

The One Covenant of Grace:

From Skin to Nucleus

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Covenants are a common theme throughout the whole scope of special revelation. These covenant statements display, among other things, God’s faithfulness, steadfast love, almighty power and unconditional grace for his people. However, sometimes, the abundance of covenant language in Scripture can be mishandled and derived into an unhealthy partition of the Word of God, which must of the time ends up bringing undesired results into one’s theology.¹ Thus, how someone understands the relationship or lack thereof between different covenants throughout the Bible will end up being a significant factor in their system of interpretation of Scripture itself. J.I. Packer goes even further as to say that not only Scripture but also the Gospel and the reality of God are not properly understood until viewed within a covenantal frame.²

Due to its different dispensations, this covenant language mishandle is particularly true when it comes to the specific covenant known as the *Covenant of Grace*. Hence, this work will aim to demonstrate, as Covenant Theology has taught for centuries, that the different postlapsarian covenants are indeed nothing else than administrations of the one Covenant of Grace instead of distinct individual covenants without further relationship than that of a historical one. Alternatively, what is the same, to show that the Covenant of Grace is *one in essence*, but *many in its dispensations*.

This task will be undertaken by way of analogy. When a physician attends medical school, before learning how to treat emergencies, how to diagnose specific pathologies or how do antibiotics work, indeed, before receiving babies at the delivery room, or help save lives at the E.R., three basic courses are to be attended and well learned in the first years. These are *anatomy*, *physiology*, and *genetics*. There is a reason for this. Before acquiring the ability to notice what is wrong or unhealthy about a human body and how to

¹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, New Ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1996). 291. Berkhof, speaking about *Dispensationalism*, comments: “This theory is also divisive in tendency, dismembering the organism of Scripture with disastrous results.”

² J. I. Packer, “Introduction on Covenant Theology,” Introduction to *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), [31]-[39].

solve that problem, the soon-to-be physician must fully understand these three basic sciences insofar they are meant to first, help him recognize what structures form a normal (healthy) human body. This is what anatomy does. Secondly, physiology explains to him how a healthy human body must work. Lastly, genetics teaches him the biological essence of what makes a human body human and not canine or feline.

In this same way, we will learn the *anatomy*, *physiology*, and *genetics* of the Covenant of Grace. For doing so, we will take the Covenant of Grace with all its dispensations into the *theological amphitheater* and start by observing its characteristics in their *skin*; this is the framework in which both the Covenant of Grace and its different administrations are enclosed. Then, the dissection will begin for us to perceive the *anatomy* of this covenant and its administrations, this is what are they formed by. We will then move from the amphitheater to the laboratory to explore the way on which those covenants work, or their *physiology*. Finally, before building those parts together again, we'll run *genetic* tests so we may be able to take a glance at their *DNA* and discover if indeed they are in essence one and the same, or many and different.

Skin. Understanding General Principles.

As we want to begin by observing the framework in which our subjects of study are to be understood, a twofold warning must be brought forth. In one hand, we must recognize that this framework is a linguistic one. Indeed, as Donald K. McKim expresses, “Words are the building blocks for Christian Theology.”³ Therefore, our first approach in our attempt to understand the Covenant of Grace must be a linguistic one. Nevertheless, on the other hand, the problem of defining terms is particularly tricky within theologians due to the multiple perspectives in which a particular term could be defined.⁴ Indeed, as Rhodes comments, while

³ Donald K. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 1st ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996). v.

⁴ A word can be defined from an etymological, a theological or a historical perspective (among others) depending on the aim of he who is defining any given term. This problem will be noticed by any theological dictionary author or editor somewhere at the beginning of its work. Most of the times, among those same lines, they will excuse having to do extraordinarily lengthy and exhaustive entries by stating the purpose of their definitions. Therefore, let us also state how we want to approach this first task. As it is not our purpose to make an exhaustive treatise on each word, a term will be defined by using a combination of perspectives in a concise fashion. Etymologically, when possible, by rendering the common biblical words in the original languages from which the word in English is derived. Theologically, as in observance of a definition that portrays how the term is used by theologians today. And finally, historically, this is by rendering a definition given by any historical theologian or any historical figure's work on the field of Covenant Theology.

attempting to define the word covenant, “the problem with giving definitions is that you can usually give four or five different answers that would all be right.”⁵ Both of these statements are true as we come to the study of our specific covenant. Hence, let us begin by defining the terms *covenant*, *grace*, *dispensation*, *covenant people*, *covenant mediator*, *stipulation*, *blessing*, and *curse*. At the end of this section, the concept of *Biblical Progressive Development* as a recurring theme in Scripture will also be discussed as is the author’s convictions that an acquaintance with this concept is critical for the theme in view.

Covenant: from the Hebrew word בְּרִית *berit*, meaning agreement; covenant; contract;⁶ and from the Greek διαθήκη *diatheke*, meaning testament, covenant, contract.⁷ It is understood to be a mutual agreement that displays the relationship⁸ between God and man which necessarily involves a promise from God and a retribution on man’s part.⁹ Blessings are promised if the conditions are kept, and curses if broken.¹⁰

Grace: from the Latin word *gratia*, meaning the benevolent disposition of God towards sinful humanity and therefore the divine operation by which the sinful heart and mind is regenerated.¹¹ In short, unmerited favor.¹²

Dispensation: from the Latin word *dispensatio*, meaning *arrangement*; the Latin term equivalent of *oikonomia*; a term applied primarily to the arrangement of God’s works and specifically by the Reformed to the successive dispensations of the one Covenant of Grace.¹³ This may also found in its synonym forms, economy or administration and always entails the idea of timeframe or a temporal perspective.

⁵ Jonty Rhodes, *Covenants Made Simple: Understanding God’s Unfolding Promises to His People*, North American edition. (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 2014). 18.

⁶ George M. Landes, *Building Your Biblical Hebrew Vocabulary: Learning Words by Frequency and Cognate*, vol. 41, Resources for Biblical Study (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 132.

⁷ Michael R. Jones, “Covenant,” ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

⁸ The term *relationship* is added from the definition of Covenant in, McKim, *Westminster Dictionary*. 64.

⁹ Definition cited from William Gouge. See, Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012). 220.

¹⁰ Rhodes, *Covenants Made Simple*. 18.

¹¹ Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology*, Second edition. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2017). 141.

¹² McKim, *Westminster Dictionary*. 120.

¹³ Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*. 94.

Covenant People: A term to describes those groups with whom God has entered into a covenantal relationship.¹⁴

Covenant Mediator: A public person, head or representative for all those who are involved in a covenant between God and mankind.¹⁵

Stipulation: from the Latin word *stipulatio*, the legal foundation or condition of the Covenant of Grace.¹⁶ That part of a covenant, upon the performing of which one's right to the benefit promised, is founded.¹⁷

Blessing: a particular goodness received or given.¹⁸ In the context of covenant, it is that positive promise which God bestows onto man if the covenant stipulation is kept.

Curse: an oral pronouncement for harm or evil to befall on another.¹⁹ In the context of covenant, it is the negative promise or consequence with which God warns the covenant people what would happen if they fail to preserve the covenant stipulation.

All these terms are not arbitrarily baptized as *skin*. For, as it is the skin what everybody sees when approaching a human being, that skin is not the whole body. It is but the framework in which everything else is contained. As Beeke notices when going through the definition of covenants, “the consistent themes of mutuality [relationship], contract [arrangement], and blessing certainly predominate in the discussion about the natures of the covenants in general.”²⁰ Also, terms like positive [blessings] and negative [curses]

¹⁴ McKim, *Westminster Dictionary*. 64.

¹⁵ Nehemiah Coxe and John Owen, *Covenant Theology from Adam to Christ*, ed. Ronald D Miller, James M Renihan, and Francisco Orozco (Palmdale, Calif.: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2005). 39.

¹⁶ Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*. 344.

¹⁷ Thomas Boston, *A View of the Covenant of Grace from the Sacred Records: Wherein the Parties in That Covenant; Together with The Trial of a Saving Personal Inbeing in It, and The Way of Instating Sinners Therein, Unto Their Eternal Salvation* (East Sussex: Focus Christian Ministries Trust, 1990). 63.

¹⁸ McKim, *Westminster Dictionary*. 32.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 69.

²⁰ Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*. 221.

promises are discussed in its relationship to the completion or not of the conditions [stipulations] prescribed, by covenant theologians such as Witsius,²¹ and Boston.²²

Along with these terms, the concept of *Biblical Progressive Development* must be treated. The term ‘progressive’ upholds the notion of *graduality*. This means that something does not happen suddenly, but gradually. The word ‘development’ carries the sense of *growing* into maturity. It aims to communicate the impression of something that advances into completeness. Finally, the term ‘biblical’ alludes to the idea that this *progressive development* is to be found as a thematic characteristic throughout Scripture.

Several examples of this *Biblical Progressive Development* can be given but let us mention three only. 1. Creation. Even when it was *ex nihilo*, one cannot say that it was *de subito*. This was not because God didn't have the power to do so, but because it is not how He regularly works.²³ 2. Redemption. As the creation, for instance, it occurs not suddenly, but progressively, both in the way it is accomplished and in the manner in which it is bestowed upon the elect. About the first statement, we should remember that Jesus Christ did not come as a 33 (or so) years-old-adult to be directly crucified for sinners. But that he underwent incarnation, a human birth, perfect obedience in an active and a passive way; indeed, crucifixion, which also had its own progress and was not as rapid as, even perhaps the eternal Son of God would have wished in his humanity. Then, again, He was buried and did not come to life at that very time, but three days after. Also, He did not ascend immediately but stayed more days to continue teaching. And even when He ascended, and now He enjoys his time of session, He has promised to come back for his elect. About the second statement, let us fix our eyes in the *ordo salutis*, with its election, regeneration, faith and repentance, sanctification and glorification, not to be discussed exhaustively, but by noticing that, as it all not happens suddenly at once in the life of the believer, it does support the fact that *progressive development* is not new or uncommon to

²¹ Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man*, vol. Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010). 46

²² Boston commits himself by dedicating the whole of Head III of his work to lengthily explaining the twofold composition of the Covenant of Grace, namely, the conditional part, and the promissory part. See, Boston, *A View of the Covenant of Grace*. 63-147

²³ Calvin manifests this idea in his Institutes; Book I, Chapter xiv, Section ii. See, Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008). 91

Christian teaching. Finally, 3. Scripture itself may be considered, insofar it is not as if God has sent us a printed copy of the Bible one Tuesday afternoon. But it was indeed progressively revealed and canonized.²⁴

Thus, this concept is not something exclusive to covenant theology. But a recurring theme in Scripture. This will acquire a special meaning though in our understanding of Covenant Theology, and particularly in the relationship between the Covenant of Grace and its administrations. Indeed God, through covenants, has caused his light gradually to increase until the whole mystery of his grace was perfectly revealed in and by Jesus Christ.²⁵ But this point will be revisited near the end when we reach the *genetics* lab.

Anatomy. Structure. What is the Covenant of Grace and its administrations formed by?

Having observed the *skin* of our subjects meticulously, let us now begin our dissection and see which parts come out of the Covenant of Grace and its administrations or dispensations. What we are looking for is the structure of the covenants.

Covenant with Abraham, The Abrahamic Administration of the Covenant of Grace

After reading the *loci classici* for the Abrahamic Covenant,²⁶ We can note that the covenant made between God and Abraham is formed by 1. covenant people, this is, Abraham and his offspring,²⁷ we could say, Israel in its tribal state. 2. A covenant mediator, who is Abraham.²⁸ Covenant promises in the form of 3. blessings and 4. curses which are dependent to the keeping of the 5. stipulations or covenant conditions. How do these parts relate to each other and work together as a whole is a question to be answered in the *physiology lab*. For now, let us simply observe the raw flesh and bones that compose these covenants.

²⁴ Complete volumes had been written about this subject because of the reality that it is precisely this Progressive Development of the canon which has been the point of attack for many “higher” Bible critics.

²⁵ Coxe and Owen, *Covenant Theology from Adam to Christ*. 33.

²⁶ Namely, Ge. 12; 15 & 17.

²⁷ When reading this passage thoroughly, we note that Abraham is not the only one included among the covenant people. The covenant includes his wife, his household, and all his future descendants. I might perhaps even worthy to be noticed, that even those who were bought as slaves with carrying the sign of the covenant, thus being included in some way as part of these covenant people. See, Ge. 12:1, 7; 15:18; 17:7-10, 12.

²⁸ I would like here to notice Abraham’s priestly activity shown through this dispensation perhaps nowhere clearer than in the Isaac Sacrifice narrative. See, Ge. 22:1-19.

*Covenant with Moses,
The Mosaic Administration of the Covenant of Grace.*

Exodus 6:1-9 and Deuteronomy 5:1-21 may be the primary texts for this passage. In which we can also notice the presence of covenant people, which is in this case, the Hebrew people, Abraham's descendants.²⁹ Not quite a political nation yet, but still, the chosen people of God. A covenant mediator being the prophet Moses.³⁰ Covenant stipulations, with the presentation of the law,³¹ along with its proper blessings³² and curses.³³

*Covenant with David,
The Davidic Administration of the Covenant of Grace.*

As we examine the covenant made with David as written in 2 Samuel 7:1-16 and Psalm 132:11-12, we become able to bring forth also these elements that had appeared in past covenants. A covenant people, being again Israel but now established as a nation among others.³⁴ We can see David as the king covenant mediator.³⁵ Positive promises are made, for us to see the blessings³⁶ of this covenant, but also warnings of discipline³⁷ are established as the curse, or the negative promise for those who depart from the conditions stipulated.³⁸

The New Covenant also known as The Covenant of Grace

As for the New Covenant, Jesus establishes the church, indeed, many nations included, as the recipients of the full blessings of the covenant, thus, being them the covenant people.³⁹ Jesus Christ functions as the

²⁹ Ex. 6:5-9; Deu. 5:1-3.

³⁰ Ex. 6:2; Deu. 5:5.

³¹ Deu. 5:1-21.

³² Ex. 6:6-8; Deu. 28:1-14.

³³ Deu. 28:15-68.

³⁴ David understands that the covenant made with him as a representative king is extensive to all of Israel's people. This becomes clear in his prayer of gratitude that follows the covenant. See, 2 Sam. 7:23-24.

³⁵ Ps. 132:11.

³⁶ 2 Sam. 7:9-14a; Ps. 132:11b, 12b.

³⁷ 2 Sam. 7:14b.

³⁸ Ps. 132:12a.

³⁹ Matt. 26:28; 1 Co. 11:25; Heb. 9:11-14

mediator of this New Covenant.⁴⁰ The New Covenant condition is faith symbolized by the outward sign of baptism, and its blessings are much as well,⁴¹ but the covenant curses remain.⁴²

Now that it has been observed that both Covenant of Grace as a whole and its different administrations share the same body-parts or elements in their structure, these being, covenant people, covenant mediator, blessings, curses, and conditions, it is right time for answering the question about how each element relate to each other. Let us move, therefore, from the amphitheater to the physiology laboratory.

Physiology. Function. How do the Covenant of Grace and its administrations work?

In the Abrahamic administration of the covenant of grace, the mediator receives and communicates the covenants to the covenant people. This covenant people include not only the mediator, but also his household, children, and even slaves. Here we encounter one of the most prominent features of how covenants functions regarding its parties. The beginning party is always God, and the receiving party includes, always the *offspring*.⁴³

Regarding the condition in this dispensation, it is the outward sign is circumcision, which functions as the stipulation. Every male shall be circumcised.⁴⁴ Even when circumcision was truly a physical act, the mere fact of Abraham and his descendants believing and obeying God in this commandment was intended to expose the outward demonstration of a spiritual reality, namely, faith.⁴⁵

If the stipulation is kept, then blessings will follow. The blessings on this covenant are numerous in specifics, and those are indeed important, but for the purpose of this work, let us condense them as Rhodes rightly does: “God promises Abraham a people, a place, and God’s own presence as blessings.”⁴⁶ This also will be a repeated theme throughout the rest of the covenants. However, blessings are not all that is promised.

⁴⁰ Heb. 9:15.

⁴¹ Jer. 31:33-34; Heb. 8:6; 9:11-12.

⁴² 1 Co. 11:27-30; Heb. 10:29-31.

⁴³ William Hendriksen, *The Covenant of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978). 52.

⁴⁴ Ge. 17:10

⁴⁵ Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man*, vol. Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010). 252.

⁴⁶ Rhodes, *Covenants Made Simple*. 55.

The curses are, in fact, a reversal of the covenant blessing. This is well illustrated by the act of circumcision in which, if someone failed to follow the prescribed stipulation of *cutting off* the foreskin from his male genitalia, he himself would be *cut off* from the covenant people.

In the Mosaic administration of the Covenant of Grace, Moses, the mediator between God and his covenant people, including offspring,⁴⁷ which were chosen by grace alone and not because of their ethnicity,⁴⁸ brings forth the rather lengthy conditions of the covenant which can be resumed in this: the law must be obeyed by faith.⁴⁹ This covenant also offers life as a blessing,⁵⁰ and death, and departure from the land as the curse.⁵¹

When analyzing the Davidic administration of the Covenant of Grace we shall also note the same covenant dynamics exposed so far. God promises David in a covenantal way the eternal establishing of his kingdom by way of his offspring. Through whom life will come, and the land will be forever assured.

The New Covenant, which, established through Christ, the mediator, for the church, the chosen people of God, and their children⁵² promises not only redemption, this is, eternal life, but also looks forward to an eternal place with God's presence in the new heavens and the new earth.

Whereas analyzing the anatomy of the covenants reveal to us that they all share the same basic structure, to study their physiology teaches us that they all have the same fundamental relations within their elements and that they function in the same way. A covenant is received by a mediator to share with his people and his people's offspring, in which if the stipulations kept, the promise of life is given, and when not, death and misery follow.

Thus, before closing covenant bodies, let us run the *genetic* tests.

⁴⁷ Deu. 28:19b.

⁴⁸ Deu. 7:6-8.

⁴⁹ Rhodes argues for this position against the Republication Perspective. See, Rhodes, *Covenants Made Simple*. 73-74.

Also, Calvin comments in the Book 2, Chapter vii, Section 4, of his *Institutes*, while explaining the purpose of the law even when it is clear that no one has the ability of fully obeying it, is that, "...by faith, embrace the goodness thus offered in the gospel, the promises, with all their annexed conditions, are fully accomplished." See, Calvin, *Institutes*. 221.

⁵⁰ Lev. 18:5.

⁵¹ Deu. 28:17-18.

⁵² Is. 44:3; Jer. 32:39; Ac. 2:39.

Genetics. Essence. What is at the core of the Covenant of Grace and its administrations?

The genetic information is kept at the *nucleus* of the cell. In there the most basic essence of any biological composite, DNA, can be found. This molecule will tell us if any given cell belongs to the human species, or perhaps the canine family, or whatever other species it pertains to. While the covenants' PCR tests⁵³ are running, let us talk about the essence of covenants.

Regarding covenants' DNA or their essence, this would be what is known as the covenant formula, which is: "I will be your God, and you will be my people."⁵⁴ Now, this would not tell enough as to say if one covenant can be differentiated from another in its species. It would be as if we find two different samples with the label "*feline*" written on them. The word *feline* only refers to the biological *family* to which the individual creatures from which those samples were taken belong. Those two samples may be from the same lion, or perhaps from two different lions, or maybe even one is a lion's sample, and the other is a cat's. We would never know because that information would not suffice for us to determine which feline species we are talking about. Finding the covenant formula in any given passage would only tell us that a covenant exists. It would only indicate that we have discovered some *theological organism* which belongs to the *covenant family*. But it will not reveal the species' identity of any specific covenant. Therefore, there is another characteristic required for us to build the essence of a particular *covenant species*. This we will name, the overarching covenant context.

This second concept will tell us, for example, if the covenant is mediated or unmediated; if the condition for being in good standing with God is faith which is from God and given by grace alone, or by good works, which can be acted by any individual in his own behalf. This overarching covenant context will function for us to reveal the specific species of our subjects of study.

⁵³ PCR is a laboratory method widely used in genomics to prove the existence of any specific gene or DNA molecule.

⁵⁴ Ikechukwu Michael Oluikpe and Kim Papaioannou, "Israel as the People of the Covenant and Dispensationalism: A Biblical Evaluation," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 28, no. 2 (2017): 63.

In the end, it is this concept which will demonstrate if we are speaking about different covenants, *in essence*, or one and the same covenant. Hence, let us analyze the subjects.

In the Abrahamic,⁵⁵ and the Mosaic⁵⁶ Covenants, the covenant formula can explicitly be found. The promise is, in essence, one and the same. I will be your God, and You will be my people. Then in the Davidic Covenant, the concept remains, for, in fact, this covenant comes as a shadow completion of the covenant of Abraham, in which kings were promised,⁵⁷ and the Mosaic as well, which stipulated how kings should act and behave.⁵⁸ Also, these three covenant dispensations are linked to the New Covenant from which we also find the explicit covenant formula.⁵⁹ In Ezekiel chapters 34-37, while speaking about the yet-to-come New Covenant, we can notice echoes of the covenants that had come before. The inheritance of a land⁶⁰ and the witnessing to all the nations⁶¹ associates the New Covenant with the Abrahamic Covenant. The exodus-like theme about gathering his people out of the wicked nations for bringing them to their own land, the sacramental cleanliness, and the covenant formula again appear to bond the Mosaic Covenant with the New.⁶² Also a connection with the Davidic Covenant in which an eternal kingdom was promised through David's offspring may be found by way of a promise of a Davidic king which will rule over God's people.⁶³ Furthermore, we can attest the fulfillment of all those covenant promises in Jesus Christ, which whom Matthew does well in trace his origins all back to Abraham, of course, passing through King David.⁶⁴

It is not only this covenant connections in the way of covenant promises fulfilled in Jesus' New Covenant which bear witness of the unity of all these postlapsarian covenants, but also the fact that this same covenant formula is presented in the same overarching covenant context: This promises are to be bestowed

⁵⁵ Ge. 17:7-8.

⁵⁶ Ex. 6:7; Lev. 26:12.

⁵⁷ Ge. 17:6, 16.

⁵⁸ Deu. 17:14-20

⁵⁹ Jer. 30:22; Ezek. 36:28.

⁶⁰ Ezek. 34:13.

⁶¹ Ezek. 37:21-22.

⁶² Ezek. 36:24-28.

⁶³ Ezek. 34:23-24; 37:24.

⁶⁴ Mat. 1:1-17.

by grace alone, through faith alone, mediated, not unmediated. Placing all these covenants under the specific category of a Covenant of Grace. For grace is indeed the condition through which faith is obtained. A condition which is *extra nos*, outside of us. Thus, leaving no room for boasting and all glory to God.

This is the reason why it was so important to notice that circumcision, obedience to the law, and David's gratitude prayer after the covenant was made, as earthly as they all may seem, were intended to be an outward display of the inward reality of faith which has been received by grace from God. This, in the New Covenant, is replaced by the sacrament of baptism. Also, the reality of a mediator, in the form of an Abrahamic Priest, a Mosaic Prophet, and a Davidic King, was intended all to point forward to the perfect Prophet, Priest, and King that is displayed in our federal head, our public representative, our final mediator, Jesus Christ.

In this way, as the author of Hebrew says, we are before a better covenant, in that it more fully displays God's glory. But also, one which is more inclusive. One which has developed from one tribe as representing the people of God, in which the sign was given only to males, then to males among one people in the Mosaic dispensation, to males among one nation in the Davidic dispensation, and now to both male and female as the baptism is to be applied in the New Covenant to all who belong to the covenant community, indeed, to everyone who is the people of God.

Results are ready, and they all say the same:

*Genetic compatibility of 100% in all cases for Foedus gratiae.*⁶⁵

Conclusion.

Hence, having the same DNA, being, the same covenant formula under the same overarching covenant context, which is grace through faith, we are compelled to conclude that all these covenants are one in essence. But, how can this be? Here is where our concept of Biblical Progressive Development is useful.

⁶⁵ In taxonomy, which is the branch of biological sciences that operates to name specific species, names are given in Latin first by indicating the *family* (or genus) and then the specific species. Thus, *Foedus* corresponds to the word covenant, which corresponds to the upper taxonomical rank, and *gratiae* corresponds to the word grace, which determines the specific species. This *Foedus gratiae* was also the standard way theologians used to refer to the Covenant of Grace.

When we speak about the different *dispensations* of the one Covenant of Grace, the only thing we are saying is that we are going to limit the one and only Covenant of Grace from a temporal perspective in the history of redemption. Now, this does not mean that we ought to change its identity. When we speak about ourselves referencing to our childhood or our youth, it does not follow that we change the most basic idea of who we are primarily depending on the life-stage about which we are talking. Thus, when we speak about the Mosaic dispensation or the Mosaic covenant, all we are saying is that we are going to concentrate in the time period in which the Covenant of Grace function from Moses to David. But we are still talking about the same Covenant of Grace when we speak about the Abrahamic or the Davidic dispensations.

This unity is not only a personal conviction but a broadly accepted theme upon covenant theologians and historic Reformed tradition. Beeke and Jones comment that "Though the covenant of grace in one in substance, the Reformed divided the covenant of grace into several administrations to reflect the pattern of the biblical narrative, which shows the gradual unfolding of God's redemptive purposes."⁶⁶ Or as O. Palmer Robertson says, "Instead of "wiping clean the slate" and beginning anew, each successive covenant with Abraham's descendants advanced the original purposes of God to a higher level of realization."⁶⁷ Witsius also declares that, according to its substance (or essence), the Covenant of Grace is not only one, but that "it could not possibly be otherwise", insofar he links the unity of the Covenant of Grace to the only way of salvation found in the Gospel.⁶⁸

Indeed the unity or the *oneness* of this Covenant of Grace brings not only stability and continuity to the history of redemption, but its correct comprehension helps us understand that the people of God in all ages, Old and New Testament included, had always been saved by grace through faith in Christ, to whom every other covenant mediator somehow typified. It also helps us avoid the error which separates Israel and the Church as two completely different entities, for whom God has two different purposes. As Bass explains,

⁶⁶ Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*. 259.

⁶⁷ O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1980), 29.

⁶⁸ Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants*, vol. Vol. 1, 291.

it is grace that unifies Israel and the Church, it is the cross that amalgamates the Jew and the Gentile into one group standing before God in need of grace.⁶⁹

With all these in mind, we can merge with our brethren in the past, the whole Israel of God, and declare as the Confession does, that there are not, therefore, two Covenants of Grace, differing in substance, but one and the same under various dispensations.⁷⁰

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