believers of the Old Testament looked for salvation and by that promised One they were saved. In the words of our Lord, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it and was glad" ([John 8:56](#)).

There was one essential condition—and only one—that must be met if Abraham were to receive the promised temporal and spiritual blessings. Abraham must believe; he must have faith. This one condition Abraham met and by it laid hold upon the blessings of salvation in Christ. "Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness" ([Gal 3:8](#); [Rom 4:3](#)). Abraham believed that God would keep his promises, and thus he was regarded as righteous in God's sight.

God gave an external sign to Abraham to keep Israel in remembrance of this covenant and to confirm all he had said. Under the Old Testament administration of the covenant of grace all the male members of the covenant were to receive "the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of faith" ([Rom 4:11](#)). Later, the sign of baptism as a seal of the new covenant of grace was to supplant the sign of circumcision (see [Col 2:11-12](#)).

This glorious covenant of grace that God made with Abraham was never revoked. It was never supplanted by another covenant. God was to add to this covenant but never to subtract from it. God was to unfold the meaning of this covenant more fully but never to change it essentially.

From Moses to Christ

As the history of God's people progressed, God added to the covenant of grace the law. This law was revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai and occupies a prominent place throughout the entire Old Testament (see [Ex 19:16](#) through Leviticus). It should be made very clear that God did not do away with the covenant of grace when he gave the law. The law is not a substitute for grace. God did not intend that thenceforth man was to be saved by keeping the law. "By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified" ([Gal 2:16](#)). The law was added simply as a means of administering the covenant of grace more effectively. "The law was added because of transgressions" ([Gal 3:19](#)). "By the law is the knowledge of sin" ([Rom 3:30](#)). These words of the apostle Paul make clear what the purpose of the law was. The purpose of the law was to increase Israel's sense of sin and thereby bring them to see their need of a Savior.

The laws by which the covenant of grace was administered from the time of Moses to the coming of Christ were of three different types. They were the ceremonial law, the civil law, and the moral law.

The ceremonial law, as set forth in the book of Leviticus, was composed of numerous symbols and types. A symbol is a material representation of some spiritual truth. A type is a symbol intended to foreshadow something that is to come in the future. The tabernacle was a perfect symbol and type of the work of Christ as the Mediator between God and man. The heart of the tabernacle was the Holy of Holies. Once a year on the Day of Atonement, the high priest entered the Holy of Holies and sprinkled the blood of a goat upon the mercy seat to make atonement for the sins of the people of Israel. The high priest placed his hands on the head of another goat and confessed the sins of the people of Israel. The goat was then driven forth into the wilderness (symbolic of the taking away of their sins; cf. [Lev 16](#); [23:26-32](#); [Num 29:7-11](#)). The epistle to the Hebrews makes it very plain that this ceremony on the Day of Atonement foreshadowed the entrance of Jesus, the great high priest, once for all "into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us" ([Heb 9:24](#); cf. [9:1ff.](#)). Through Christ's sacrifice on the cross we come into the Holy of Holies of God's presence. These Old Testament ceremonies were done away with in Christ. They were but shadows of things to come. When Christ came, there was no longer any need for these types and shadows. He was the fulfillment of them. This is the main burden of the epistle to the Hebrews.

The civil law was that part of God's law that was to govern Israel as a nation and society. The civil law was the application of the moral law to the social and civil life of Israel. Israel was a theocracy (ruled by God). The laws of sanitation, for instance, were revealed by God and made binding on the people of Israel. These civil laws tended to emphasize the national, temporal, and external aspects of the covenant. God stood in covenant relation to Israel as a Jewish nation. Temporal or material blessings such as the promise of the land of Canaan are quite prominent. There is also an emphasis on external washings and observances. When Israel as a nation rejected their Messiah and the kingdom of God was offered to the Gentiles, Israel as a theocratic nation governed by the civil laws of Sinai was no more. Therefore, these civil laws are no longer binding, "further than the general equity thereof may require" (as stated by the Westminster divines; see also [1 Cor 9:7-10](#)).

There was one aspect of the law revealed at Mount Sinai that was never to pass away. That was the moral law summarized in the ten commandments. In the moral law is revealed man's duty to God and to his neighbor. The moral law has the same functions today that it did in the time of Moses. It is still God's means to convict men of their sin and to show them their need of a Savior. It still remains as a standard of conduct after we have accepted Christ as our Savior.

Christ delivers men from the curse of the law ([Gal 3:13](#)) but not from the moral obligation to keep the law as an expression of faith in and love for Christ. When a lawyer came to Jesus seeking eternal life, Jesus confronted him with a summary of the Ten Commandments to convict him of his sin (see [Luke 10:25-28](#)). Paul in writing to the Christians at Rome set forth the commandments of the Old Testament as the guide and standard for Christian conduct (see Rom. 3:31, 6:15, 13:9).

THE COVENANT OF GRACE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Need for a New Covenant of Grace

Through the prophet Jeremiah, God revealed to the children of Israel that he would make a new covenant with them. "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah" (Jer. 31:31-34).

The important question is, why was it necessary for God to make a new covenant of grace with man. The reason God entered into a new covenant was because of the limitations of the old covenant. The old covenant was not sufficient to accomplish God's full purpose of grace as given to Adam and more particularly to Abraham. In the words of the writer to the Hebrews the old covenant was not "faultless"; it had definite limitations ([Heb 8:6-7](#)).

What were the limitations of the Old Covenant? One limitation was that the Old Testament sacrifices had no power in themselves to save. They were but types or shadows pointing forward to "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." Had Christ, the Mediator of the New Covenant, never come, all of the Old Testament sacrifices would have availed nothing. "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins" ([Heb 10:4](#)). Another limitation was that the knowledge of the work of Christ as revealed in the Old Testament sacrifices was not as full or as clear as the knowledge revealed in the New Testament. At best it was only a shadowy profile compared with the full detailed portrait of Christ in the New Testament. Still another limitation was the fact that the Holy Spirit was not given in fullness during the Old Testament dispensation. The Holy Spirit existed among the Old Testament saints, for David prayed "take not thy Holy Spirit from me." However, "the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified"; there remained a fuller outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the people of God. Finally, there was the limitation that under the old covenant of grace, the offer of salvation was confined almost entirely to the nation of Israel. True, to be sure, there were some proselytes (Gentile converts) who shared the blessings of the covenant by becoming Jews and adopting the Jewish faith. But for the most part, the Gentiles were not included in the covenant of grace as administered under the Old Testament. God had a better covenant of grace for man.

Christ, the Mediator of the New Covenant of Grace

Christ, according to the New Testament, became the mediator of this new and better covenant of grace. "He is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises" ([Heb 8:6](#)). Christ made a similar claim when he declared at his institution of the Lord's Supper, "This is my blood of the new testament [covenant] which is shed for many for the remission of sins" ([Matt 26:28](#)). Christ as our prophet is the great revealer of this new covenant of grace. Christ as our great high priest merits for us all the blessings promised in the new covenant through his perfect obedience and through his "once offering up of himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice and to reconcile us to God."

Under the new covenant of grace man was to receive a greater degree of blessing than that which the Old Testament saints received. These blessings were not to be of an entirely different kind from those experienced under the Old Testament dispensation. They were essentially the same kind of blessings but showered forth in greater abundance and in a higher degree (see [Heb 8:6-11](#)).

Under the new covenant of grace man received a clearer and fuller revelation of grace than that received by the Old Testament saints. No longer need men look through types and symbols which were but shadows of the Christ who was to come. Henceforth they could see Christ face to face. As John testified, "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" ([John 1:14](#)). No longer would men need to offer the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin. They could now behold "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." Through the Word we can now behold the finished work of Christ on Calvary's cross. We have Christ's full explanation of the meaning of that crucifixion. We have the detailed development of Christ's revelation of Himself in the writings of the apostles. Our knowledge of salvation is complete in Christ. This knowledge is administered to us through the Word.

In the New Testament period of grace the knowledge of the Lord was no longer to be confined to the nation Israel. The knowledge of the Lord was to come to all nations. The Gentiles as well as the Jews were to receive the Gospel of Christ. Christ commanded his disciples: "Go ye therefore and teach all nations." Not only were all nations to hear the gospel, but all classes of people within those nations were to have the gospel preached to them. "All shall know me from the least to the greatest" ([Heb 8:11](#)). The humble, despised Samaritan woman and the rich young ruler alike were to learn of Christ.

The Holy Spirit, the Executor of the New Covenant of Grace

How were men "dead in trespasses and sins" to lay hold upon Christ and his salvation? According to the Scriptures, this is the task of the Holy Spirit. He applies God's grace to men's hearts by giving them the faith to lay hold upon Christ. By his works of regeneration and sanctification he executes or accomplishes salvation in the hearts of Christ's own.

In the New Testament period of grace God poured forth the Holy Spirit in greater abundance and power than in Old Testament times. Christ had revealed to his disciples that "the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified." He had instructed his disciples to wait in Jerusalem "for the promise of the Father ... ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence ... ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you" ([Acts 1:4](#), 5, 8). On the day of Pentecost these promises were fulfilled and the Holy Spirit was poured forth in great abundance and power upon the church of Christ.

Because the Christians of the New Testament dispensation possessed in greater degree the Holy Spirit, they experienced richer and fuller blessings in Christ than did the Old Testament believers. Abraham and Moses received rich blessings indeed from the hand of their God! God promised to Abraham, "I will be to thee a God." This is the heart of all the rich blessings of God's covenant. The children of Israel were regarded as sons ([Deut 32:6](#)). But they did not receive as rich an inheritance as do we. Their blessings were more external, temporal, and earthly. Many of their blessings centered in an earthly land and in external symbols—though not exclusively so. Our blessings are more internal, spiritual, and heavenly. In the Old Testament period the law was more external—written upon tables of stone. In us is fulfilled the promise, "I will put my laws into their mind and write them in their hearts." With deeper inward

constraint were we to seek to do all his holy will. With greater power the Holy Spirit was to accomplish his sanctifying work in our hearts. By that same Holy Spirit we are brought into a more vital fellowship with our Redeemer and Lord. We are made to "sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." By faith we walk in the presence of our Savior. The fruits of the Spirit are made to abound within our souls, even "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance."

To the saints of the old and the new covenant of grace who by true faith have laid hold upon the gracious promise of salvation in Christ there remains an even greater glory. Not until the redeemed of God are brought into that new heaven and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness shall we taste of the full riches of his grace. Then will we realize with perfect understanding and consummate joy the blessed words of the Lord, "Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them and be their God ... I will give unto him that is athirst of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son" ([Rev 21:3](#), 6-7).

Until that glorious day the Lord give us to be earnest students and eager heralds of that one and only way of salvation revealed in the covenant of grace. When this underlying message of the Bible is once more clearly understood and aggressively proclaimed, the Gospel will go forth in a richness and power seldom experienced in our day. When this full-orbed Gospel is once more declared with conviction and power, we might well expect a mighty awakening among professing Christians and a glorious revival unto salvation in the world. To this end let us study and teach and pray that the Holy Spirit of God might enlighten our minds and enrich our hearts with a deeper knowledge and experience of the glorious Gospel of the grace of God.

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