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A HISTORICAL, BIBLICAL, AND THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION  
OF COVENANTS: UNCONDITIONALITY AND CONDITIONALITY  
IN RELATION TO JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION

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by  
Carol Man Fen Chen  
December 2019

**APPROVAL SHEET**

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To my parents,  
with love and gratitude.

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## PREFACE

It is my pleasure and privilege to write on covenant theology, a topic of my interest, for my dissertation. I am indebted to those who first introduced me to the tradition of Reformed theology. They have played an indispensable role in opening my mind and heart to appreciate theology in general and Reformed theology in particular. I give thanks to Dr. Samuel Ling for introducing me to covenant theology, invaluable Puritan literature, and J. I. Packer's writings. I also give thanks to Dr. Stephen Tong because of his form of "reason on fire" teaching and preaching, I have learned the richness of Christian faith that does not deny the function of human reason. I give further thanks to Dr. Stephen Chan for his style of rhetorical teaching that has stimulated and shaped my mind for critical thinking.

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Above all, I am thankful for my Lord Jesus Christ for my unmerited salvation in Him and all the opportunities I have had to learn and seek to live in a way that pleases him.

Carol Man Fen Chen

Louisville, Kentucky

December 2019

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

One significant Reformation legacy is the doctrine of justification by sovereign grace alone through faith alone on the ground of Christ's righteousness alone.<sup>1</sup> Though there are theological differences and emphases between Martin Luther and John Calvin,<sup>2</sup> both agreed on the centrality of this doctrine, which they maintained as a forensic act of God's free grace by which sinners are declared righteous on the basis of the alien righteousness of Christ.<sup>3</sup>

Alister McGrath specifies the main characteristics of the doctrine in this way:

The leading characteristics of the doctrine of justification associated with the Reformation are readily ascertained and may be stated thus: (1) justification is the forensic declaration that the Christian is righteous, rather than the process by which he is made righteous, involving a change in man's status, rather than his nature; (2) a deliberate and systematic distinction is made between justification (the act by which God declares the sinner to be righteous ) and sanctification or regeneration (the internal process of renewal by the Holy Spirit); (3) justifying righteousness, or the formal cause of justification, is the alien righteousness of Christ, external to man

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<sup>1</sup>Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 1:180-87.

<sup>2</sup>For basic agreements on the doctrine of justification and nuances on the relationship between justification and renewal between Calvin and the early Lutherans, see Peter A. Lillback, "Calvin's Development of the Doctrine of Forensic Justification: Calvin and the Early Lutherans on the Relationship of Justification and Renewal," in *Justified in Christ: God's Plan for Us in Justification*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2007), 51-80; Karla Wübbenhorst, "Calvin's Doctrine of Justification: Variations on a Lutheran Theme," in *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 99-118.

<sup>3</sup>See Corey D. Maas, "Justification by Faith Alone," in *Reformation Theology: A Systematic Summary*, ed. Matthew Barrett (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 511-47; Carl R. Trueman and Eunjin Kim, "The Reformers and Their Reformations," in Barrett, *Reformation Theology*, 138.

and imputed to him, not a righteousness inherent to man, located within him, or in any way belonging to his person.<sup>4</sup>

The Reformation doctrine of justification was in contrast to the medieval and Roman Catholic view which maintained justification as a *process* of moral transformation. In this process, God makes one righteous through his initiating grace at baptism (infused grace through sacraments) and by subsequent human cooperation with that grace, thereby fusing justification and sanctification.

While the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone became Protestant orthodoxy, it has been repeatedly challenged in different contexts throughout church history even until today. It may even be said that this doctrine still occupies a center stage in theological debates from a variety of fronts.<sup>5</sup> Though each challenge is motivated for a different reason, each explicitly or implicitly denies the imputation of Christ's righteousness as the sole ground or formal cause of justification. Thus, Bruce McCormack rightly says that what is at stake in current debates over justification is "nothing less than the Reformation itself."<sup>6</sup> He claims, "The heart of the Reformation understanding of justification lay the notion of a positive imputation of Christ's righteousness. That was the truly distinctive element in the Reformation understanding, and given the centrality of the doctrine for defining Protestantism, its abandonment can

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<sup>4</sup>Alister E. McGrath, "Forerunners of the Reformation? A Critical Examination of the Evidence for Precursors of the Reformation Doctrines of Justification," *Harvard Theological Review* 75, no. 2 (1982): 233.

<sup>5</sup>The contemporary challenges on the Reformation doctrine of justification are identified from at least three major fronts: ecumenical movement, the so-called New Perspective on Paul, and the relationship between faith and obedience.

<sup>6</sup>Bruce L. McCormack, "What's at Stake in Current Debates over Justification? The Crisis of Protestantism in the West," in *Justification: What's at Stake in the Current Debates*, ed. Mark Husbans and Daniel J. Treier (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 82.

only mean the transformation of the Reformation into something qualitatively different.”<sup>7</sup> Similar to the claim of others, what is at stake “is the heart of the gospel—the forensic declaration of God by which sinners are justified through the imputation of an alien righteousness found only in Jesus Christ.”<sup>8</sup>

The Reformed understanding of justification insisted on Christ’s imputed righteousness because the Reformers affirmed the free grace of God that is grounded in the work of Christ alone. Therefore, the Reformation doctrine affirmed the declared righteousness of God and as such, it remains distinct from other views that insist justification also includes moral renewal (sanctification) or works of obedience. Nevertheless, although the Reformers insisted on the exclusion of human works in obtaining God’s favor, they did not deny that good works were necessary for our salvation. Therefore, in addition to insisting on the doctrine of imputation of Christ’s righteousness as crucial for the doctrine of justification, a further challenge since the Reformation is the articulation of the proper relationship between justification and sanctification. In other words, rather than defending forensic justification, losing the transformative reality of salvation, and falling into antinomianism, holding the two truths—God’s free grace and good works or merits—together is crucial.

In light of some of the current objections and challenges, especially that which has arisen from the New Perspective on Paul, a large number of evangelical publications have been written in recent years to defend the Reformed view of justification and its

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<sup>7</sup>McCormack, “What’s at Stake in Current Debates over Justification?,” 83.

<sup>8</sup>James K. Beilby, Paul Rhodes Eddy, and Steven E. Enderlein, eds., *Justification: Five Views* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 52.

central importance for the doctrine of salvation.<sup>9</sup> Coinciding with these challenges is a growing interest in the subjects of union with Christ and covenant or federal theology.<sup>10</sup> In fact, some scholars have proposed union with Christ and a proper understanding of federalism as the solution to the current debates in defending the doctrine of imputation in justification while keeping sanctification as necessary for salvation. For this reason, union with Christ,<sup>11</sup> which was a prominent topic for Calvin,<sup>12</sup> has become an important

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<sup>9</sup>For some responses to the New Perspective on Paul, see D. A. Carson, ed., *Right with God: Justification in the Bible and the World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992); D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid, eds., *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, vol. 1, *The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001); D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid, eds., *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, vol. 2, *The Paradoxes of Paul* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004); Ryan Glomsrud and Michael S. Horton, eds., *Justified: Modern Reformation Essays on the Doctrine of Justification* (Escondido, CA: Modern Reformation, 2010); Mark A. Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Justification* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001); Mark A. Seifrid, *Justification by Faith: The Origin and Development of a Central Pauline Theme* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 1992); Guy Prentiss Waters, *Justification and The New Perspectives on Paul: A Review and Response* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2004); Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier, eds., *Justification: What's at Stake in the Current Debates* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004); Cornelis P. Venema, *Getting the Gospel Right: Assessing the Reformation and New Perspectives on Paul* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2006); John Piper, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007); K. Scott Oliphint, ed., *Justified in Christ: God's Plan for us in Justification* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2007); R. Scott Clark, ed., *Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry*; Michael Allen, *Justification and the Gospel: Understanding the Contexts and Controversies* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013); Michael F. Bird, *The Saving Righteousness of God: Studies on Paul, Justification and the New Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007); Charles E. Hill, "N. T. Wright on Justification," *IJIM Magazine Online* 3, no. 22 (2001).

<sup>10</sup>I take "federal theology" as the synonym for "covenant theology," but I will use "covenant theology" most of the time for convenience. For R. Michael Allen's rationale for using "federal theology" instead, see R. Michael Allen, *Reformed Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2010), 34-35.

<sup>11</sup>For recent and representative works on the doctrine of justification by faith in relation with union with Christ, see Richard B. Gaffin, *Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul's Soteriology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1987); Gaffin, *By Faith, Not By Sight: Paul and the Order of Salvation*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013); Gaffin, "Union with Christ: Some Biblical and Theological Reflections," in *Always Reforming: Explorations in Systematic Theology*, ed. A. T. B. McGowan (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 271-88; Gaffin, "Justification and Union with Christ," in *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes: Essays and Analysis*, ed. David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2008), 248-69; Gaffin, "Justification and Eschatology," in Oliphint, *Justified in Christ*, 1-21; Lane G. Tipton, "Union with Christ and Justification," in Oliphint, *Justified in Christ*, 23-49; Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007).

<sup>12</sup>E.g., Mark A. Garcia, *Life in Christ: Union with Christ and Twofold Grace in Calvin's Theology* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2008); Garcia, "Christ and the Spirit: The Meaning and Promise of a Reformed Idea," in *Resurrection and Eschatology: Theology in Service of the Church*, ed. Land G. Tipton and Jeffrey C. Waddington (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2008), 424-42; Garcia, "Imputation and the Christology of Union with Christ: Calvin, Osiander, and the Contemporary Quest for a Reformed Model," *Westminster Theological Journal* 68 (2006): 219-51; J. Todd Billings, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift: The Activity of Believers in Union with Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); also, although J. V. Fesko (*Beyond Calvin: Union with Christ and Justification in Early Modern Reformed Theology* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012]) affirms union with Christ was prominent in Calvin,

topic within soteriological discussion.<sup>13</sup> Union with Christ is described as the context for the application of redemption in which believers participate in all the saving benefits applied to the believer in Christ. These benefits include justification *and* sanctification as distinct yet inseparable precisely because believers are united to Christ. Rather than rendering imputation as unnecessary in union with Christ, imputation is entailed by a believer's union with Christ. Therefore, the judicial *and* transformative aspects of salvation are united by a believer's union with Christ, maintaining that sanctification is no less integral than justification.<sup>14</sup>

While affirming the significance of union with Christ for the doctrine of justification, some scholars also recognize that another missing element in the current debate on justification is “an extended engagement with classic covenant theology.”<sup>15</sup> Michael Horton and others argue that covenant theology is the necessary context for justification, and specifically for the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness. In other words, to facilitate a proper understanding of the doctrine of imputation, it must

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he presents a survey of union with Christ and justification in the Reformation, Early Orthodox, and High Orthodox periods of the Reformed tradition to show that the formulation on union with Christ and justification was not a unique doctrine to Calvin.

<sup>13</sup>J. V. Fesko (“Union with Christ,” in Barrett, *Reformation Theology*, 423-50) points out that the historical understanding of union with Christ is described as threefold: (1) the Son's incarnation as a human being (or the natural union as some called it); (2) the mystical union in which Christ indwells believers; and (3) the sinners' glorification (some called it the spiritual union). However, contemporary discussions about union with Christ focus largely on soteriology.

<sup>14</sup>This is in line with Andrew T. B. McGowan's conclusion of two essential points of the Reformed doctrine of justification: “First, the doctrine of justification by faith cannot be properly and fully understood unless it is seen in the context of union with Christ; second, any understanding of justification that fails to maintain a forensic notion of the imputation of the righteousness of Christ cannot claim to be Reformed.” Andrew T. B. McGowan, “Justification and the *ordo salutis*,” in *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 163.

<sup>15</sup>Michael S. Horton, “Introduction: Getting Perspective,” in *Justified: Modern Reformation Essays on the Doctrine of Justification* (Escondido, CA: Modern Reformation, 2010), 6; Horton, “Which Covenant Theology?,” in *Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry: Essays by the Faculty of Westminster Seminary California*, ed. R. Scott Clark (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2007), 197-227 (esp. 226-27).

be framed within the historical matrix of the prelapsarian covenant of works and the postlapsarian covenant of grace, with each covenant respectively being represented by two federal heads: the first Adam and the second Adam, our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>16</sup> In Adam's sin, his guilt is imputed to all human beings in the covenant of works, but due to Christ's covenantal work, his righteousness is imputed to the elect in the covenant of grace.

However, although union with Christ *and* covenant theology are constructive solutions and necessary theological truths undergirding the doctrine of justification, scholars believe something is still missing. Much of what people think is missing is the relationship between justification and sanctification, or more specifically, the relationship between the judicial and transformative aspects of our salvation. McCormack supports this view, as he notes:

Where the doctrine of justification in particular is concerned, my own conviction is that the Reformers had it basically right with their emphasis upon a positive imputation of Christ's righteousness. But, unfortunately, they were not in a position to explore the *theological ontology* that was implied in their understanding of justification. And this left their articulation of the doctrine vulnerable to criticism. In an age like our own, in which men and women are crying for real change, for real transformation of the fundamental conditions of life, this can all too easily appear to be a decisive weakness. And it can also make the Protestant tradition appear weak

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<sup>16</sup>E.g., a collective project by the faculty of Westminster Seminary California, *Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry*; Fesko affirms the Reformed doctrine of justification and specifically explicates justification in relation to the three-covenant structure of Reformed covenant theology: covenant of redemption (*pactum salutis*), covenant of works, and covenant of grace (forthcoming). His works in theological retrieval of the historical Reformed covenant theology include J. V. Fesko, *Justification: Understanding the Classic Reformed Doctrine* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2008); Fesko, *The Covenant of Redemption: Origins, Development, and Reception* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015); Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2016); Fesko, *Death in Adam, Life in Christ: The Doctrine of Imputation* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2016); Michael S. Horton (in his four-volume dogmatic project *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002]; Horton, *Lord and Servant: A Covenant Christology* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005]; Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*; Horton, *People and Place: A Covenant Ecclesiology* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008]) reaffirms covenant theology by demonstrating how it can be used in a systematic way in contemporary dogmatic theology.

and emaciated in comparison with those traditions, like the Catholic and the Orthodox, which have always given explicit attention to matters ontological.<sup>17</sup>

McCormack claims the Reformers were right in insisting justification as the forensic declaration of God by which sinners are justified through the imputation of Christ's righteousness. However, he argues that they neglected or did not develop the "ontology" of union with Christ in the covenant of grace as providing the rationale for connecting justification and sanctification. McCormack may be on target with his observation, yet I will argue that what is actually missing is the discussion of the nature of the biblical covenants. Specifically, I will argue that the missing element is the historical understanding of the unilateral and bilateral nature of the covenant of grace, which supplies the rationale for holding justification and sanctification together as distinct yet inseparable.

The contemporary proposed solutions correctly set justification within union with Christ and rightly view union with Christ in a covenantal context. Moreover, scholars claim the ontology of union with Christ competently holds the forensic and transformative dimensions together. However, these theological discussions neglect the connection between these two dimensions and the mutuality of the covenant of grace.<sup>18</sup> That is, there is insufficient reflection on the *nature* of the covenant of grace in relation to faith and works and to the two major covenantal benefits—justification and sanctification. Nevertheless, with McCormack's protest, a post-Reformation development

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<sup>17</sup>McCormack, "What's at Stake in Current Debates over Justification?," 84 (emphasis original).

<sup>18</sup>Therefore, rather than opposing the contemporary theological works in this respect, I will affirm and build upon them to offer my theological construction.

of covenant theology in understanding the biblical covenants as both monopoleuric (i.e., unilateral) and dipoleuric (i.e., bilateral) contains the answer.<sup>19</sup>

As noted above, many evangelical scholars affirm good works as a necessary condition (consequent, not antecedent, to faith) for salvation.<sup>20</sup> Others claim that faith and works are not mutually exclusive and thus are an impetus in maintaining the distinction and inseparability of justification and sanctification in union with Christ. However, a debated issue in the current theological discussion still remains: Does evangelical obedience provide a ground for justification? If not, how is it a required condition for those who are in Christ? Moreover, what is the nature of the connection between the two saving benefits of justification and sanctification as received in new covenant union with Christ? Is the believer's covenantal relationship with Christ unconditional or conditional? More specifically, how is "justification and sanctification in union with Christ" related to the covenant of grace, particularly to its unconditionality and conditionality?

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<sup>19</sup>In protesting, McCormack ("What's at Stake in Current Debates over Justification?," 106-17) proposes a solution as well in arguing that the ontology of the covenant of grace is able to maintain the forensicism and transformational. He claims "that justification and regeneration [sanctification] are conceptually distinguishable 'moments' in a single act of God. . . . In justification, God pronounces a judicial verdict upon the sinner. . . . God's word is always effective . . . So a judicial act for God is never merely judicial; it is itself transformative" (107). "Imputation, understood as a judicial act with transformative consequences" (110). Moreover, he takes union with Christ as the union of the wills, the believer's will to God's will: "The being of the Christ 'in Christ' is to be constructed along the lines of the conformity of my life to his life of obedience, which brings about his likeness in me. Union with Christ, biblically considered, refers to a union of wills, the uniting of my will with his by virtue of which my life is conformed to his" (110). This union with Christ is an ethical relation—the ethical is the ontological of this union. Making connection further to covenant theology, he argues the "essence" of the human is the individual human's relation to the divine. Specifically that essence is that God from eternity has chosen to be in a covenant with each believer. True humanity is "to live in such a way that we conform to the purpose of God in electing, creating and redeeming us" (114). Though human "essence" and human "existence" can only perfectly conjoin in final consummation, "but in those moments in which our lived existence is brought into conformity to Christ's—our existence conforms to 'essence.'" In other words, humans' true identity is to live out who they are in Christ, a covenantal relationship established by a divine act. Certainly, this is a biblical understanding that the design of God's covenant (or salvation) is for the purpose of having his people conform to His will, into Christlikeness. Nevertheless, I will take a different route in reflecting the nature of the covenants—unilateral and bilateral.

<sup>20</sup>E.g., Mark Jones, foreword to *By Faith, Not by Sight: Paul and the Order of Salvation*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013), by Richard B. Gaffin, xi.

## Thesis

With this background discussion in place, this dissertation will seek to answer the question of why obedience and good works are necessary conditions in salvation, specifically tied to our covenantal bond in Christ. Moreover, it will offer an understanding of how the two saving benefits—justification and sanctification in union with Christ—are related to the new covenant in Christ. This dissertation will argue that justification and sanctification are two inseparable covenant benefits believers receive due to union with Christ and that they are undergirded by a monopleuric (unilateral) and dipleuric (bilateral) covenant by which God unconditionally justifies sinners without human merit while simultaneously demanding obedience as required in the covenant.<sup>21</sup> In other words, the *nature* of the covenant that God, the Creator, relates to his human subject is both unconditional and conditional, and it is my contention that the unconditional and conditional (or unilateral and bilateral) covenant supplies the ground for the two basic covenantal benefits of justification and sanctification respectively.

God’s demand of perfect obedience from believers is perfectly fulfilled by Christ. Only the divine, incarnate Son, Jesus, can fulfill the perfect righteousness of God. Nevertheless, this fulfillment of Christ does not make the new covenant absolute in the sense that human obedience is obviated. The new covenant is conditional not in justification, which is only grounded in the active and passive obedience of Christ, but in sanctification, for which human obedience is still required. The mutuality or conditionality of sanctification in the new covenant in Christ does not nullify the

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<sup>21</sup>I will use the terms “unconditional and conditional,” “unilateral and bilateral,” “monopleuric and dipleuric,” and “absolute and conditional” interchangeably.

believer's status before God (justification) and thus nullify his salvation. Rather, sanctification is grounded upon the believer's irrevocable relationship of being united in Christ.

Historically, in Reformed covenant theology, a unilateral and bilateral nature constitutes a unique element of the biblical divine-human covenants. The duality of unconditionality and conditionality of the covenant of grace holds the forensic (justification) and transformative (sanctification) aspects of salvation together without threatening its monergistic nature. In other words, in the Reformed tradition, covenantal synergism is not in conflict with its doctrine of monergism in salvation. In fact, the development of covenant theology is consistent with a Reformed view of predestination. The doctrine of predestination does not “exclude human action from any sphere of meaning or ultimacy”<sup>22</sup> as in the teaching of the doctrine of the covenant. The strength of covenant theology is that it maintains both divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

Therefore, in light of some contemporary challenges to the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone and the tendency to confound justification and sanctification, understanding these two doctrines within the covenantal context—unconditional and conditional—is essential and furnishes the biblical underpinning for them. In fact, by affirming the historical understanding of covenants as both unilateral and bilateral and tying this understanding with the current proposal on union with Christ and covenant theology that locates justification and sanctification within a federal structure, the logical implication is that the dual aspects of the covenant, unilateral and bilateral, correspond to justification and sanctification respectively. This implication

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<sup>22</sup>Allen, *Reformed Theology*, 45.

yields constructive theological formulations that will defend the Reformation teaching against some of its current challenges.

### **Background**

The focus of this dissertation embraces two related subjects in academic and popular writing: the doctrines of justification and sanctification in a believer's union with Christ and covenant theology. On the one hand, interest in the doctrine of justification by faith has endured because it is distinctive to the Protestant Reformation. However, on the other hand, because justification has always been a target of criticism ever since the Reformation, it requires further discussion and reflection. In light of some of these challenges, justification has received much attention among evangelicals in current theological debates concerning it. The doctrine of union with Christ was helpfully expounded by John Calvin in which he properly comprised both justification and sanctification. Reformed theology has always appreciated this doctrine, but at times it has overlooked its centrality. There have been recent efforts to retrieve this doctrine by scholars such as John Murray in his *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*.<sup>23</sup>

As noted above, the recently renewed interest in this doctrine can be seen as proposing a solution to the current debate on the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith alone. Reformed theology gives similar appreciation to the doctrine of covenants because the development of covenant theology has always been central to Reformed theology.<sup>24</sup> Although covenant theology has not consistently been central to theological

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<sup>23</sup>John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1955).

<sup>24</sup>B. B. Warfield says covenant theology is “architectonic” of Reformed theology. See B. B. Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly and Its Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1931), 56. Similarly,

discussions, it has always been in the background; and yet, covenant theology has often been criticized. Particularly, Barth rejected the prelapsarian covenant of works. Moreover, recent efforts to retrieve classic covenant theology as the defense for the doctrine of imputation of Christ's righteousness concur with the renewed interest in union with Christ.

On the subject of covenant theology, for several decades, many scholars have argued that there are two competing streams of covenantal thought within the Reformed tradition. Rhineland Reformers such as Bullinger developed one stream, emphasizing mutuality and conditionality, and Genevan Reformers such as Calvin developed the other, emphasizing God's unconditional grace (e.g., predestination). The former has been identified as *bilateral* and the latter as *unilateral*. In this understanding, Calvin's covenantal thought is in tension with the post-Reformation's development of a mutual conditional (or bilateral) covenant of grace. However, some scholars have argued for a unity and continuity (substantial agreement) in covenantal thought between Calvin and the post-Reformation's development, not only in the formulation of the prelapsarian covenant of works but also in the harmonization of a unilateral and bilateral covenant of grace.<sup>25</sup> While there are various strands of covenant theology, consensus is that it has

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some scholars claim Reformed theology is covenant theology. E.g., Richard Pratt, "Reformed Theology Is Covenant Theology," Ligonier Ministries, June 1, 2010, <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/reformed-theology-covenant-theology/?platform=hootsuite>.

<sup>25</sup>E.g., Lyle D. Bierma, "Federal Theology in the Sixteenth Century: Two Traditions?" *Westminster Theological Journal* 45 (1983): 304-21; Peter A. Lillback, "The Continuing Conundrum: Calvin and the Conditionality of the Covenant," *Westminster Theological Journal* 29 (1994): 42-74; Lillback, *The Binding of God: Calvin's Role in the Development of Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001); Lillback, "Calvin's Interpretation of the History of Salvation: The Continuity and Discontinuity of the Covenant," in Hall and Lillback, *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes*, 168-204; Andrew A. Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought: A Study in the Reformed Tradition to the Westminster Assembly* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012); R. Scott Clark, "Christ and Covenant: Federal Theology in Orthodoxy," in *A Companion to Reformed Orthodoxy*, ed. Herman Selderhuis (Boston: Brill, 2013), 403-28.

always included unilateral and bilateral elements, the duality of unconditionality and conditionality, in the covenant. Furthermore, federalists' covenantal thoughts harmonized the two antimonies—divine sovereignty and human responsibility—without threatening their monergistic soteriology.

Most covenant theologians agree that there was a covenant of works with Adam in the garden<sup>26</sup> and a covenant of grace with the elect in Christ, which encompasses the entirety of redemptive-history after the fall.<sup>27</sup> While many theologians recognize God's unified purpose in redemptive-history through the biblical covenants, diverse viewpoints reside in the details. This dissertation will demonstrate that a specific feature of all biblical covenants is that they are both unconditional and conditional in nature.

### **Personal Interest**

I first encountered covenant theology through an institute for laypersons. At the institute, a Chinese pastor who graduated from Westminster Theological Seminary Philadelphia taught a course titled Introduction to Reformed Theology. Experiencing the course brought about both an intellectual and spiritual breakthrough to my Christian life.

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<sup>26</sup>For the limitations on the term “covenant of works,” some prefer “covenant of creation” or “covenant of life.” Contrary to this general consensus, Reformed scholars, such as John Murray, although they align with the WCF, reject the term “covenant of works,” preferring the term “Adamic administration” because they take the historical understanding of the covenant of works as a legal arraignment rather than God's gracious disposition. See John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. 4, *Studies in Theology Review* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1982), 217-22. For Murray's rationale on rejection of the covenant of works, see Cornelis P. Venema, “Recent Criticisms of the ‘Covenant of Works’ in the Westminster Confession of Faith,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 9, no. 2 (1993), 184; David B. McWilliams, “The Covenant Theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith and Recent Criticism,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 53 (1991): 118.

<sup>27</sup>Historically, in the Reformed tradition, “the Covenant of Grace” is designated as one covenant from the Old Testament, starting from God's declaration of his plan of redemption in Gen 3:15 to the New Testament. Covenants God made with different covenant heads are simply different stages/dispensations of this covenant. See Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, 4:223-34.

This particular class, together with others, introduced me to the doctrine of predestination. Coming from an Arminian background, this doctrine opened my mind and heart to the biblical teaching of God’s grace alone in salvation. The doctrine of predestination that I was taught was not “fatalism,” which absolves humanity of responsibility. God’s sovereign grace in salvation (divine election) does not conflict with the doctrine of covenants, in which God requires obedience. Moreover, I was specifically introduced to Puritan covenant theology, which joins the poles of predestination and piety in the covenant of grace. I conceived that the Puritans developed their spirituality or experiential theology in their commitment to covenantal understanding.<sup>28</sup>

Henceforth, covenant theology not only captured my mind and heart in the process of faith-seeking understanding, or understanding that theology and spirituality are inseparable,<sup>29</sup> but it also continues to shape my mind to understand the Scriptures and gospel in covenantal form.

### **Background in Arriving at this Dissertation**

Coming to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for my Th.M., in Stephen Wellum’s class, Issues in Biblical and Systematic Theology, I was given an opportunity to encounter covenant theology from a different aspect.<sup>30</sup> Though Wellum

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<sup>28</sup>A reason for which covenant theology intrigued me was that, specifically, I was introduced primarily to Puritans’ understanding of covenant in relation to covenant keeping as believers (sanctification) rather than in relation to ecclesiology or sacraments.

<sup>29</sup>Specifically, J. I. Packer’s works advocate a need to bring systematic theology and spirituality together. He says, “I want to arrange a marriage. I want our systematic theology to be practised as an element in our spirituality, and I want our spirituality to be viewed as an implicate and expression of our systematic theology.” J. I. Packer and Alister E McGrath, “An Introduction to Systematic Spirituality,” in *The J.I. Packer Collection* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 206.

<sup>30</sup>The class exposed me for the first time to a distinctive Baptist understanding of the biblical covenants, namely Progressive Covenantalism, or identified by some as a version of New Covenant theology.

identifies his view of the covenants as Progressive Covenantalism (which is different from classic covenant theology at points), he concurs with Reformed Covenant theology in affirming the redemptive-historical character and the covenantal unity of Scripture (i.e., covenants as the architectonic structure of the Bible).<sup>31</sup> He also affirms that all biblical covenants that God has made with man consist of both unconditional and conditional elements.<sup>32</sup> Holding to more of a classical covenant theology while understanding that God's covenants with humans are always unconditional and conditional, I wrote a paper to demonstrate this specific feature of the biblical covenants and argued that within the covenant relationship there is a human responsibility of evangelical obedience.

Additional seminars allowed me the opportunity to familiarize myself with historical data on covenant theology and to apply covenant thinking to contemporary theology. In the spring of 2015, in David Puckett's seminar, *Theology of Karl Barth*, I wrote a paper titled "Barth's Objections to Cocceius's Covenant Theology," by which I gained greater understanding of Barth's version of covenant theology (the so-called monocovenantalism) and his understanding and rejection of the post-Reformation's development of covenant theology. Later, in the fall of 2015 in Bruce Ware's seminar, *God and the World*, I wrote a paper against Open Theism by proposing covenantal relationship as a providential means of maintaining God's sovereignty and human responsibility. Covenant is God's means of working out his eternal decree in the world.

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<sup>31</sup>Covenantal unity of Scripture was the common confession among the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), the Savoy Declaration (1658), and the London Baptist Confession of 1689.

<sup>32</sup>Peter John Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 609.

Finally, in the spring of 2017, as I was sitting in on Shawn Wright's John Calvin and Puritanism seminars and reading the relevant literature, I began arriving at my thesis. Having understood the biblical covenants as a divine-human relationship unilaterally initiated by God and bilaterally bound by the human covenant partners, consisting of both unconditional and conditional elements,<sup>33</sup> I connected this understanding to John Calvin's *duplex-gratia* (double-grace) of justification and sanctification in *unio cum Christo* (union with Christ). Although some scholars affirm a continuity-view between Calvin and the post-Reformation's development of covenant theology, Calvin's doctrines of justification and sanctification as distinct and yet inseparable in union with Christ convinced me that he discussed justification and sanctification in a covenantal context.<sup>34</sup> Specifically, many scholars today understand union with Christ as a covenantal bond in a covenantal context.<sup>35</sup>

## **Purpose**

The doctrine of covenant is a consistently relevant topic, and in conjunction with the doctrines of justification and sanctification, has pertinent theological and pastoral implications for Christians today. Though Presbyterians and Baptists understand the covenants (i.e., ecclesiology and sacraments) differently, when both embrace their historic Calvinistic and covenantal roots, they find common ground. Nevertheless, Earl M. Blackburn points out a common caricature: "When untaught and unstudied minds

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<sup>33</sup>E.g., John von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), esp. 53-85.

<sup>34</sup>Lillback in *The Binding of God* argues Calvin played a substantial role in the development of covenant theology. Specifically, Lillback claims Calvin's understanding of the doctrines of justification and sanctification was in a covenantal context and Calvin maintained a mutual and conditional covenant.

<sup>35</sup>E.g., Gaffin, *By Faith, Not by Sight*, 40-45.

hear the words Covenant Theology, the first expression that often comes out of the mouth is ‘You mean infant baptism, right?’”<sup>36</sup> In fact, what always lingers in my mind from my first exposure to covenant theology is “God covenants with us; we ought also to covenant with Him to be a covenant keeper.” I am convicted that covenant is a central theme in Scripture, a covenant document given by God to govern his people. God has always dealt with his people through covenant relationships. J. I. Packer agrees, boldly proclaiming that the gospel of God, the Word of God, and the reality of God cannot be properly understood until they are viewed within a covenantal frame.<sup>37</sup>

In connection with this central covenantal understanding, Packer states:

All this yields a basic definition of Christian spirituality as recognition of and response to the reality and power of God through Jesus Christ in the covenant of grace. This covenantal basis for communion with God was central to the Puritan understanding of the Christian life, and was spelt out clearly in the Westminster Confession, but less has been heard of it recently, and renewed exploration of it is currently needed. God’s covenant with each Christian is a covenant of permanent friendship, like that between husband and wife (cf. Ezek. 16:8; Mal. 2:14), and it defines the relationship in a definite way that has to be clearly grasped if the relationship itself is to grow and deepen.<sup>38</sup>

Therefore, this dissertation, partly as an attempt to respond to Packer’s call,<sup>39</sup> seeks to make a contribution toward theological and spiritual renewal through retrieving the unilateral and bilateral understanding of the covenants in Reformed covenant theology

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<sup>36</sup>Earl M. Blackburn, *Covenant Theology: A Baptist Distinctive* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2013), 7.

<sup>37</sup>I certainly agree with J. I. Packer in saying, “First, *the gospel of God is not properly understood till it is viewed within a covenantal frame*”; “Second, *the Word of God is not properly understood till it is viewed within a covenantal frame*”; “Third, *the reality of God is not properly understood till it is viewed within a covenantal frame*.” J. I. Packer, *Celebrating the Saving Work of God, Collected Shorter Writings of J. I. Packer*, vol. 1 (Carlisle, England: Paternoster, 1998), 12, 13, 15.

<sup>38</sup>Packer and McGrath, *The J. I. Packer Collection*, 238.

<sup>39</sup>I disclaim this study proposed here as a “comprehensive” retrieval on the subject of covenant theology.

from a biblical-historical-theological approach.<sup>40</sup>

## Methodology

The relationship between biblical theology and systematic theology is a disputable matter in some theological circles.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, this dissertation presupposes all theological disciplines are interrelated as an organic whole. Specifically, it affirms biblical theology does not conflict with systematic theology. Rather, as Geerhardus Vos has maintained, biblical theology serves systematic theology.<sup>42</sup> Within the Reformed tradition, Vos emphasized the redemptive-historical or covenant-historical character of God's revelation in his theology. Building on Vos, scholars continued to describe redemptive history as God's progressive unfolding of his plans of salvation in covenants that culminated with fulfillment in Christ.<sup>43</sup>

Therefore, systematic theology is not in a vacuum, apart from God's revelation in history. On the contrary, biblical theology serves as the basis for systematic theology. Because justification and sanctification are part of the *ordo salutis* (order of salvation), they should not be abstracted from their place within the covenant of grace, the *historia*

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<sup>40</sup>Theological retrieval is the manifesto of Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain in *Reformed Catholicity: The Promise of Retrieval for Theology and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015).

<sup>41</sup>See Richard C. Gamble, "The Relationship between Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology," in *Always Reforming: Explorations in Systematic Theology*, ed. A. T. B. McGowan (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 211-39. For a brief discussion on the positive relationship between biblical and systematic theology, see Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 139-41; Richard B. Gaffin, "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," *Westminster Theological Journal* 38 (Spring 1976): 281-99; Gaffin, *By Faith, Not by Sight*, 17-19; Gaffin, "Biblical Theology and the Westminster Standards," *Westminster Theological Journal* 65 (2003): 165-79; Gaffin, "Redemption and Resurrection: An Exercise in Biblical-Systematic Theology," *Themelios* 27, no. 2 (2002):16-31.

<sup>42</sup>Geerhardus Vos, "The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline," in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1980), 3-24, esp. 23-24.

<sup>43</sup>E.g., Gaffin, *By Faith, Not by Sight*, 6-10.

*salutis* (redemptive history), for *ordo salutis* is inherently eschatological—bound up with the eschatological Adam.<sup>44</sup> Thus, rather than merely focus the doctrines of justification and sanctification upon *ordo salutis*, this dissertation attempts to place them in union with Christ (*ordo salutis*) within the *historia salutis* (redemptive history) to facilitate an understanding of the doctrines in relation to the covenant of grace (or the new covenant in Christ).<sup>45</sup>

Nevertheless, rather than setting the context of *historia salutis* (redemptive history through covenants) for the *ordo salutis*, this dissertation starts with contemporary theological discussions to establish my argument's progression. I will attempt to expose a missing element in these discussions by briefly introducing how historical and contemporary challenges deviate similarly from the traditional confession. Current responses to the challenges will be explored. Subsequently, the argument progresses by identifying this missing element through returning to historical theology and showing that the element can be supported through biblical theology as well. Finally, I will draw from my theological constructions in substantiating that the missing or neglected element is constructive to current theological discussions.

Therefore, this dissertation's structure will generally follow a historical, biblical, and theological pattern, as the title indicates. As mentioned above, although the overall presentation does not initially discuss *historia salutis* (biblical theology) to set the

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<sup>44</sup>Fesko, *Justification*, 92. I am indebted to Fesko's explication of the relationship between *ordo salutis* (order of salvation) and *historia salutis* (redemptive history) and the significance of understanding the doctrine of justification in relation to union with Christ or covenant (or covenant theology).

<sup>45</sup>As Fesko emphasizes in *Justification*, rather than merely explicate the doctrines, there is a need to place them within redemptive history to obtain a better understanding (*Justification*, 2-3, 32, 88-92).

context for *ordo salutis* (systematic theology), this structural principle is still in view. One will see this study's theological discussion of *ordo salutis* in light of *historia salutis*. Specifically, in the biblical section, the study will delineate the structure of redemptive history (*historia salutis*) in relation to God's revelation of covenants from the first to the last Adam, with a view of unconditionality and conditionality in each covenant. Demonstrating and affirming that God's covenants with humans are absolute and conditional will establish the legitimacy of justification as God's unconditional grace and sanctification as his conditional demands in the covenant. Therefore, combined biblical and historical evidence will demonstrate that the biblical covenants are always unilateral and bilateral in nature. This infrastructure then prepares the way for theological construction.

### **Chapter Summaries**

Chapter 1 introduces the subject of the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith alone and explore common characteristics of the historical and contemporary challenges to the doctrine. This introduction will establish my contention that renewed interest in union with Christ and covenant theology as the solutions to the challenges on the doctrine justification also calls for the neglected historical element, or the unilateral and bilateral nature of the covenant of grace—the thesis of my dissertation. The chapter will also describe the dissertation's theological methodology, share a brief background on the subjects of justification and union with Christ and covenant theology, explain personal interest on the subjects, and convey chapter summaries.

Chapter 2 briefly presents historical and contemporary objections and challenges to the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith alone to demonstrate that a

common characteristic of these theological threats is conflating justification and sanctification, which incites defense for the orthodox teaching. The chapter continues by explicating contemporary responses, such as union with Christ and covenant theology, as proposed panaceas to these challenges. I show that although these proposals constructively defend the Reformation doctrine of justification in the framework of union with Christ and Reformed covenant theology, they are missing a historic understanding of a *mutual, bilateral* (or unconditional and conditional) covenant of grace as the foundation connecting justification and sanctification as distinct yet inseparable.

Chapter 3 describes Calvin's doctrine of union with Christ in relation to his doctrines of justification and sanctification in a covenantal context to demonstrate that Calvin was a forerunner of covenant theology of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and maintained covenant of grace as both unconditional and conditional. While he strongly insisted that the sole basis of justification is the works of Christ (unconditional), Calvin does not exonerate the need for good works by Christians for salvation (conditional). This chapter demonstrates that the contemporary soteriological discussion of union with Christ can be found in Calvin who, while emphasizing an integral relationship between justification and union with Christ, maintains justification and sanctification as *duplex-gratia* (double-grace), distinct but inseparable and in union with Christ. Because Calvin's discussion of this *duplex-gratia* is in a covenantal context with God's covenantal relationship with his chosen people in view, this chapter demonstrates that his covenantal thought is consistent with claims of later covenant theologians and that his double-grace corresponds to a mutual bilateral covenant of grace.

Chapter 4 explicates how, together, the doctrines of justification and sanctification found a central place in the post-Reformation's exposition of the divine-human covenants. The chapter briefly introduces the unity and continuity of covenantal thought from Calvin to post-Reformation to assert that justification by faith alone and the later development of mutual covenant concepts in Puritan theology were not in conflict. Thus, this chapter demonstrates that the later Reformed orthodox covenant theologians, specifically the Puritans, developed the covenant of grace as both absolute and conditional and affirmed the harmony of divine grace (absolute) and human participation (contingency) in the divine-human relationship. In their covenantal understanding, the double-grace of God from union with Christ so that the one who is justified by grace alone is also called to grow in grace.

Chapters 5 and 6 survey the major temporal biblical covenants in the Scripture, from the Garden of Eden with Adam (the prelapsarian covenant of works) to the new covenant accomplished by Christ (the postlapsarian covenant of grace), demonstrating that God's covenants with humans are unilateral and bilateral (or absolute and conditional) in nature and that divine benevolence and human responsibility run through the covenants God made with his people in history. Therefore, evangelical obedience to the covenants is required. Notably, there is a difference between prelapsarian and postlapsarian covenants in obedience, for in the former, humans can obtain eternal life as reward by perfect obedience, but in the latter, they cannot merit life by obedience. Nevertheless, obedience is required in the postlapsarian covenants, which is sustained in both the Old and New Testaments. The emphasis of good works in the Old Testament is not incompatible with salvation by grace through faith in the New Testament because

saving faith always yields the fruit of obedience to God. Human obedience continues as a required condition even in the new covenant accomplished by Christ. Therefore, from presenting the historical-biblical evidence that God's covenants with humans are always absolute and conditional, this discussion will proceed toward constructive theological synthesis.

Chapter 7 summarizes previous discussions and offers my theological synthesis. It describes and explicates how the unconditional and conditional covenant of grace relates to the doctrines of justification and sanctification, explaining why this understanding is a constructive theological formulation to current theological debates.

Chapter 8 concludes with a brief overview of the study and final remarks on the significance and relevance of my argument in both academic and popular discussions. In particular, I comment on the significance of my theological construction in offering solutions to the current theological concern that conflates the doctrines of justification and sanctification and the pastoral, practical concern that the Reformation doctrine of justification leads to moral laxity.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE STATE OF CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGICAL DISCUSSION

The significance and centrality of the doctrine of justification can be seen in Martin Luther's (1483-1546) understanding of this doctrine as the article by which the church stands or falls. Luther articulated justification as an act of God's free grace by which he declares sinners righteous through the alien righteousness of Christ so they can stand before the judgment and wrath of God.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, he stressed justification by faith rather than the believer's need to perform good works: "He understood good works as the inevitable result of justification, but his major concern was always the righteousness of faith, not deeds. This was expressed most clearly in his understanding of the radical opposition of law and gospel."<sup>2</sup> Luther's doctrine of justification was basically forensicism,<sup>3</sup> although his younger colleague, Philip Melancthon, worked out the

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<sup>1</sup>Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 2:10-20. Cf. Martin Luther, "Lectures on Titus," in *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1968), 29:41. Also, for "Two Kinds of Righteousness," in *Luther's Works*, ed. Harold J. Grimm (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 31:297-99; "Lectures on Romans," in *Luther's Works*, ed. Hilton C. Oswald (St. Louis: Concordia, 1972), 25:188.

<sup>2</sup>Carl R. Trueman, *Luther's Legacy: Salvation and English Reformers, 1525-1556* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 79; for Luther's understanding of good works, also see, 63-67. Cf. Karla Wübbenhorst, "Calvin's Doctrine of Justification: Variations on a Lutheran Theme," in *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 112-14.

<sup>3</sup>Carl Trueman opposes those who view Luther's understanding of justification as theosis in arguing that Luther's development of justification from 1515 to 1520 was consistently forensic and, thus, was not distinct from his younger colleague, Philip Melancthon. "Simul peccator et justus: Martin Luther and Justification," in *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 73-97.

language of imputed righteousness and made a distinction between justification and sanctification in the Lutheran tradition.<sup>4</sup>

Like Luther, John Calvin (1509-64) affirmed and taught the centrality of justification by grace through faith alone.<sup>5</sup> He vigorously argued for the imputed righteousness of Christ as the material cause of justification and faith as the instrumental cause.<sup>6</sup> Faith does not save believers without the works of Christ; indeed, the believer's faith is futile without the work of Christ on his or her behalf. Insisting on justification as a judicial or forensic declaration of God, Calvin also emphasized that justified sinners are simultaneously sanctified by the grace of Christ's Spirit by being united to Christ. Although justification and sanctification are distinct and are found in union with Christ, Calvin maintained their inseparability. In particular, while justification is inseparable from the renewal of a believer's life in sanctification, the free gift of justification is solely grounded on the imputed righteousness of Christ.

Therefore, both Calvin and Luther opposed the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification as a process of gradually becoming holy, which is sanctification. For Roman Catholics, faith cannot justify until it is formed by love, and God only declares righteousness to those who are made righteous. According to this view, believers "can be righteous before God not by an alien righteousness imputed—credited—but only by an

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<sup>4</sup>E.g., Wübbenhorst, "Calvin's Doctrine of Justification," 101.

<sup>5</sup>See Wübbenhorst, "Calvin's Doctrine of Justification," 99-118.

<sup>6</sup>Bruce L. McCormack claims that the Protestant or "evangelical" view of justification came to its final form by John Calvin; see *Justitia aliena: Karl Barth in Conversation with the Evangelical Doctrine of Imputed Righteousness*, in *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), esp. 169-72.

inherent righteousness imparted and improved by obedience.”<sup>7</sup> God’s initiating grace produces internal righteousness (inherent or intrinsic) that grounds justification. That is to say, God justifies only those who possess inherent righteousness and who have already been made righteous through grace. Therefore, while the Reformers taught justification on the basis of declared or imputed righteousness, granted from the righteousness of Christ that is alien to the believer, Roman Catholics taught an inner transformation of the sinner on the basis of imparted or infused righteousness which is initiated through the sacrament of baptism. This imparted or infused divine grace enables the faithful to cooperate with the graciousness of the Holy Spirit to enact the good works of faith.<sup>8</sup> Through this process of cooperation between God and human beings, grace and charity are increased, thereby earning the faithful the merits of salvation and thus attain eternal life.<sup>9</sup> This view was formed through the Counter Reformation at the Council of Trent, insisting on justification as involving not only forgiveness of sins but also sanctification and the renewal of the interior man.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the Roman Catholic Church conflated

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<sup>7</sup>Michael Horton, *Calvin on the Christian Life: Glorifying and Enjoying God Forever*, ed. Stephen J. Nichols and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 96.

<sup>8</sup>See Cornelis P. Venema, “Justification: The Ecumenical, Biblical and Theological Dimensions of Current Debates,” in *Always Reforming: Explorations in Systematic Theology*, ed. Andrew T. B. McGowan (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 293-99; W. Robert Godfrey, “Faith Formed by Love or Faith Alone?,” in *Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry: Essays by the Faculty of Westminster Seminary California*, ed. R. Scott Clark (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2007), 267-84; J.V. Fesko, *Justification: Understanding the Classic Reformed Doctrine* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2008), 20-21, 349-87.

<sup>9</sup>Gregg R. Allison, *Roman Catholic Theology and Practice: An Evangelical Assessment* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 416-20.

<sup>10</sup>*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1989, quoting Canons of Decrees of Council of Trent, 6<sup>th</sup> session (January 13, 1547), Decree on Justification 7, in Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper, 1877-1905), 2:94. Also see James K. Beilby, Paul Rhodes Eddy, and Steven E. Enderlein, eds., *Justification: Five Views* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 29-31. For Protestant and Roman Catholic theologians’ agreement and disagreement over Article 5 of Regensburg Colloquy, see Anthony N. S. Lane, “A Tale of Two Imperial Cities: Justification at Regensburg (1541) and Trent (1546-1547),” in *Justification in Perspective*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 119-45.

justification and sanctification and claimed justification by sanctification rather than what reformers insisted: justification by the righteousness of Christ alone through faith.<sup>11</sup>

### Historical Challenges

Justification by faith alone emerged as a distinctive doctrine of the Reformation yet was confronted by continuous challenges throughout church history.<sup>12</sup> Andreas Osiander (1498-1552), a Lutheran theologian and Luther's contemporary, ignited one such controversy by teaching a doctrine of justification by what he considered "essential righteousness." In the words of Calvin, Osiander used this terminology to teach that "we are substantially righteous in God by the infusion both of his essence and of his quality."<sup>13</sup> For Osiander, Christ's righteousness is essentially imparted rather than forensically imputed to believers. Therefore, from his notion of essential righteousness, Osiander denied the value and necessity of "Christ's obedience and sacrificial death" done in his human nature, the forensic concept of justification by faith alone, and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, his teaching did not only distort the biblical understanding of mystical union by breaking down the Creator-creature distinction, but it also confused the distinction between justification and sanctification.

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<sup>11</sup>See Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 511-12.

<sup>12</sup>For a brief discussion on the history of the Protestant controversies over justification, see R. Scott Clark, "How We Got Here: The Roots of the Current Controversy over Justification," in *Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry: Essays by the Faculty of Westminster Seminary California*, ed. R. Scott Clark (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2007), 12-19; for a brief discussion of justification in church history, see Fesko, *Justification*, 6-55; for a detailed survey of the history of justification, see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*; Michael Horton, *Justification*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018) .

<sup>13</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.11.5.

<sup>14</sup>Calvin wrote his long critique against this non-imputative and anti-forensic view of union with Christ of Osiander in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.11.5-12. Cf. Mark A. Garcia's interpretation of Calvin versus Osiander in *Life in Christ: Union with Christ and Twofold Grace in Calvin's Theology* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2008), 43-45, 197-252.

Subsequent to Osiander, the Reformation doctrine of justification remained controversial even after the Reformation era. During the Reformed Orthodoxy era, while Roman Catholicism continued as a major theological threat to the doctrine of justification, other threats such as Socinianism, Antinomianism, Neonomianism, and Arminianism also arose.<sup>15</sup> In the context of these threats within the English Reformed Orthodoxy, John Owen (1616-83) wrote two polemical works: *Of the Death of Christ and of Justification* (1650) and *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith through the Imputation of the Righteousness of Christ, Confirmed, and Vindicated* (1677).<sup>16</sup> Faustus Socinius (1539-1604) and his followers rejected the vicarious nature of Christ's work and "held that sinners obtain pardon and acceptance with God, through His mercy, on the ground of their own repentance and reformation."<sup>17</sup> Socinians also primarily denied the full deity of Christ. Moreover, rather than grounding justification on Christ's work, Socinians grounded it on moral transformation.

The Antinomians readily embraced the doctrine of eternal justification, which holds that the elect are actually justified from eternity before an actual faith

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<sup>15</sup>See J. I. Packer, "The Doctrine of Justification among the Puritans," in *Puritan Papers: 1968-1969*, ed. J. I. Packer (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2005), 5:147-62; Packer, "The Doctrine of Justification in Development and Decline among the Puritans," in *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 149-61. For a discussion on the threats of Popery, Arminianism, and Antinomianism at the Westminster Assembly, see Jeffrey K. Jue, "The Active Obedience of Christ and the Theology of the Westminster Standards: A Historical Investigation," in *Justified in Christ: God's Plan for Us in Justification*, ed. K. Scott Oliphant (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2007), 103-14.

<sup>16</sup>For an introduction to the second work, see Carl R. Trueman, "John Owen on Justification," in *Justified in Christ: God's Plan for us in Justification*, ed. K. Scott Oliphant (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2007), 81-98.

<sup>17</sup>Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 513. For Faustus Socinus on justification and union with Christ, see Fesko, *Beyond Calvin: Union with Christ and Justification in Early Modern Reformed Theology (1517-1700)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 227-50.

commitment.<sup>18</sup> This doctrine “tended to collapse everything either into the eternal decrees or the work of Christ, giving short shrift to the necessity for the Christian to walk in and strive for holiness.”<sup>19</sup> The propensity for Antinomianism came from its teaching on the free grace of justification at the expense of requiring Christians to pursue holiness and godly living. The Antinomians tended to teach that the law of God is no longer binding for New Testament believers. Connected to this tendency is the conviction that God sees no sin in the justified and they are freed from the obligation of the moral law. Moreover, Antinomians insisted on the “immediate actings of the Spirit.” While holding correctly that Christ achieved perfect obedience for the believer, Antinomians wrongly claimed that a believer does not perform any act on his or her own; instead, Christ does it immediately by his Spirit. Obliterating human responsibility by Christ’s responsibility, Antinomians obviously conflated justification and sanctification.<sup>20</sup>

Another interlocutor of John Owen, Richard Baxter (1615-91) was a main figure in the Neonomian controversy. In fact, Antinomianism was Baxter’s lifelong opponent because of his concern of moral anarchy. In opposition to the teaching of

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<sup>18</sup>See Robert J. McKelvey, “That Error and Pillar of Antinomianism: Eternal Justification,” in *Drawn into Controversie: Reformed Theological Diversity and Debates Within Seventeenth-Century British Puritanism*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin and Mark Jones (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 223–62. Cf. Carl R. Trueman, “Reformed Orthodoxy in Britain,” in *A Companion to Reformed Orthodoxy*, ed. Herman Selderhuis (Boston: Brill, 2013), 278-80. For studies on the context and theology of antinomianism, see Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *The Precisianist Strain: Disciplinary Religion and Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003); David R. Como, *Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in Pre-Civil-War England* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004); Mark Jones, *Antinomianism: Reformed Theology’s Unwelcome Guest?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013); Paul R. Schaefer, “An American Epilogue: Looking at Sola Gratia from Differing Angles—Cotton and Shepard and Massachusetts’s Antinomian Controversy,” in *The Spiritual Brotherhood: Cambridge Puritans and the Nature of Christian Piety* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011), 264-314.

<sup>19</sup>Alan D. Strange, “The Imputation of the Active Obedience of Christ,” in Haykin and Jones, *Drawn into Controversie*, 39.

<sup>20</sup>See Jones, *Antinomianism*, 26-30.

“justification from eternity” or “justification before faith,”<sup>21</sup> he “taught a neonomian doctrine of justification by denying the imputation of Christ’s active obedience and claiming that an obedient faith fulfills the condition for justification.”<sup>22</sup> For Baxter, the gospel is a “new law” or “new Covenant-Righteousness” of Christ that sinners obey by faith.<sup>23</sup> This faith is not simply faith in Christ because it also includes obedience to the law. Therefore, believers are declared righteous on the basis of faith and obedience. Faith is imputed as righteousness because it is an act of obedience to God. For Baxter, justification involves ongoing obedience or evangelical works as a condition for receiving Christ’s righteousness.<sup>24</sup> In his view, faith and obedience possess the causality of justification as conditions of the new covenant. In the words of Packer, “Baxter was convinced that those who held the ground and formal cause of our justification to be the imputing to us of Christ’s own righteousness were logically committed to Antinomianism, on the ‘payment-God-cannot-twice-demand’ principle.”<sup>25</sup> Baxter was also concerned that this orthodox position, similar to Antinomianism, led to the stress of

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<sup>21</sup>For historical background on the subject of eternal justification in relation to and in distinction to antinomianism, see McKelvey, “That Error and Pillar of Antinomianism,” 223-62.

<sup>22</sup>Michael Brown, *Christ and the Condition: The Covenant Theology of Samuel Petto (1624-1711)* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 105. Baxter taught his neonomian doctrine of justification in *Aphroismes of Justification* (1649), *Of Justification: Four Disputations* (1658), and *Treatise of Justifying Righteousness* (1676).

<sup>23</sup>See John V. Fesko, “Richard Baxter’s View of Law and Covenant, Justification, and Union with Christ,” in *Beyond Calvin*, 300-17, esp. 305-7.

<sup>24</sup>Baxter explains aspects of his doctrine of justification in this way: “And that the law of grace being that which we are to be judged by, we shall at the last judgment also be judged (and so justified) thus far by or according to our sincere love, obedience, or evangelical works, as the condition of the law or covenant of free grace, which justifies and glorifies freely all that are thus evangelically qualified, by and for the merits, perfect righteousness and sacrifice of Christ, which procured the covenant or free gift of universal conditional justification and adoption, therefore and without any works or conditions done by man whatsoever. Reader, forgive me this troublesome oft repeating of the state of the controversy; I meddle with no other. If this be justification by works, I am for it.” *A Treatise of Justifying Righteousness* (London, 1676), 163.

<sup>25</sup>J. I. Packer, “The Doctrine of Justification in Development and Decline among the Puritans,” in *A Quest for Godliness: the Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990),

human passivity in salvation. While “the antinomian emphasis on free grace endeavored to safeguard the *sola gratia* aspect of justification from the encroachment of legalism,” Baxter “sought to protect that same grace of justification from the perceived excesses that fostered licentiousness.”<sup>26</sup> However, his viewpoint consequently affixed obedience onto the believer’s justification. In his concern, Baxter confused Christ’s righteousness and the believer’s work in his doctrine of justification.

Also arising during the post-Reformation era, Arminianism was rejected by the Westminster divines and defeated at the Synod of Dort in 1619, and yet it continued as a theological threat to Reformed orthodoxy.<sup>27</sup> While Antinomians so “guard[ed] the free grace of God in salvation that they denied faith any involvement at all in the actual justification of sinners,”<sup>28</sup> Arminians limited the scope of justification by holding that it only includes forgiveness of sins on the basis of Christ’s obedience and that the sinner is accounted righteous not by the imputation of Christ’s righteousness but on the basis of his or her faith or obedience in life.<sup>29</sup> McKelvey explains that “the growing presence of Arminianism threatened to usurp the role of Christ with the human will as the ultimate ground of justification. Further, faith was viewed in part as a sincere act of the semi-depraved will graciously accounted as the believer’s personal and whole

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<sup>26</sup>McKelvey, “That Error and Pillar of Antinomianism,” 229.

<sup>27</sup>See John R. de Witte, “The Arminian Conflict and the Synod of Dort,” in *Puritan Papers: 1968-1969*, ed. J. I. Packer (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2005), 5:3-23; J. I. Packer, “Arminianisms,” in *Puritan Papers: 1968-1969*, ed. J. I. Packer (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2005), 5:25-41; J. V. Fesko, see his chapter discussion on “Jacob Arminius on Union with Christ, Justification, and Sanctification,” in *Beyond Calvin*, 269-85.

<sup>28</sup>McKelvey, “That Error and Pillar of Antinomianism,” 238.

<sup>29</sup>Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 513, 525.

righteousness.”<sup>30</sup> The Arminian’s form of justification is described as a process that consists of both a beginning and an end. The beginning is the cleansing of a believer’s sin by Christ’s imputed righteousness, and the end is seen only when those who are preserved in Christ are finally justified. Thus, Arminianism places sanctification, inherent righteousness, at the end of justification and maintains it is required for eternal life.<sup>31</sup>

The debated issues within the Neonomian controversy of the seventeenth century recurred in the Scottish church of the eighteenth century in the Marrow Controversy (1718-23).<sup>32</sup> This ecclesiastical controversy involved two groups. One of these identified with *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* (1645) and was known as the “Marrow men,” while the other group was composed of opponents to the book’s teachings. Though both groups affirmed the Westminster Confession of Faith’s teaching on justification by grace alone through faith, opponents of *The Marrow* emphasized the conditions of the covenant of grace, tending toward Neonomianism. In contrast, supporters of *The Marrow* stressed the doctrine of assurance of faith resting in the promises of the gospel, holding the covenant of grace as absolute. In their conflict, the Marrow men claimed *The Marrow* “represented a powerful practical exposition of the doctrine of grace,” but its opponents “saw it as a deceptive threat to the orthodoxy of the Church, a work of disguised antinomianism.”<sup>33</sup> In total, the Marrow Controversy

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<sup>30</sup>McKelvey, “That Error and Pillar of Antinomianism,” 238.

<sup>31</sup>See Jue, “The Active Obedience of Christ,” 106-9.

<sup>32</sup>See William VanDoodewaard, *The Marrow Controversy and Seceder Tradition: Atonement, Saving Faith, and the Gospel Offer in Scotland (1718-1799)* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014); David C Lachman, *The Marrow Controversy, 1718-1723: An Historical and Theological Analysis* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 1988); Jones, *Antinomianism*, 13-16. For the background and theological implication of this controversy, see Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance—Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).

<sup>33</sup>Como, *Blown by the Spirit*, 1.

involved the resurgence of the historical subjects of Antinomianism and Neonomianism (or legalism) in the understanding of the gospel.<sup>34</sup>

Clearly, theological threats emerged to challenge the Reformed orthodoxy of justification. They demonstrate that, since the Reformation, Christians have wrestled with the relationship between justification and sanctification (or between justification and obedience or good works). Besides denying the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness, another theological threat to this doctrine, as represented by the ongoing debate between the Reformers and the Roman Catholics, is the overlap of forensic and transformative categories regarding justification, thereby conflating the distinction between justification and sanctification. Fesko rightly recognizes that "the history of the doctrine of justification has moved between these poles with the orthodox position lying in the middle, between Scylla of antinomianism and the Charybdis of neonomianism."<sup>35</sup> While the reformers kept the doctrine of justification in the middle of the spectrum,<sup>36</sup> the theological threats that have risen to challenge the doctrine throughout history oscillate between the two poles, either moving toward Antinomianism, which separates justification and sanctification, or Neonomianism (legalism), which confuses justification and sanctification. Some of the contemporary objections and challenges to the doctrine of justification do not escape this polarity.

### **Contemporary Challenges**

The attack on the Reformation doctrine of justification has not ceased in the

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<sup>34</sup>See Jones, *Antinomianism*, 13.

<sup>35</sup>Fesko, *Justification*, 7, see also 6, 31, 46, 54-55.

<sup>36</sup>See Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 5.

contemporary context, and the current challenge also does not escape the oscillations between the two poles of Antinomianism and legalism as in church history. The contemporary challenges on justification are identified from three major fronts: the ecumenical movement, the so-called New Perspective on Paul, and the debate on the relationship between faith and obedience.<sup>37</sup>

The impetus for the current ecumenical discussion<sup>38</sup> is the desire to resolve the long-standing divergence between Roman Catholic and Protestant understandings of the gospel.<sup>39</sup> With this motivation, many consider that the ecumenical movement “has served largely to reverse the five-hundred-year split between the Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches on justification.”<sup>40</sup> An emerged or emerging consensus on basic truth between the two traditions indicates that even if the representatives of the Protestant church do not completely abandon the central truth that the Reformers strongly insisted, Protestant thought inevitably waters down and compromises it.<sup>41</sup> Allowing for ambiguity on central teaching signals their departure from the Reformers’ confession.

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<sup>37</sup>For a brief discussion of these three lines of attack on the Reformation doctrine of justification, see David VanDrunen, “Where We Are: Justification under Fire in the Contemporary Scene,” in *Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry: Essays by the Faculty of Westminster Seminary California*, ed. R. Scott Clark (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2007), 25-57. Similarly, on the ecumenical movement and the New Perspective on Paul, see Venema, “Justification,” 289-327.

<sup>38</sup>Such examples are the “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification,” signed by representatives of the Lutheran and Roman Catholic churches in Augsburg, Germany, on Reformation Day, 1999; *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification: Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2000); Reformanda Initiative, “Is the Reformation Over? A Statement of Evangelical Convictions.”

<sup>39</sup>For the claims and critiques of a few attempts resulting from the recent ecumenical dialogues, see Fesko, *Justification*, 356-70; for Henri A. Blocker’s historical and theological analysis of “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification,” see “The Lutheran-Catholic Declaration of Justification,” in *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 197-217; for a brief summary of dialogues on justification in contemporary ecumenical contexts and responses, see Beilby, Eddy, and Enderlein, *Justification*, 45-52.

<sup>40</sup>Beilby, Eddy, and Enderlein, *Justification*, 15.

<sup>41</sup>For an evangelical assessment and extensive summary of these ecumenical documents, see Anthony N. S. Lane, *Justification by Faith in Catholic-Protestant Dialogue: An Evangelical Assessment*

While the ecumenical movement implicitly surrendered the Reformation orthodoxy on justification, the advocates of the New Perspective on Paul explicitly rejected the Reformers' understanding of Paul's doctrine of justification.<sup>42</sup> The Protestant doctrine of justification insisted on the forensic declaration of God by which sinners are justified through the imputation of an alien righteousness found only in Jesus Christ. By denying the penal substitutionary atonement and the imputation of Christ's obedience as the sole ground of justification, and allowing good works or human obedience play a role in the future justification, the New Perspective inescapably blurs the doctrines of justification and sanctification that the Reformers took great pain to distinguish. In other words, by rejecting justification as soteriological, the New Perspective on Paul collapses justification and sanctification into its "covenantal nomism."

The current in-house evangelical debate on justification appears to have centered on scholars who have struggled to articulate the relationship between justification and sanctification or the role of faith and obedience in justification. They implicitly and explicitly question the sufficiency of the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone in emphasizing Christian obedience.<sup>43</sup> This thinking leads

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(London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2002).

<sup>42</sup>E.g., Michael Bruce Thompson, *The New Perspective on Paul* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2002); James D. G. Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2008); N. T. Wright, *Justification: God's Plan & Paul's Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016); Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier, eds., *Justification: What's at Stake in the Current Debates* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004); Bruce L. McCormack, ed., *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006); Beilby, Rhodes Eddy, and Enderlein, *Justification*; for an introduction to the history and development of the new perspective on Paul, see Kent L. Yinger, *The New Perspective on Paul: An Introduction* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011).

<sup>43</sup>For instance, Paul A. Rainbow in *The Way of Salvation: The Role of Christian Obedience in Justification* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005) argues that while the Reformers were right in emphasizing God's free grace in justifying sinners on the sole ground of imputing Christ's righteousness, they were wrong in excluding evangelical obedience as playing any role in salvation. He claims "[f]or persons to be justified in the full sense, God's present imputation of righteousness to those who are incorporate in Christ by faith must be legitimized in the end by his approbation of an actual righteousness which he brings about in them during the meantime" (xvi). He contends it with the concern of antinomianism in churches today

some scholars to give more weight to the obedient life of the Christian (sanctification) in their theology, arguing that faith rather than the righteousness of Christ is imputed to the believer as the basis for justification. For instance, Robert Gundry argues for “the nonimputation of Christ’s righteousness.”<sup>44</sup> Moreover, the controversial scholar Norman Shepherd has been identified with not only blurring the distinction between faith and obedience, which results in ambiguously teaching faith as the only instrument of justification (denying justification by faith alone), but also with denying the imputation of Christ’s active obedience as the basis for righteousness.<sup>45</sup> Whether these charges are accurate, his concern is clearly the evangelical obedience of Christians in salvation—sanctification. While Shepherd, Gundry, and others rightly support that obedience in the Christian life, or life in pursuit of sanctification, has a role to play in salvation,<sup>46</sup> they fail

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that separates justification from sanctification, resulting in undermining human efforts and the mandate for Christians to do good works (Christian behavior), as well as the need for continuous renewal in one’s Christian life. Another example is Daniel P. Fuller, who directly or indirectly states that the Reformation’s understanding of grace promotes antinomianism and its understanding of faith is not sufficient in maintaining the need for a believer’s moral transformation. He teaches that justification depends on a believer’s persevering faith (faithfulness). These understandings are shown in his two works: Daniel P. Fuller, *Gospel and Law: Contrast or Continuum: The Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1980) and Fuller, *The Unity of the Bible: Upholding God’s Plan for Humanity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991).

<sup>44</sup>Robert H. Gundry argues exegetically that an imputation of Christ’s righteousness is not a valid view in biblical teaching. See Robert H. Gundry, “The Nonimputation of Christ’s Righteousness,” in *Justification: What’s at Stake in the Current Debates*, ed. Mark Husbans and Daniel J. Treier, 17-45. He suggests that “Paul does not match the imputation of our sins to Christ with an imputation of Christ’s righteousness to us believers because he (Paul) wants to emphasize the obedient life of righteousness that we are supposed to live—and indeed will live if we are true believers—apart from the Old Testament law, under which Christ was born, and to emphasize the judgment of our works at the end” (44, emphasis original). For critical evaluations of Gundry’s view, which offer defense for the traditional Reformation view of the “Imputation of Christ’s Righteousness,” see D. A. Carson, “The Vindication of Imputation: On Fields of Discourse and Semantic Fields,” in *Justification: What’s at Stake in the Current Debates*, ed. Mark Husbans and Daniel J. Treier, 46-80; John Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ: Should We Abandon the Imputation of Christ’s Righteousness?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002).

<sup>45</sup>David VanDrunen calls people such as Norman Shepherd and those who identify with the federal vision and deviate from the Reformation doctrine of justification Reformed revisionists. See his analysis in VanDrunen, “Where We Are: Justification under Fire in the Contemporary Scene,” 48-54. Cf. Clark, “How We Got Here,” 16-18. For an account of the Norman Shepherd affair, see O. Palmer Robertson, *The Current Justification Controversy* (Unicoi, TN: Trinity Foundation, 2003).

<sup>46</sup>See Norman Shepherd, *The Call of Grace: How the Covenant Illuminates Salvation and Evangelism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2000); Shepherd, “Justification by Faith Alone,” *Reformation and*

to articulate a biblical relationship between justification and sanctification, or the role of faith and evangelical obedience (good works) in justification.

### Contemporary Responses to the Challenges

#### Westminster Theological Seminary: Richard B. Gaffin

**The nature of union with Christ.** In light of the recent challenges, especially the challenge from the New Perspective on Paul, the faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary (WTS) in Philadelphia has defended the Reformed doctrine of justification.<sup>47</sup> In particular, Richard Gaffin, a long time professor at WTS, articulates the doctrine of justification by faith in relation with union with Christ and emphasizes Calvin's doctrine of union with Christ, consisting of the twofold grace of justification and sanctification, judicial and renovative, as the antidote to the challenge.<sup>48</sup> While affirming the Reformed distinction and correlation between *historia salutis* and *ordo salutis*,<sup>49</sup> Gaffin agrees with his teacher, John Murray, on the centrality of union with Christ in soteriology: "Union with Christ is really the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation not only in its application but also in its once-for-all accomplishment in the finished work of Christ. Indeed the whole process of salvation has its origin in one phase of union with Christ and

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*Revival* 11, no. 2 (Spring 2002): 75-90.

<sup>47</sup>They published *Justified in Christ: God's Plan for Us in Justification*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2007) as a joint venture to defend the Reformed orthodoxy on justification.

<sup>48</sup>See Richard Gaffin, "Justification and Union with Christ: *Institutes* 3.11-18," in *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes: Essays and Analysis*, ed. David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2015), 248-69.

<sup>49</sup>See Richard Gaffin, "Biblical Theology and the Westminster Standards," *Westminster Theological Journal* 65 (Fall 2003): 165-79. He argues for the compatibility of biblical theology and the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF). The predominant concern of biblical theology is the once-for-all accomplishment of salvation (*historia salutis*), and the WCF concerns its ongoing application of salvation (*ordo salutis*). The Reformed tradition shares both concerns, accomplished and application. Thus, they are not mutually exclusive but complementary with different emphases.

salvation has in view the realization of other phases of union with Christ.”<sup>50</sup> Gaffin concurs with Murray in speaking of union with Christ as an encompassing notion in the Bible that extends from election in eternity past to resurrection in eternity future.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, they maintain union with Christ consists of three aspects: “There is the *predestinarian* ‘in Christ’ (Eph. 1:4), the *redemptive-historical* ‘in Christ’, the union involved in the once-for-all accomplishment of salvation, and the *existential*, or perhaps better, *applicatory* ‘in Christ’, union in the actual possession or application of salvation.”<sup>52</sup> Gaffin understands these distinctions are not different unions but different aspects or phases of a single union.<sup>53</sup>

Despite the notions that union is all-inclusive, its eternal origin is in election, its historical accomplishment is the once-for-all work of Christ, and its application of salvation is in believers, Gaffin emphasizes the last aspect of union as existential or experiential: “union in the actual possession or application of salvation, in that sense existential union.”<sup>54</sup> He regards union with Christ is primarily “experiential” in nature, distinguishing between Christ’s work as an objective accomplishment (*historia salutis*)

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<sup>50</sup>John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1955), 161. Similarly, he says, “Union with Christ is the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation. All to which the people of God have been predestined in the eternal election of God, all that has been secured and procured for them in the once-for-all accomplishment of redemption, all of which they become actual partakers in the application of salvation, and all that by God’s grace they will become in the state of consummated bliss is embraced within the compass of union and communion with Christ” (170).

<sup>51</sup>See Richard B. Gaffin, *By Faith, Not by Sight: Paul and the Order of Salvation*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013), 41-42. Cf. Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 165, 201.

<sup>52</sup>Richard B. Gaffin, “Union with Christ: Some Biblical and Theological Reflections,” in *Always Reforming: Explorations in Systematic Theology*, ed. Andrew T. B. McGowan (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 275; cf. Gaffin, *By Faith, Not by Sight*, 42; Gaffin, “The Work of Christ Applied,” in *Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Church Catholic*, ed. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 281.

<sup>53</sup>Gaffin, *By Faith, Not by Sight*, 42.

<sup>54</sup>Gaffin, “The Work of Christ Applied,” 281. Cf. Gaffin, “Justification and Union with Christ,” 248-69; Gaffin, “Union with Christ: Some Biblical and Theological Reflections,” 271-88.

and subjective application (*ordo salutis*). While Christ's objective work of salvation is accomplished once-for-all, his subjective works, or the appropriation of salvation by the Spirit, is on-going and shaping believers' lives as they conform to Christ. The experiential union is a concept that builds from Calvin and his insistence on the necessity of the subjective application of Christ's work to believers or else Christ's objective work has no value to us. Gaffin speaks to this value, saying that the "union is so central, so pivotal, that without it the saving work of Christ, the once-for-all redemption he has accomplished, 'remains useless and of no value.' Union is the all-or-nothing reality on which everything depends in the application of salvation."<sup>55</sup> Union is "constitutive" of the actual application or appropriation of redemption to believers.<sup>56</sup> Only through union with Christ will believers actually partake of the salvific benefits of redemption. Therefore, for Gaffin, union with Christ is the comprehensive way of summarizing the application of salvation.

**Union with Christ and *ordo salutis*.** In his teaching on union with Christ, Gaffin relates this union to *ordo salutis*, which maintains the priority of union with Christ over justification.<sup>57</sup> He understands the essence of Paul's theology is the soteriological

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<sup>55</sup>Gaffin, "The Work of Christ Applied," 283. He quotes Calvin's *Institutes*, 3.1.1.

<sup>56</sup>Constantine R. Campbell categorizes Gaffin's model as existential and assesses, "With Gaffin as the major exponent of this description, union with Christ is perceived as solidarity with Christ. It is constitutive and descriptive of the actual experience of the believer, since solidarity means that what Christ experienced becomes part of the 'experience' of the believer." *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 61. This is similar to what Anthony A. Hoekema calls the "actual" union with Christ. Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved By Grace* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1989), 59-60.

<sup>57</sup>A few theological differences between Richard Gaffin and J. V. Fesko (Westminster Seminary California) in the exposition of the doctrine of union with Christ in relation to *ordo salutis* are (1) Gaffin insists union with Christ as central dogma of Paul; Fesko maintains justification is central to Paul's theology, but not a central dogma; (2) Gaffin argues for the priority of union with Christ, on the grounds that from it flows the double-benefit of justification and sanctification; Fesko argues for the logical priority of justification over sanctification and, though union with Christ undergirds the entire *ordo salutis*

reality of a believer's union with Christ.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, he understands the central and pivotal significance for Calvin on the application of salvation. Union is more fundamental because it is the source or foundation of the twofold grace.<sup>59</sup> From it, redemption is applied by means of *ordo salutis*. Therefore, the entire *ordo salutis* is undergirded by the believer's union with Christ.<sup>60</sup>

Another feature of Gaffin's teaching on union with Christ and *ordo salutis* is his argument for a non-temporal or non-linear *ordo salutis*.<sup>61</sup> Raising questions about the traditional *ordo salutis*,<sup>62</sup> Gaffin argues the different elements of *ordo salutis* are simultaneous aspects rather than temporal steps on the way to salvation. In other words, he contends that *ordo salutis* "are not separate, distinct acts. Rather each describes a

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including judgment, a believer's union with Christ is logically founded upon the forensic, not vice versa; (3) Fesko disagrees with Gaffin and his colleagues in viewing Calvin's doctrine of union with Christ as unique on this subject, while he thinks Calvin's formulation was one of the versions in the Reformed tradition. See Fesko's assessment of the Gaffin-school on Calvin and union in *Beyond Calvin*, 17-26.

<sup>58</sup>See Gaffin, *By Faith, Not by Sight*, 49.

<sup>59</sup>Lane G. Tipton points out that the view of union and imputation in Lutheran Theology is different from the Reformed view. While in Reformed tradition, union with Christ is basic or foundational, in Lutheran theology, justification causes union with Christ and then sanctification follows. Lane G. Tipton, "Union with Christ and Justification," in *Justified in Christ: God's Plan for Us in Justification*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2007), 42-45.

<sup>60</sup>It appears that Gaffin has changed or clarified his view later saying, "Accenting inseparability, Calvin speaks not of two graces but of 'twofold grace,' in the singular, although later in this section he does refer to regeneration as 'the second of these gifts' or, better, this 'second grace,' signaling distinction and a certain priority to justification." Gaffin, "Justification and Union with Christ," 253-54; emphasis added.

<sup>61</sup>For an overview of the Reformed understanding of justification in relation to *ordo salutis*, see A. T. B. McGowan, "Justification and the *ordo salutis*," in *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 147-63. Specifically, McGowan concludes with two essential points on the Reformed doctrine of justification: "first, the doctrine of justification by faith cannot be properly and fully understood unless it is seen in the context of union with Christ; second, any understanding of justification that fails to maintain a forensic notion of the imputation of the righteousness of Christ cannot claim to be Reformed." "Justification and the *ordo salutis*" (163).

<sup>62</sup>Gaffin, *Resurrection and Redemption*, 137-43. He raises three questions about the traditional *ordo salutis* and argues for the centrality of resurrection in Christ's justification and believers' participation of these benefits by faith.

different facet or aspect of the *one act* of being raised from the dead.”<sup>63</sup> This unity and inseparability is undergirded by the one event of Christ being raised (resurrection).

Therefore, by uniting to Christ, believers partake of all the elements of *ordo salutis*, including justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification, as one inclusive act.<sup>64</sup>

**Compatibility of imputation and union with Christ.** Moreover, Gaffin maintains the traditional Reformed view on the compatibility of imputation of Christ’s righteousness and union with Christ. Affirming Reformed theology in this tradition accentuates both *historia salutis* and *ordo salutis*, rather than viewing union with Christ and justification as competing concepts.<sup>65</sup> In this affirmation, Gaffin argues that “an imputative aspect is integral and indispensable to the justification given in union with Christ.”<sup>66</sup> Following Calvin in the exposition of union with Christ, Gaffin also argues that imputation is a facet of our “fellowship of righteousness” with Christ and an integral aspect of our union with Christ, crucified and exalted.<sup>67</sup> Because imputation reckons the righteousness or guilt of one person on another, to be united to Christ (in Christ) implies

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<sup>63</sup>Gaffin, *Resurrection and Redemption*, 127 (emphasis original); also see 138.

<sup>64</sup>This view of Gaffin’s union with Christ has been challenged. First, his understanding of the ordering of the *ordo salutis* is understood as being distinct from the traditional understanding. Second, he is charged with swallowing the notion of *ordo salutis* within his all-embracing nature of the union with Christ. See McGowan’s analysis of Gaffin’s three problems about the traditional *ordo salutis* in “Justification and the *ordo salutis*,” 161.

<sup>65</sup>For instance, viewing union with Christ and *ordo salutis* as competing methods of theology, Barth and his followers conceive justification not in forensic terms that involve the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, but in terms of participation in Christ’s righteousness. See McGowan, “Justification and the *ordo salutis*,” 158-60; Michael F. Bird, “Incorporated Righteousness: A Response to Recent Evangelical Discussion Concerning the Imputation of Christ’s Righteousness in Justification,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47, no. 2 (June 2004): 253-75. For recent examples of the attempt to argue that the idea of “union with Christ” constitutes an alternative to the judicial idea of imputation, see Don Garlington, “Imputation or Union with Christ? A Response to John Piper,” *Reformation & Revival* 12, no. 4 (Autumn 2003), 45-113.

<sup>66</sup>Gaffin, “The Work of Christ Applied,” 287.

<sup>67</sup>For historical and theological treatment of Calvin’s theology of union with Christ and twofold grace, see Garcia, *Life in Christ*.

that the person has his righteousness. Thus, rather than rendering imputation as unnecessary within union with Christ, Gaffin claims imputation is implied in our union with Christ, and forensic declaration does not conflict with a personal, covenantal relationship.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, since union with Christ is the context whereby the Spirit applies to believers all the salvific benefits, being united to Christ in his resurrection does not only have judicial significance (justification) but also includes the renovative (sanctification) dimension of salvation.<sup>69</sup> Thus, besides arguing for the distinction and inseparability between imputation and union with Christ, Gaffin also maintains justification and sanctification as distinct and inseparable within union with Christ.

**Justification in a federal scheme.** Moreover, Gaffin places his doctrine of justification in the context of a federal structure that includes a covenant of works and covenant of grace.<sup>70</sup> Describing an integral relation between union with Christ and covenant theology, Gaffin maintains, “Human beings were created in God’s image to live in fellowship, or covenant, with God, trusting his promises and obeying his commands, being loved and loving. Sin, however, destroyed this fellowship bond, this union, by rendering humanity guilty and corrupt, and so, alienated from God and deserving of

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<sup>68</sup>See, Gaffin, “Union with Christ,” 271-88; Gaffin, “Justification and Union with Christ,” 248-69; Gaffin, “Justification and Eschatology,” in *Justified in Christ: God’s Plan for Us in Justification*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2007), 1-21. Gaffin’s student, Lane G. Tipton, argues similarly in “Union with Christ and Justification,” 23-49.

<sup>69</sup>See Gaffin, “Justification and Eschatology,” 6.

<sup>70</sup>McGowan summarizes the Reformed understanding on the relation between justification and covenant theology in this way: “Justification was defined in forensic terms as the remission of sin and the imputation of righteousness, all of which in later Reformed theology was set in the context of a federal structure including a covenant of redemption, a covenant of works, and a covenant of grace. Just as the sin of Adam was imputed to all those whom he represented in the covenant of works, on the basis that he was their federal head, so the righteousness of Christ is imputed to all those whom he represents as federal head in the covenant of grace.” McGowan, “Justification and the *ordo salutis*,” 153.

death.”<sup>71</sup> By his disobedience, Adam, the first federal head, disrupted the covenantal bond between God and men. God’s response to humanity’s predicament in sin is to restore that bond by the obedience of the second Adam, Jesus Christ. The correspondence between the two federal heads is that “the sin of Adam, understood as trespass and disobedience, elicits condemnation and consists in death, both in Adam and those he represents; but in antithetical contrast to this reality, the righteousness of Christ, understood as one meritorious act of righteousness and obedience, elicits justification that consists in eschatological life, both for Christ and those he represents” (Rom. 5:12-19).<sup>72</sup> Therefore, “when we recognize the covenantal character of Jesus’ obedience as a second and last Adam (Luke 4:1-13; Rom. 5:12-19; 1 Cor. 15:45, 47), and the way that his active and passive obedience satisfies the just demands of the covenant of works, then the resurrection of Christ as his justification *must* involve a judicial declaration that the Son of God has met perfectly and penal sanction of the covenant of works.”<sup>73</sup> Believers united to Christ in their present possession of salvation is the climatic realization of the covenantal communion between the triune God and his people. Through uniting with Christ, believers partake of the imputed righteousness of Christ as the remedy to the legal demands of the covenant of works. The imputation of Christ’s righteousness and union with Christ are integrally related in a covenantal scheme.

## **Westminster Seminary California**

### **Union with Christ and *ordo salutis* and *historia salutis*. Standing on the**

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<sup>71</sup>Gaffin, “Union with Christ,” 272.

<sup>72</sup>Tipton, “Union with Christ and Justification,” 34 (emphasis original).

<sup>73</sup>Tipton, “Union with Christ and Justification,” 31 (emphasis original).

Reformed tradition, scholars in Westminster Seminary California (WSC) also came to the defense for the centrality of the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Recognizing the teaching of the New Perspective on Paul has a diminished interest in the *ordo salutis* of Paul, and also many of the publications by the evangelicals to counteract this weakness largely focus upon the *ordo salutis*, in particular, John Fesko restates and elaborates the classic Reformed doctrine of justification in terms of the *ordo salutis* (order of salvation) and *historia salutis* (history of salvation).<sup>74</sup> Following Calvin in the Reformed tradition, Fesko recognizes the significance of locating *ordo salutis* in *historia salutis* (covenant of grace). Countering the charge of the New Perspective on Paul that defends Reformed theology's teaching on *ordo salutis* as abstract truth, Fesko writes, "We must, however, first explore the structure of redemptive history, or the *historia salutis*. While justification is part of the *ordo salutis*, one does not want to abstract it from its place in redemptive history. One must recognize that the *ordo salutis* is inherently eschatological, seeing that it is bound up with the eschatological Adam."<sup>75</sup> Fesko understands Reformed theology expresses the *historia salutis* and the *ordo salutis* covenantally and eschatologically. In this historical scheme, he recognizes that justification and sanctification are not abstract principles but are integral parts of the *ordo salutis*, undergirded by a believer's union with Christ.

Union with Christ in the covenant of grace is the reality in which salvation is applied to individual sinners. Thus, union with Christ (*ordo salutis*) finds its place within

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<sup>74</sup>E.g., Fesko, *Justification*.

<sup>75</sup>Fesko, *Justification*, 92.

the covenant of grace, which has a broad redemptive history (*historia salutis*).<sup>76</sup> Redemption to individual sinners (*ordo salutis*) is not isolated from the historical context in which God’s plan of redemption unfolds (*historia salutis*) because “the *ordo salutis* is governed by the structure of redemptive history, the *historia salutis*.”<sup>77</sup> Moreover, the *ordo salutis* is set within the context of the theological constructs of the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, representing the two-age structure of redemptive history—that of the first and last Adam. Within the contours of these covenants, the redemption of Christ is revealed. Particularly, within the context of the new covenant, the entire *ordo salutis*, or the doctrine of redemption, is found. Therefore, the subjects of justification and sanctification are closely related to the doctrine of covenants because covenants reveal Christ in whom all saving benefits are found.

Similar to Gaffin, Fesko claims that justification in the *ordo salutis* and, indeed, the entire *ordo* is undergirded by the believer’s union with Christ; yet, justification and union with Christ are not in tension but are complementary aspects of our salvation.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, Fesko differs from Gaffin by claiming that the Reformed doctrine of union with Christ assigns logical or theological priority to justification over sanctification, or the forensic over the transformative.<sup>79</sup> Fesko takes this stance, in part, to

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<sup>76</sup>See Fesko, *Justification*, 32, 92.

<sup>77</sup>Fesko, *Justification*, 90.

<sup>78</sup>See Fesko, *Justification*, 56-92, esp. 91.

<sup>79</sup>The issue of logical priority of justification over sanctification (or the relationship between justification and sanctification) is a controversial one in contemporary theological discussions. Richard Muller, in his historical survey on *ordo salutis* in relation to union with Christ in the Reformed tradition, concludes, “All of the formulations that we have examined identify union with Christ as the basis of the work of salvation. All identify it as accomplished by the work of the Spirit of Christ through the instrumentality of faith, . . . all place justification in immediate relation to faith and the *unio* and regard regeneration, increase in holiness or sanctification, and the attendant good works as a subsequent stage, without making clear whether the series of stages is a temporal, logical, or natural sequence.” He adds, “Indication of a temporal or logical sequence did not necessarily indicate a cause-and-effect relationship:

avoid the perceived error of some Reformed scholars who confuse the legal and transformative categories in salvation. While similar to Gaffin in affirming justification as the legal aspect of union with Christ, Fesko argues,

To give priority to justification in the *ordo salutis* makes clear the distinction but not separation between the objective, the legal-forensic, and the subjective, the transformation. There can be no subjective, or transformative work of the Spirit, apart from the objective, the work of Christ . . . the transformative is founded upon the forensic; union with Christ, though undergirding the whole *ordo salutis*, is grounded upon justification.”<sup>80</sup>

Justification is given theological priority over sanctification because the former is the legal basis of the latter. More specifically, Fesko contends justification is the causal basis for sanctification, and, moreover he argues that justification is the judicial basis for the entire *ordo salutis* and union with Christ. Although union with Christ undergirds the entire *ordo salutis*, including judgment, a believer’s union with Christ is logically

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acts and events occur after other acts and events without being caused by them . . . Similarly, temporal and causal or natural sequences are not logical . . . entire sequence of [*ordo salutis*], given that it rests on the free divine willing, cannot as a whole ultimately be a logical sequence.” Richard Muller, “Union with Christ and the *Ordo Salutis*: Reflections on Developments in Early Modern Reformed Thought,” in *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition: On the Work of Christ and the Order of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 239, 241. Jones observes, “The antinomians gave a priority to justification that went far beyond what Scripture teaches. That had a number of consequences, to the point that justification essentially swallowed up sanctification.” Jones, *Antinomianism*, 100-101.

<sup>80</sup>Fesko, *Justification*, 90. Cf. Fesko, “Calvin on Justification and Recent Misinterpretations of His View,” *Mid-American Journal of Theology*, 16 (2005): 83-114; Fesko, *Beyond Calvin*, esp. 29-30 for the summary of his arguments. In this work, Fesko surveys the theme of union with Christ in the Reformation, Early Orthodox, and High Orthodox periods of the Reformed tradition. He argues the development of this formulation was diverse among the Reformed theologians, and Calvin’s formulations on union with Christ and justification was not the norm for the tradition. He claims there is no one unified doctrine of union with Christ and the same with *ordo salutis*, but there are a number of different versions and combinations in the tradition. Nevertheless, he shows that they all affirm that union with Christ and the golden chain of salvation (*ordo salutis*) are not two different entities, but the latter is part of the former. In other words, they are compatible rather than two competing models of soteriology. Moreover, the double-benefit of justification and sanctification consist within union with Christ, while justification is given theological priority over sanctification because the former is the legal basis of the latter. Richard Muller echoes that the Reformed doctrine of union with Christ was not a unique doctrine to Calvin in “Union with Christ and the *Ordo Salutis*: Reflections on Developments in Early Modern Reformed Thought,” in *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition: On the Work of Christ and the Order of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 202-43.

founded upon the forensic and not vice versa.<sup>81</sup> Commenting on the significance of the doctrines of justification and union, he summarizes,

We have also determined that we may legitimately say that justification is at the center of Paul's thought but not that it is a central dogma. Rather, it is the entry point to our redemption, and therefore central to our redemption and to the gospel. For this reason justification is most certainly the article by which the church stands or falls. . . . Justification is not at the head of *ordo salutis*, but is one aspect of the unitary *application salutis* undergirded by the believer's union with Christ. Nevertheless, we must maintain that the *unio mystica* is logically founded upon the believer's justification.<sup>82</sup>

Fesko maintains that this priority of justification is not temporal or chronological but is, instead, logical or theological.

In a similar approach, Michael Horton contends for the priority of justification in union with Christ by arguing that justification as the “engine” that tows the elements of *ordo salutis*.<sup>83</sup> While maintaining the integral connection between justification and sanctification, he argues for “the forensic character of divine speech-acts as the source of effective transformation.”<sup>84</sup> He maintains justification is related to sanctification in an organic relationship that the prior necessarily entails the latter, or the forensic grace with transformative effect. Therefore, although union with Christ embraces both forensic and transformative aspects, at its core is “a forensic-covenantal ontology.”<sup>85</sup> Moreover,

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<sup>81</sup>See Fesko, *Justification*, 89.

<sup>82</sup>Fesko, *Justification*, 92.

<sup>83</sup>See Michael Horton, *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 299-300.

<sup>84</sup>Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 310.

<sup>85</sup>Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 153.

Horton is similar to Fesko in claiming justification as the judicial basis for the mystical union.<sup>86</sup> He states:

Regardless of whether union temporally preceded justification, Calvin is clear that the latter is the basis for the former. . . . The same act of faith that constantly looks to Christ alone for justification looks to Christ alone for sanctification and glorification. There are not two sources of the Christian life: one forensic and found in Christ alone, with the other being moral and found within us. Forensic justification through faith alone is the fountain of union with Christ in all of its renewing aspects.<sup>87</sup>

For Horton, the union is built upon a forensic basis that grounds renewal and other aspects of the union.

**Justification and union with Christ in a covenantal structure.** While affirming the significance of justification in the reality of union with Christ, the scholars of WSC contend that the emphasis of the covenantal character of the doctrine of imputation in justification, or the teaching of classic covenant theology, is neglected in the current debate on justification.<sup>88</sup> They seek to defend the Reformation doctrine of justification and, specifically, the imputation of both the active and passive obedience of Christ as the ground of justification by setting it within a threefold covenant structure, consisting of a covenant of redemption, a covenant of works, and a covenant of grace.

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<sup>86</sup>See Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 147-48. For instance, he writes “Christ alone is the basis both for justification and union, but the act of justification is logically prior to union.” He adds “Charged by its forensic core, union with Christ encompasses not only justification, but also the organic, transformative, and moral aspects as well” (147, 153).

<sup>87</sup>Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 143.

<sup>88</sup>See Clark, *Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry*. Specifically, Michael Horton affirms that justification consists of both covenantal and forensic dimensions: “This is precisely where the classic Reformed version of covenant theology makes a contribution that has often been overlooked on both sides in these related debates. Union with Christ in the covenant of grace is the context within which justification makes sense and is given both its cosmic-eschatological and individual horizon. In this covenant theology, the *historia salutis* and *ordo salutis* come together, as do justification and sanctification, the church and the individual. Union with Christ is not an *alternative* to the Reformation doctrine of justification, but is proper horizon.” Michael Horton, “Which Covenant Theology?,” in Clark, *Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry*, 226-27.

Within this threefold structure, the covenant of redemption (*pactum salutis*) is the eternal, intra-trinitarian covenant in which Christ is appointed as the covenantal mediator. He is also the surety of the elect in the covenant of grace, for his obedience fulfilled the condition of perfect obedience that Adam failed in the covenant of works.<sup>89</sup> Given its perfection, his obedience is the ground of justification and maintains both a distinction and a correlation between justification and sanctification in the believer's union with Christ.<sup>90</sup> Therefore, the WSC scholars argue the bi-covenantal structure (of works and of grace) within covenant theology is the necessary context for the imputation of Christ's righteousness in justification. Furthermore, in contrast to the claim of the New Perspective on Paul, they contend that the imputation of Christ's righteousness and God's covenantal faithfulness are false dichotomies.<sup>91</sup>

**Covenant of works and covenant of grace: Law and gospel antithesis.** In their defense for the doctrine of imputation by classic covenant theology, the scholars of WCS emphasize the importance of the doctrine of the two covenants, the covenants of works and of grace, and their implication to the law-gospel distinction.<sup>92</sup> They insist that the law-gospel distinction relates to the antithesis between merit and grace and coincides with the relationship between the *legal* covenant of works and the *gracious* covenant of

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<sup>89</sup>The classic formulation of covenant theology is codified in the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter VII.

<sup>90</sup>See Hywel Jones, "Justification by Faith Alone: No Christian Life without It," in Clark, *Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry*, 285-306; Fesko, *Justification*, 281-98.

<sup>91</sup>See Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 102-25.

<sup>92</sup>E.g., Clark, *Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry*; Mark Karlberg, "The Significance and Basis of the Covenant of Works," in *Federalism and the Westminster Tradition: Reformed Orthodoxy at the Crossroads* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006); Karlberg, *Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective: Collected Essays and Book Reviews in Historical, Biblical, and Systematic Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000), 17-128; Karlberg, "Reformed Interpretation of the Mosaic Covenant," *Westminster Theological Journal* 43, no. 1 (Fall, 1980): 1-57.

grace, which is a key hermeneutical principle safeguarding the doctrine of justification by faith alone.<sup>93</sup> In addition, the covenant structure presents the parallel between two federal headships: Adam's sin, imputed to those he represents in the covenant of works, and Christ's righteousness, imputed to the elect in the covenant of grace. The two covenants represent two different ways of life. The former is by obedience to the law (works), and the latter is by faith to Christ (grace). They are understood as the traditional contrast between law and grace, works and faith. In this respect, the law is antithetical to the gospel. This emphasis on covenant theology also contends the Mosaic covenant as the republication of a covenant of works because of its "works-inheritance principle."<sup>94</sup> Scholars supporting this thought claim that failure to maintain a biblical concept of law/merit is a departure from Reformed theology and endangers the doctrine of justification by faith.

## Conclusion

WTS and WSC undoubtedly differ in some theological issues, but they agree

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<sup>93</sup>With this emphasis on law/gospel antithesis, scholars of Westminster Seminary California (WSC) categorize scholars of Westminster Seminary Philadelphia (WTS), such as Richard Gaffin, John Murray, Norman Shepherd, Peter Lillback, and Sinclair Ferguson as belonging to the "Union with Christ School" who deny the distinction between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, fail to maintain Law and Gospel antithesis in Calvin's theology, and move toward to monocovenantalism of the Barthian theology, which is problematic in maintaining the proper relationship between faith and works in justification. This monocovenantalism is seen as exclusively emphasizing the concept of union with Christ without maintaining the distinction between Law and Gospel in Pauline soteriology and is also a key hermeneutic and theological principle of Calvin's covenant theology and soteriology. Despite all these, the major division between WTS and WSC was over Norman Shepherd's controversy in the late 1970s and early 1980s. See Jeong Koo Jeon, *Covenant Theology and Justification by Faith: The Shepherd Controversy and Its Impacts* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006); Jeon, *Calvin and the Federal Vision: Calvin's Covenant Theology in Light of Contemporary Discussion* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016); VanDrunen, "Where We Are," 48-52; Mark Karlberg, *Federalism and the Westminster Tradition: Reformed Orthodoxy at the Crossroads* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006); Karlberg, *Gospel Grace: The Modern-Day Controversy* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003); Thomas L. Wenger, "The New Perspective on Calvin: Responding to Recent Calvin Interpretation," *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 50 (2007): 311-28; David VanDrunen, "Inaugural Lecture: The Two Kingdoms and the *Ordo Salutis*: Life beyond Judgment and the Question of a Dual Ethic," *Westminster Theological Journal* 70 (2008): 207-24.

<sup>94</sup>Karlberg, *Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective*, 46-49.

with Geerhardus Vos on the significance of the doctrines of union with Christ and the covenant in soteriology.<sup>95</sup> They clearly stand on the Reformed tradition in explaining the doctrine of union with Christ in a broad covenant structure as the solution to the contemporary challenge on the doctrine of justification. They correctly set justification within the reality of a believer's union with Christ, which manifests in receiving Christ's imputed righteousness, and they concur with Calvin, claiming his applied soteriology consists of a structure in which justification and sanctification are grounded in the reality of a spiritual union with Christ. This claim supports the forensic and the transformational aspects of salvation as distinct and yet inseparable in union with Christ.

In generalizing, if Richard Gaffin emphasizes the doctrine of "union with Christ" as the solution to the current challenge, scholars of WSC seem to propose and emphasize a broader theological spectrum that stands behind union with Christ, that of covenant theology in the Reformed tradition. Nevertheless, while the former rightly emphasizes the context of justification and sanctification as union with Christ, he does not explicate the two doctrines in a broad covenantal contour although he implicitly or explicitly presupposes a covenantal bond and communion relationship behind the believer's union with Christ. By contrast, the latter rightly defends the doctrine of justification by engaging with covenant theology, but its accent on covenant theology to distinguish between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace neglects the monopleric (i.e., unilateral) and dipleric (i.e., bilateral) nature of the covenant.<sup>96</sup> In

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<sup>95</sup>Geerhardus Vos, *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1980), 248.

<sup>96</sup>While scholars in WSC stress the antithesis between covenant of works and covenant of grace, they also acknowledge the mutuality and conditionality of the covenant of grace. For instance, Horton asserts that the covenant of grace resting on its basis, the covenant of redemption, is unconditional and inviolable, but it is a bilateral covenant in its administration, in which obligations are imposed as

other words, while vigorously arguing for the gracious character of salvation, the aspect of covenant theology that the WSC scholars emphasize is insufficient in providing a rationale for moral imperatives of the Christian life but undermines the duties of obedience which God requires in the covenant. In their theological discussions, both schools of thought neglect the mutual or bilateral character of the covenant. While union with Christ is the unilateral act of God by the Spirit, communion and fellowship with the triune God resulting from this union is a mutual or bilateral relationship that demands commitment from the engaged persons. A historical understanding of the covenants as both unilateral and bilateral (unconditional and conditional) upholds justification and sanctification as distinct and yet inseparable in union with Christ, an assertion that is neglected in the current theological discussion.

These scholars of the Reformed tradition claim to stand on Calvin's doctrine of union with Christ. To provide additional insight for a contemporary understanding, further discussion must engage with Calvin and learn the character, necessity, and implication of the union and how his teaching on the subject is related to his doctrine of covenant. Calvin's teaching on these subjects and their further development by his successors will, therefore, provide salient insight on these topics.

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conditions. See Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 148-52; Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 182-85.

## CHAPTER 3

### JOHN CALVIN'S DOCTRINE OF TWOFOLD GRACE OF GOD IN COVENANT THEOLOGY

#### **John Calvin's Doctrine of Justification**

The Protestant or “evangelical” view of justification came to its full form by John Calvin in his doctrine of imputation of Christ’s righteousness.<sup>1</sup> While Roman Catholicism fused justification and sanctification by teaching justification as a process by which the faithful cooperate with God’s infused grace to obtain justification, one of Calvin’s most important contributions was to unite the two while keeping them distinct in union with Christ. Commenting on this union, G. W. Bromiley argues that Calvin “presented a comprehensive view of Christian salvation and the Christian life in a way which brings out the full relationship of justification and sanctification.”<sup>2</sup> Ferguson elaborates on these points by noting that the “Pauline emphasis on union with Christ had been a dominant motif in Calvin’s exposition of the gospel and the Christian life. He had expounded it extensively in the *Institutes*, weaving together the forensic and the dynamic aspects of the union in his stress on justification and sanctification as distinct dimensions

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<sup>1</sup>Bruce L. McCormack claims in “*Justitia aliena: Karl Barth in Conversation with the Evangelical Doctrine of Imputed Righteousness*” in *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), especially 169-72. Cf. “What’s at Stake in Current Debates over Justification? The Crisis of Protestantism in the West,” in *Justification: What’s at Stake in the Current Debates*, ed. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 91-92.

<sup>2</sup>Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Historical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1978), 237.

but inseparable realities.”<sup>3</sup> These scholars are not alone in their understanding that the Reformation doctrine of justification arrived at its finished form when Calvin incorporated it to sanctification in his doctrine of union with Christ.

### **Union with Christ (*unio cum Christo*)**

The theme of the believer’s “union with Christ” was prominent in Calvin’s exposition of Pauline soteriology during the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation.<sup>4</sup> Calvin taught that the believer’s union with Christ is by the Spirit through faith.<sup>5</sup> Although faith is an instrument, it is also a necessary means of this union so that believers obtain Christ’s saving benefits.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, Calvin asserted that “the secret

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<sup>3</sup>Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance—Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 53.

<sup>4</sup>See Richard Gaffin, “Justification and Union with Christ,” in *A Theological Guide to Calvin’s Institutes: Essays and Analysis*, ed. David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2015), 248-69; Mark A. Garcia, *Life in Christ: Union with Christ and Twofold Grace in Calvin’s Theology* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2008); Cornelis P. Venema, “Union with Christ, the ‘Twofold Grace of God,’ and the ‘Order of Salvation’ in Calvin’s Theology,” in *Calvin for Today*, ed. Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009), 91-113; Venema, *Accepted and Renewed in Christ: The Twofold Grace of God and the Interpretation of Calvin’s Theology* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007); Paul Wells, “Calvin and Union with Christ: The Heart of Christian Doctrine,” in *Calvin: Theologian and Reformer*, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Garry J. Wells (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2010), 65-88. Nevertheless, Fesko writes, “As famous as Calvin’s *Institutes* are for his language about the two-fold benefit of union with Christ, the famous Geneva Reformer did not elaborate on the doctrine of union with Christ with great specificity. There is no particular place or treatise, for example, where Calvin explained this doctrine. In many respects he simply assumed the category and employed it throughout his writings.” J. V. Fesko, “Union with Christ,” in *Reformation Theology: A Systematic Summary*, ed. Matthew Barrett (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 434. See also Fesko, *Beyond Calvin: Union with Christ and Justification in Early Modern Reformed Theology* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012) for his demonstration against the claim that union with Christ and justification are unique doctrines to Calvin. Similarly, J. Todd Billings acknowledges Calvin’s teaching in union with Christ was not distinctive among the Reformers of his time. Nevertheless, he claims his teaching was “rich and multifaceted.” See J. Todd Billings, “John Calvin’s Soteriology: On the Multifaceted ‘Sum’ of the Gospel,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 11, no. 4 (2009): 428-47.

<sup>5</sup>Richard A. Muller says, “Calvin’s understanding of union with Christ, as accomplished by the work of the Spirit through faith, was foundational to his soteriological expression from the time of the second edition of his *Institutes* and the initial publication of his Romans commentary.” Richard A. Muller, “Union with Christ and the *Ordo Salutis*: Reflections on Developments in Early Modern Reformed Thought,” in *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition: On the Work of Christ and the Order of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 205.

<sup>6</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 3.1.1. All citations from Calvin’s *Institutes* are from this edition. The reference order is by book, chapter, and section number.

energy of the Spirit” is the key “by which we come to enjoy Christ and all his benefits.”<sup>7</sup> The Holy Spirit is the bond that unites believers to Christ, and, according to Calvin, faith is the work of the Spirit. Without that “secret working of the Spirit,” a person cannot embrace the gospel. Calvin further insisted that “Paul shows the Spirit to be the inner teacher by whose effort the promise of salvation penetrates into our minds, a promise that would otherwise only strike the air or beat upon our ears.”<sup>8</sup> Therefore, while the believer must have faith to effect the union, it is a “Spirit-worked faith,” making the Spirit the source of faith and the necessary agent in this union. Without the Spirit illumining believers’ minds and opening their eyes to the truth, they would still be in the dark. In this role, the Spirit produces faith in believers and unites them to Christ. Therefore, Calvin defended a “Spirit-worked union” by saying that, in sum, “the Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself.”<sup>9</sup> The Spirit is thus the sustenance of this spiritual union, and union with Christ by the Spirit is God’s act of engrafting believers in a living relationship of faith and trust in Christ as the source of new life.

### **The Necessity of Union with Christ**

Calvin accentuated the centrality and necessity of union with Christ. This spiritual union is a saving union, for through it salvation is granted to individual sinners.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.1.1.

<sup>8</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.1.4. Similarly, he wrote, “for light would be given the sightless in vain had that Spirit of discernment [Job 20:3] not opened the eyes of the mind. Consequently, he may rightly be called the key that unlocks for us the treasures of the Kingdom of Heaven [cf. Rev. 3:7]; and his illumination, the keenness of our insight. Paul so highly commends that ‘ministry of the Spirit’ [II Cor. 3:6] for the reason that teachers would shout to no effect if Christ himself, inner Schoolmaster, did not by his Spirit draw to himself those given to him by the Father [cf. John 6:44; 12:32; 17:6].”

<sup>9</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.1.1.

<sup>10</sup>Richard A. Muller, from Calvin’s Romans commentary, interprets his view that “union with Christ has priority over justification and regeneration, and the striving after purity follows on regeneration.”

Indeed, believers receive Christ's grace by united with him. Calvin asserted

First, we must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us. Therefore, to share with us what he has received from the Father, he had to become ours and to dwell within us. For this reason, he is called 'our head [Eph. 4:15], and 'the first-born among many brethren' [Rom. 8:29]. We also, in turn, are said to be 'engrafted' into him' [Rom. 11:17], and to 'put on Christ' [Gal. 3:27]; for, as I have said, all that he possesses is nothing to us until we grow into one body with him.<sup>11</sup>

Union with Christ is the analogical term for being "in Christ." Believers are not saved until they are in Christ because Christ's saving work cannot be appropriated to them until they are in him. Without dwelling within or outside of Christ, believers have nothing. Calvin presented the believer's union with Christ as the effectual event in the actual application of the salvific benefits found in Christ. Apart from this actual union, believers cannot partake in any of Christ's saving benefits. Therefore, for Calvin, union with Christ is essential to salvation.<sup>12</sup> The significance and centrality of union with Christ can be seen in his description in Book III as "The Way in Which We Receive the Grace of Christ: What Benefits Come to Us From it, and What Effects Follow."<sup>13</sup> The means of possessing every benefit of the gospel is by uniting to the person of Christ. Salvation can only be sought in Christ. If not the center or controlling motif of Calvin's doctrine of

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Muller, "Union with Christ and the *Ordo Salutis*," 207.

<sup>11</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.1.1.

<sup>12</sup>Kevin Dixon Kennedy in *Union with Christ and the Extent of the Atonement in Calvin* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2002) argues that Calvin's teaching on union with Christ as the application of the benefits of the death of Christ is the key that allowed him to hold to a view of the atonement as both universal and substitutionary. He asserts that Calvin taught Christ died for all people, but only those who are engrafted into or united to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit by faith are to share the benefits of the cross of Christ. Since Calvin identified the event of union with Christ as the key to receiving his benefits, the Holy Spirit as the necessary effectual agent in salvation, and saving faith as also a necessary element, Kennedy concludes that for Calvin, in union with Christ and not at the cross, the elect are separated from the reprobate.

<sup>13</sup>See Richard B. Gaffin, "Calvin's Soteriology: The Structure of the Application of Redemption in Book Three of the *Institutes*," *Ordained Servant* 18 (2009): 68-77.

salvation, union with Christ is the essential basis for the application of redemption in the Christian experience.<sup>14</sup>

### **Union with Christ and *Duplex Gratia***

Through union with Christ, believers partake of all the saving blessings in him. Calvin spoke of two principal blessings: repentance and forgiveness of sins or renewal and reconciliation.<sup>15</sup> By repentance, Calvin denoted sanctification, and by forgiveness of sins, he denoted justification. He referred to them as a “double grace” or a “twofold benefit” of God (*duplex gratia Dei*).<sup>16</sup> Detailing this duality, Calvin expounded that “Christ was given to us by God’s generosity, to be grasped and possessed by us in faith. By partaking of him, we principally receive a double grace: namely, that being reconciled to God through Christ’s blamelessness, we may have in heaven instead of a Judge a gracious Father; and secondly, that sanctified by Christ’s spirit we may cultivate blamelessness and purity of life.”<sup>17</sup> Calvin claimed believers receive these saving benefits by partaking of Christ because they cannot be obtained from a Christ who “remains outside of us.” The double grace of justification and sanctification flows from the reality of the believer’s union with Christ. In other words, this union is the source or basis of the twofold grace.

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<sup>14</sup>See Garcia, in *Life in Christ*, 45-46, argues that at the heart of Calvin’s soteriology is “union with Christ.” The essential significance of union with Christ is the application of salvation, a saving union. Moreover, he claims “Calvin’s orthodox Christology, pneumatological sacramentology, and Trinitarian soteriology intersecting frequently at the point of union with Christ and the *duplex gratia*. Behind the most compelling features of Calvin’s teaching on justification and sanctification stands a controlling understanding of what it means to be united to Christ and, thus, to enjoy his saving benefits.”

<sup>15</sup>See Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.3.19.

<sup>16</sup>Gaffin comments, “Since this twofold grace is ‘principal,’ apparently for Calvin it encompasses all other saving benefits of union with Christ.” Gaffin, “Justification and Union with Christ,” 253.

<sup>17</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.11.1.

## Union with Christ as “the Sum of the Gospel”

For Calvin, moreover, union with Christ is “the sum of the gospel,” which “is held to consist in repentance and forgiveness of sins [Luke 24:47; Acts 5:31] . . . both repentance and forgiveness of sins—that is, newness of life and free reconciliation—are conferred on us by Christ, and both are attained by us through faith.”<sup>18</sup> Since the double grace of repentance and forgiveness of sins can be bestowed to believers only by uniting to Christ through faith, union with Christ is “the sum of the gospel” or “the whole of the gospel”<sup>19</sup> Similarly, for Calvin, union with Christ is the heart of the gospel.<sup>20</sup>

Summarizing Calvin’s double grace, Venema writes, “Calvin offered an exposition of God’s grace in Christ that properly included the renewal of the believer by the indwelling power and work of Christ’s Spirit. As sharply as Calvin distinguished justification and sanctification, he held them together as the double benefit of Christ’s work through His Spirit and Word.”<sup>21</sup> As the Spirit unites believers to Christ by faith, they not only receive

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<sup>18</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.3.1.

<sup>19</sup>Here, speaking of the inseparability of the two benefits in union with Christ, Calvin asked, “Now if it is true—a fact abundantly clear—that the whole of the gospel is contained under these two headings, repentance and forgiveness of sins, do we not see that the Lord freely justifies his own in order that he may at the same time restore them to true righteousness by sanctification of his Spirit?” Calvin *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.13.19.

<sup>20</sup>J. Todd Billings is similar to Calvin in viewing union with Christ as “the sum of the gospel.” Billings says, “Union with Christ is a central New Testament description of Christian identity, the life of salvation in Christ. It entails the giving of a new identity such that in Christ, forgiveness and new life are received through the Spirit. Union with Christ involves abiding in Christ the Vine. It means that through the Spirit, sinners are adopted into the household of God as co-heirs with Christ. It means that God’s Spirit is poured out to make the life and teaching of Jesus real to us. It implicates our worship, our vocation in the world, and our witness as the church. Union with Christ is theological shorthand for the gospel itself—a key image that pulls together numerous motifs in the biblical witness.” J. Todd Billings, *Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 1. Billings similarly summarizes Calvin’s view of the gospel by saying “the gospel is the double grace of justification and sanctification accessed through union with Christ by the Spirit, received through the instrument of faith.” Billings, “John Calvin’s Soteriology,” 428.

<sup>21</sup>Venema, “Union with Christ, the ‘Twofold Grace of God,’ and the ‘Order of Salvation’ in Calvin’s Theology,” 111.

the free forgiveness of sins but also new life. Therefore, the sum of the gospel consists of both new status and new birth, justifying grace and sanctifying grace.

### **Justification: The First Benefit of *Duplex Gratia***

#### **Definitions of Justification**

Calvin described justification as “the primary article of the Christian religion,” “the main hinge on which religion turns,” or the “chief axis.” He went on to say that “unless you first of all grasp what your relationship to God is, and the nature of his judgment concerning you, you have neither a foundation on which to establish your salvation nor one on which to build piety toward God.”<sup>22</sup> For Calvin, a right understanding of justification is necessary and basic to a right ordering of Christian life. Among his several definitions to justification, Calvin specified that “‘to justify’ means nothing else than to acquit of guilt him who was accused, as if his innocence was confirmed.”<sup>23</sup> For Calvin, justification is a legal (or forensic or judicial) concept, meaning the believer is righteous before the law.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, he explained that justification’s “fundamental significance is that of vindication, a declaration of innocence with respect to a charge, an acquittal.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, a justified person has been declared innocent in the sight of God.

#### **Justification and Imputation**

Calvin’s doctrine of justification consists of not simply forgiveness of sins but

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<sup>22</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.2.1, 3.11.1.

<sup>23</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.11.3.

<sup>24</sup>See Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.11.11.

<sup>25</sup>McCormack, “*Justitia aliena*,” 170.

also the concept of imputation.<sup>26</sup> Establishing this concept, Calvin identified the believer as someone “justified by faith . . . who, excluded from the righteousness of works, grasps the righteousness of Christ through faith, and clothed in it, appears in God’s sight not as a sinner but as a righteousness man. Therefore, we explain justification simply as the acceptance with which God receives us into his favor as righteous men. And we say that it consists in the remission of sins and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness.”<sup>27</sup>

Imputation is God’s justifying act of reckoning a person as righteous because he or she is covered by Christ’s righteousness.<sup>28</sup> Believers are therefore considered righteous in God’s sight because the righteousness of Christ is imputed to them.

Calvin made his doctrine of imputation clear in his refutation of Andreas Osiander’s doctrine of justification as the transfer of Christ’s “essential righteousness” to believers; that is, the infusion of Christ’s person and his quality onto them.<sup>29</sup> Calvin

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<sup>26</sup>McCormack understands Calvin’s doctrine of justification consists of two principal parts—a negative nonimputation of guilt (the remission of sins) and a positive imputation of Christ’s righteousness. See McCormack, “*Justitia aliena*,” 170-71. Cf. Karla Wübbenhorst, “Calvin’s Doctrine of Justification: Variations on a Lutheran Theme,” in *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 114.

<sup>27</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.11.2. Calvin provided another similar definition: “We define justification as follows: the sinner, received into communion with Christ, is reconciled to God by his grace, while, cleansed by Christ’s blood, he obtains forgiveness of sins, and clothed with Christ’s righteousness as if it were his own, he stands confident before the heavenly judgment seat” (3.17.8).

<sup>28</sup>Some scholars believe that Calvin makes a distinction between “imputing” and “reckoning.” For instance, Gaffin writes, “Imputation is antecedent to reckoning. The imputation of righteousness, Christ’s righteousness as imputed, is the immediate ground or basis of the reckoning of righteousness, of being reckoned as righteous.” Gaffin, “Justification and Union with Christ,” 261. In fact, Calvin used not only the term “imputed,” but also “reckoned.” For instance, he wrote, “He is said to be justified in God’s sight who is both *reckoned* righteous in God’s judgment and has been accepted on amount of his righteousness” (Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.11.2). Affirming this distinction by Calvin, George Hunsinger thinks John Owen stands in continuity with Calvin in that union with Christ brings imputed righteousness of Christ and leads to reckoned righteousness. See George Hunsinger, “Justification and Mystical Union with Christ: Where Does Owen Stand?” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen’s Theology*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Mark Jones (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2015), 199-211.

<sup>29</sup>Calvin’s refutation against Andreas Osiander’s doctrine of “essential righteousness” in his *Disputation on Justification* (1550) is in *Institutes* 3.11.5-12. Osiander was a Lutheran theologian whose view was finally rejected by the Lutheran Formula of Concord (1576/84).

stated Osiander's non-imputative or infusion doctrine taught "to be justified is not only to be reconciled to God through free pardon but also to be *made* righteous, and righteousness is not a free imputation but the holiness and uprightness that the *essence* of God, dwelling in us, inspires."<sup>30</sup> Osiander's view of real or imparted righteousness not only confuses justifying righteousness (justification) and sanctifying righteousness (sanctification), but it also teaches an "ontological union," which dissolves the Creator-creature distinction.<sup>31</sup> For Calvin, God justifies by declaring a person righteous because of the imputed righteousness of Christ. A person is not justified by works righteousness because he or she lacks intrinsic righteousness.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, Calvin's doctrine of justification excludes any notion of moral transformation and the obliteration of the human personality. Justification is defined as "the sinner, received into communion with Christ, is reconciled to God by his grace, while, cleansed by Christ's blood, he obtains forgiveness of sins, and clothed with Christ's righteousness as if it were his own, he stands confident before the heavenly judgment seat."<sup>33</sup> Thus, the grounding for justification is the imputation of an "alien righteousness" of Christ. This righteousness is not inherent within believers but is of Christ: "We possessed it only because we are partakers in Christ."<sup>34</sup> For Calvin, justification is by grace alone, through which believers

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<sup>30</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.17.8. Calvin emphasized that "Christ's merit alone" is the only foundation for believers' justification, excluding the merit of human works: "Finally, I say that it is of no value unless we give prior place to the doctrine that we are justified by Christ's merit alone, which is grasped through faith, but by no merits of our own works, because no men can be fit the pursuit of holiness save those who have first imbibed this doctrine" (3.16.3).

<sup>31</sup>Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 143-46.

<sup>32</sup>See Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.11.6 (emphasis mine). Cf. 3.11.11, 3.11.23, 3.17.8.

<sup>33</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.17.8.

<sup>34</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.11.23.

are cleansed by Christ's blood, obtain the forgiveness of sins, and are clothed with Christ's righteousness.

### **Imputation of Christ's Obedience**

Calvin also emphasized the imputation of Christ's righteousness as the imputation of his obedience. That is, Christ's righteousness comes from his obedience. Quoting Paul, Calvin conferred this teaching—"As we were made sinners by one man's disobedience, so we have been justified by one man's obedience' [Rom. 5:19]"—and continued by saying, "To declare that by him alone we are accounted righteous, what else is this but to lodge our righteousness in Christ's obedience, because the obedience of Christ is reckoned to us as if it were our own?"<sup>35</sup> Calvin taught that Christ, as the second Adam, obediently remedied the disobedience of the first Adam. Therefore, Calvin associated Christ's obedience with his saving work:

The second requirement of our reconciliation with God was this: that man, who by his disobedience had become lost, should by way of remedy counter it with obedience, satisfy God's judgment, and pay the penalties for sin. Accordingly, our Lord came forth as true man and took the person and name of Adam in order to take Adam's place in obeying the Father, to present our flesh as the price of satisfaction to God's righteous judgment, and in the same flesh, to pay the penalty that we had deserved.<sup>36</sup>

Christ's saving work necessitates him as the obedient second Adam. Moreover, the imputation of Christ's righteousness is the imputation of the righteousness he acquired by his perfect obedience unto the law and also his obedience unto death.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.11.23.

<sup>36</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.12.3.

<sup>37</sup>In this regard, McCormack suggests that for Calvin, the two phrases—"imputed righteousness" and "imputed obedience"—function as virtual synonyms. McCormack, "*Justitia aliena*," 171n6.

Although Calvin did not use the later Reformed terminology of the “active” and “passive” obedience of Christ,<sup>38</sup> his summation of this obedience affirmed this teaching.<sup>39</sup> In addition, Calvin’s focus on obedience answered the question of how Christ has abolished sin and acquired righteousness for believers: “he has achieved this for us by the whole course of his obedience.”<sup>40</sup> Christ’s life was comprehensive, including his obedience to the law and his sacrificial death on the cross. Christ lived his entire life in full obedience to the Father to free us from the curse of the law. Clearly, Calvin emphasized the unity of Christ’s obedience as wholly oriented to the believer’s reconciliation. Christ’s “one obedience” encompassed his entire life. Consequently, the imputation of Christ’s righteousness consists of the imputation of both his active and passive obedience.

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<sup>38</sup>In Reformed or evangelical theology, the redemptive obedience of Christ consists of two sides—“active” and “passive.” In his active obedience, Christ fulfilled the positive commandments of God by keeping the law on behalf of his people. In his passive obedience, Christ paid the penalty owed by sinners to God by suffering death on the cross. Though Christ’s obedience is distinguished as active and passive, these two sides cannot be separated.

<sup>39</sup>Robert A. Peterson, *Calvin and the Atonement: What the Renowned Pastor and Teacher Said about the Cross of Christ* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2009), 65. Cf. G. C. Berkouwer also claims Calvin concluded that the two aspects of Christ’s obedience were manifested in his whole life. G. C. Berkouwer, *The Work of Christ* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1965), 321. Similarly, R. Scott Clark, in “Do This and Live: Christ’s Active Obedience as the Ground of Justification,” in *Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry: Essays by the Faculty of Westminster Seminary California*, ed. R. Scott Clark (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2007), 229–65, argues that Luther and Calvin alike held to “the imputation of active obedience” in sinners’ justification. Though the theological terminology of the distinction between the active and passive obedience of Christ did not surface until the 1570s, the essence of two aspects through one obedience of Christ was already fully present in Calvin’s thought.

<sup>40</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.16.5. He wrote, “Paul extends the oasis of the pardon that frees us from the curse of the law to the whole life of Christ. . . . in his very baptism, also, he asserted that he fulfilled a part of righteousness in obediently carrying out his Father’s commandment [Matt. 3:15]. In short, from the time when he took on the form of a servant, he began to pay the price of liberation in order to redeem us. Yet to define the way of salvation more exactly, Scripture ascribes this as peculiar and proper to Christ’s death. . . . the so-called ‘Apostles’ Creed’ passes at once in the best order from the birth of Christ to his death and resurrection, wherein the whole of perfect salvation consists. Yet the remainder of the obedience that he manifested in his life is not excluded. . . . And truly, even in death itself his willing obedience is the important thing because a sacrifice not offered voluntarily would not have furthered righteousness” (2.16.5).

## Justification, Imputation, and Union with Christ

Justification is grounded in Christ's imputed righteousness. Calvin drew connections between believers' righteousness in justification and their union with Christ, as Gaffin observes: "In expressing himself on justification, including imputation, he [Calvin] always, explicitly or implicitly, relates it to union with Christ."<sup>41</sup> Calvin repeatedly stressed that believers cannot partake of Christ's grace outside of him because "our righteousness is not in us but in Christ," and "even though God alone is the source of righteousness, . . . we are righteous only by participation in him."<sup>42</sup> The righteousness of Christ is shared with believers only through their spiritual union with him. Many scholars have therefore concluded that, for Calvin, forensic justification and its accompanying imputation is not incompatible with union with Christ.<sup>43</sup>

Indeed, imputation in justification is compatible with union with Christ in Calvin's view because partaking of Christ's righteousness leads to a fellowship of righteousness with him. In rebutting Osiander, Calvin said,

Therefore, that joining together Head and members, that indwelling of Christ in our hearts—in short, that mystical union—are accorded by us the highest degree of importance, so that Christ, having been made ours, make us sharers with him in the gifts with which he has been endowed. We do not, therefore, contemplate him outside ourselves from afar in order that his righteousness may be imputed to us but because we put on Christ and are engrafted into his body—in short, because he deigns to make us one with him. For this reason, we glory that we have fellowship of righteousness with him.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Richard B. Gaffin, "Union with Christ: Some Biblical and Theological Reflections," in *Always Reforming: Explorations in Systematic Theology*, ed. Andrew T. B. McGowan, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 285.

<sup>42</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.11.8.

<sup>43</sup>E.g., Mark Garcia argues that Calvin's forensicism in justification (saving righteousness) is not inconsistent with his doctrine of a personal union with Christ by the Spirit. Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 47-86. Cf. Venema, *Accepted and Renewed in Christ*, 150-62.

<sup>44</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.11.10.

Calvin emphasized justification takes place *in* Christ, being united to him, rather than outside of him. Moreover, justification is by *imputation* of Christ’s righteousness to those who are united to him: “Union brings justification as a forensic fellowship, a sharing in Christ’s righteousness, and it does so by imputation.”<sup>45</sup> Calvin did not describe imputation and union with Christ as competitive concepts because, rather, they are complementary. Gaffin concurs, understanding that Calvin’s “Spirit-worked union or bond...does not exclude imputation or make it somehow redundant. Rather, on its forensic side, union is a ‘fellowship of righteousness,’ and it is that by imputation.”<sup>46</sup> For Calvin, a fellowship of righteousness with Christ by imputation is a “differentiated union” with God—a union in which the Creator-creature distinction is sustained without the creatures being absorbed into the divine.<sup>47</sup> It is also a mystical or spiritual union through which believers participate in Christ’s supernatural life and all the redemptive benefits that he procured by his obedience and sacrificial death.

### **Sanctification: The Second Benefit of *Duplex Gratia***

#### **Sanctification**

Despite Calvin’s teaching on justification as the “main hinge,” and thus its centrality, he did not treat it first in the *Institutes*. Instead, his initial focus was on sanctification (repentance) and Christian life.<sup>48</sup> Reversing the order of treatment has

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<sup>45</sup>Gaffin, “Justification and Union with Christ,” 265.

<sup>46</sup>Gaffin, “Justification and Union with Christ,” 265. Similarly, he says, “Imputation, realized in union with Christ, results in a ‘fellowship of righteousness’. It is an imputed righteousness, which does not, indeed cannot, exist apart from that union.” Gaffin, “Union with Christ,” 286.

<sup>47</sup>Billings, “John Calvin’s Soteriology,” 442.

<sup>48</sup>Venema in “Union with Christ, the ‘Twofold Grace of God,’ and the ‘Order of Salvation’ in Calvin’s Theology,” 92, has pointed out that Calvin’s surprising decision in discussing sanctification before

occasioned many scholarly discussions. Gaffin suggests Calvin’s “primary motivation” was to expound the nature of the (saving) faith first before discussing justification.<sup>49</sup> On sanctification and saving faith, Calvin said, “When this topic is rightly understood it will better appear how man is justified by faith alone” because “actual holiness of life . . . is not separated from free imputation of righteousness.”<sup>50</sup> A justifying faith cannot be a dead faith, but a living one that desires God’s righteousness. Additionally, this logic is in place to answer the Roman Catholic charge of antinomianism.<sup>51</sup> Also, as some scholars suggest, because Calvin saw justification and sanctification as bestowed “at the same time,” the one never without the other, the order of discussion is “discretionary.”<sup>52</sup> Therefore, “this is not a logical or a theological order, but rather a ‘teaching’ order.”<sup>53</sup>

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justification has aroused considerable debate among interpreters of his theology.

<sup>49</sup>Gaffin, “Justification and Union with Christ,” 254. Cf. Gaffin, “Union with Christ,” 283-84; Venema in “Union with Christ, the ‘Twofold Grace of God,’ and the ‘Order of Salvation’ in Calvin’s Theology,” 104-6.

<sup>50</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.3.1. Similarly, in discussing justification he said, “because it was more to the point to understand first how little devoid of good works is the faith, through which alone we obtain free righteousness by the mercy of God; and what is the nature of the good works of the saints, with which part of this question is concerned” (3.3.1).

<sup>51</sup>See Gaffin, “Justification and Union with Christ,” 255; Gaffin, “Biblical Theology and the Westminster Standards,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 65 (2003): 175-77; William Edgar, “Ethics: The Christian Life and Good Works According to Calvin,” in Hall and Lillback, *A Theological Guide to Calvin’s Institutes*, 321-22.

<sup>52</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.16.1. Richard Gaffin argues, “For him [Calvin] the relative *ordo* or priority of justification and sanctification is indifferent theologically.” “Union with Christ: Some Biblical and Theological Reflections,” 284; Cf. Gaffin, “Biblical Theology and the Westminster Standards,” 175-77; Gaffin, “Union with Christ,” 284. However, scholars such as Fesko and Horton argue for the logical or theological priority of justification over sanctification on the reason that the former is the forensic basis for the latter in union with Christ. See, J. V. Fesko, *Justification: Understanding the Classic Reformed Doctrine* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2008); Fesko, *Beyond Calvin*; Michael Horton, *Calvin on the Christian Life: Glorifying and Enjoying God Forever* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 105; Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 143. Venema similarly thinks Calvin granted a kind of theological priority to justification because it “constitutes the framework within which the Christian life is one of free obedience” with the goal of sanctification. “Union with Christ, the ‘Twofold Grace of God,’ and the ‘Order of Salvation’ in Calvin’s Theology,” 93, 104, 109-10. Nevertheless, scholars such as Mark Jones see justification as an applied salvific benefit that does not cause sanctification. See Mark Jones, *Antinomianism: Reformed Theology’s Unwelcome Guest?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013), 58. Moreover, Richard A. Muller views Calvin presents sanctification as the second grace that “follows logically (not temporally) upon the first grace just as participation follows union, much as the grace of justification is identified as a prior *gradus* to the grace that brings forth good works and ‘after a certain manner’ as its cause.” Nevertheless, he argues Calvin leaves the issue of whether there is priority of union

Calvin referred to sanctification, the renewal of Christian life, as the second benefit of God’s grace. Often, he used the terms “regeneration” or “repentance” to denote this entire process of conversion.<sup>54</sup> Specifically, he stated, “In a word, I interpret repentance as regeneration, whose sole end is to restore in us the image of God.”<sup>55</sup> Calvin defined repentance as “the true turning of our life to God, a turning that arises from a pure and earnest fear of him; and it consists in the mortification of our flesh and of the old man, and in the vivification of the Spirit.”<sup>56</sup> By this definition, Calvin stressed the “inner renewal” of genuinely repentant souls in relation to God. While in justification, God deals with sin definitively, Calvin saw repentance as a gradual process of killing sin and returning to God as progress toward holiness.

### **Sanctification and Christian Life**

Calvin also connected regeneration to the goal of the Christian life, or “the transformation of life according the image of God.” He introduced his discussion on the Christian life with these words: “The object of regeneration, as we have said, is to manifest in the life of believers a harmony and agreement between God’s righteousness

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and justification over sanctification undecided. Calvin did not attempt to integrate mortification and vivification (as aspects of repentance and Christian life) into the sequence of the application of salvation, “[n]or does he typically indicate that justification is a cause of sanctification.” Muller also maintains “a natural order” “is neither temporal nor logical” and concludes that historically there was no clear articulation regarding the temporal, logical, or natural sequence of the application of salvation (*ordo salutis*) in Reformed tradition. Muller, “Union with Christ and the *Ordo Salutis*,” 210-11, 239. McCormack, in “What’s at Stake in Current Debates over Justification? The Crisis of Protestantism in the West,” asserts that Calvin appears to make union with Christ “logically, if not chronologically, prior to both justification and regeneration,” (101) while speculating about Calvin’s order of teaching on regeneration (sanctification) and justification (101-3). In these investigations, McCormack sees a problem with temporal simultaneity of justification and sanctification in Calvin (105).

<sup>53</sup>David Calhoun, *Knowing God and Ourselves: Reading Calvin's Institutes Devotionally* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2016), 161.

<sup>54</sup>See Venema, *Accepted and Renewed in Christ*, 9n1; Edgar, “Ethics,” 322.

<sup>55</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.3.8.

<sup>56</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.3.5.

and their obedience, and thus to confirm the adoption that they have received as sons.”<sup>57</sup>

Calvin wed human obedience and divine righteousness by noting the goal of regeneration (sanctification) by obedience is agreeing or conforming to the likeness of Christ to manifest “that our life express Christ, the bond of our adoption.”<sup>58</sup> Christian life is the outworking of the process of sanctification from which believers’ obedience increasingly shows God’s righteousness.

For Calvin, this new life in Christ demands “a right ordered life.”<sup>59</sup> He claimed the purpose of scriptural instruction for the Christian’s life was twofold: “The first is that the love of righteousness to which we are otherwise not at all inclined by nature, may be instilled and established in our hearts; the second, that a rule be set forth for us that does not let us wander about in our zeal for righteousness.”<sup>60</sup> Although Christians cannot attain perfection in this life, Calvin summarized the endeavor of Christian life: “The beginning of right living is spiritual, where the inner feeling of the mind is unfeignedly dedicated to God for the cultivation of holiness and righteousness.”<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, knowing the Bible provides instruction on the right ordering of Christian life, Calvin also thought some concrete teachings for conducting this life would be beneficial. He described the characteristics of the Christian life as: the denial of self; bearing the cross; meditation of

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<sup>57</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.6.1.

<sup>58</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.6.3.

<sup>59</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.6-10. For secondary resources on Calvin’s doctrine of Christian life: John H. Leith, *John Calvin’s Doctrine of the Christian life* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989); Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Christian life* (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1959); Michael Horton, *Calvin on the Christian Life: Glorifying and Enjoying God Forever* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014).

<sup>60</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.6.2.

<sup>61</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.6.5.

the future life; and the right use of the present life and its helps.<sup>62</sup> For Calvin, Christian life needs to consist of both the external and the internal: disciplines stemming from the love of righteousness in Christians' hearts.

The Christian life involves the denial of self because fundamentally Christians are not their own; they belong to God. This denial of self leads the Christian to disavow autonomy and all evil vices, yielding to God and his will. For Calvin, this inward orientation toward God would lead Christians to seek the benefit of their neighbors because they know the gifts they possess are bestowed by God for the service of others. On the subject of bearing the cross, Calvin discussed suffering and persecution. By being united to Christ, Christians come to share in his sufferings which are meant by God to serve as blessings so that Christians trust in God's power, experience his faithfulness, and train for patience and obedience. Even though Christians may not see sufferings as beneficial for them, Calvin asserted, "Our most merciful Father consoles us also in this respect when he asserts that in the very act of afflicting us with the cross he is providing for our salvation."<sup>63</sup> On the last two subjects, meditation of the future life and the right use of the present life, Calvin warned against excessive love and contempt of the present life. Meditation and the right longing for eternal life help Christians form proper attitudes on the present life. Although they cannot find immortality in this life, they should not deny it because the earthly life and its blessings are gifts of God to enjoy. How should Christians balance the denial and the enjoyment of the good gifts in this life?

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<sup>62</sup>See Edgar, "Ethics," 323-36.

<sup>63</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.8.11.

Furthermore, Calvin discussed calling, or obeying one's calling from God, as the principle of the right use of earthly good things.

Just as union with Christ and justification are the effect of the Spirit, Calvin maintained sanctification is no less the fruit of the power of the Spirit through faith:

For Christ imparts the Spirit of regeneration to us in order that he may renew us within, and that a new life may then follow the renewal of mind and heart. For if the function of giving repentance belongs to Christ, it follows that it is not something that has been put in the power of man. And since it is truly something of a wonderful reformation, which makes us new creatures, restores the image of God in us, transfers us from the slavery of sin to the obedience of righteousness, men will no more convert themselves than to create themselves.<sup>64</sup>

The Spirit is the divine agent of sanctification. As men are utterly incapable of giving themselves life, they are also powerless in transforming their lives to God. Thus, Calvin rejected any suggestion that sanctification is from works of men rather than a free gift of Christ effected by his Spirit. Calvin did not see the gospel as simply the forgiveness of sins, for it also consists of the promise of new life and growing into the likeness of Christ by the power of the Spirit.

### **The Relation of *Duplex Gratia***

While distinguishing the double grace of justification from sanctification, Calvin strongly insisted that they are inseparable in union with Christ.<sup>65</sup> He wrote:

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<sup>64</sup>Calvin, Commentary Acts 5:31 (*Johannis Calvini Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*, 48.111), quoted in Venema, *Accepted and Renewed in Christ*, 113.

<sup>65</sup>Gaffin says, "Accenting inseparability, Calvin speaks not of two graces but of 'twofold grace,' in the singular, although later in this section he does refer to regeneration as 'the second of these gifts' or, better, this 'second grace,' signaling distinction and a certain priority to justification." Moreover, in Calvin's description of the integral interrelatedness of justification and sanctification in union with Christ, Gaffin refers to the "union-twofold grace (*unio-deplex-gratia*) structure of Calvin's applied soteriology." He also summarizes Calvin's two aspects of the union: "The basic *unio-duplex gratia* structure of his applied soteriology is such that the participatory (union) has both forensic (justifying) and nonforensic (sanctifying, renovative) dimensions or aspects, without any confusion or interpenetration of these two aspects." Gaffin, "Justification and Union with Christ," 253-54, 262. Similarly, Garcia claims that, rather than simply the *duplex gratia* framework, the model of *unio Christi-duplex gratia* better reflects Calvin's union idea within his soteriology since the two basic saving benefits, justification and

Although we may distinguish them, Christ contains both of them inseparably in himself. Do you wish, then, to attain righteousness in Christ? You must first possess Christ; but you cannot possess him without being made partaker in his sanctification, because he cannot be divided into pieces [1 Cor. 1:13]. Since, therefore, it is solely by expending himself that the Lord gives us these benefits to enjoy, he bestows both of them at the same time, the one never without the other. Thus it is clear how true it is that we are justified not without works yet not through works, since in our sharing in Christ, which justifies us, sanctification is just as much included as righteousness.<sup>66</sup>

Justification and sanctification are inseparable because they are simultaneously and without a gap in time bestowed by the Spirit. Calvin repeatedly stressed in the *Institutes* that believers “could not grasp this [Christ’s righteousness] without at the same time grasping sanctification also. . . . Christ justifies no one whom he does not at the same time sanctify.”<sup>67</sup> The very reason that they are indivisible is because of the oneness of the person of Christ—for “Christ cannot be torn into parts.”<sup>68</sup> They are linked together by an everlasting and indissoluble reality in Christ by the Spirit. Calvin used a natural metaphor to demonstrate this inseparability: “If the brightness of the sun cannot be separated from

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sanctification, are distinct and yet inseparable because of a fundamental reality: the believer’s Spirit-effect of *unio cum Christo*. Therefore, Calvin’s structure of soteriology is the “triangulation of union with Christ, justification, and sanctification.” Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 1-7.

<sup>66</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.16.1. Calvin elsewhere similarly said, “We cannot be justified freely through faith alone without at *the same time* living holily. For these fruits of grace are connected together, as it were, by an indissoluble tie, so that he who attempts to sever them does in a manner tear Christ in pieces. Let therefore the man who seeks to be justified through Christ, by God’s unmerited goodness, consider that this cannot be attained without his taking him at the same time for sanctification, or, in other words, being renewed to innocence and purity of life.” John Calvin, Commentary on 1 Corinthians, at 1:30; *Werke*, 49:331 (emphasis added), quoted in Wübbenhorst, “Calvin’s Doctrine of Justification,” 112.

<sup>67</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.16.1. “Why, then, are we justified by faith? Because by faith we grasp Christ’s righteousness, by which alone we are reconciled to God. Yet you could not grasp this without at the same time grasping sanctification also. For he ‘is given unto us for righteousness, wisdom, sanctification, and redemption; [1 Cor. 1:30]. Therefore Christ justifies no one whom he does not at the same time sanctify. These benefits are joined together by an everlasting and indissoluble bond, so that those whom he illumines by his wisdom, he redeems; those whom he redeems, he justifies; those whom he justifies, he sanctifies” (3.16.1).

<sup>68</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.11.6. “God justifies not only by pardoning but by regenerating . . . as Christ cannot be torn into parts, so these two which we perceive in him together and conjointly are inseparable—namely, righteousness and sanctification. Whomever, therefore, God receives into grace, on them he at the same time bestows the Spirit of adoption [Rom. 8:15], by whose power he remakes them to his own image” (3.11.6).

its heat, shall we therefore say that the earth is warmed by its light, or lighted by its heat? . . . The sun, by its heat, quickens and fructifies the earth, by its beams brightens and illumines it.”<sup>69</sup> Just as the light and heat of the sun are inseparable and yet are always present and distinct, so justification and sanctification in union with Christ are inseparable without the one becoming the other. Calvin asked, “Now if it is true—a fact abundantly clear—that the whole of the gospel is contained under these two headings, repentance and forgiveness of sins, do we not see that the Lord freely justifies his own in order that he may at the same time restore them to true righteousness by sanctification of his Spirit?”<sup>70</sup> For Calvin, the complete gospel does not only offer free justification, but also sanctification—the renewal of the new person in Christ by the Spirit.

The inseparability of justification and sanctification is the inseparability of the person of Christ and the Spirit, who ministers to Christ himself and his benefits to believers. This inseparability is associated with the nature of the gospel that “sanctification is as much Christ’s and Spirit’s work as justification.”<sup>71</sup> Calvin did not want to separate the work of Christ and the work of the Spirit. In his Romans commentary on 8:9, he expressed: “That gratuitous remission of sins can never be separated from the Spirit of regeneration; for this would be as it were to rend Christ asunder.”<sup>72</sup> Calvin repeatedly stressed that it is “by the power of the Spirit, he imparts to

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<sup>69</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.11.6.

<sup>70</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.3.19.

<sup>71</sup>Venema, “Union with Christ, the ‘Twofold Grace of God,’ and the ‘Order of Salvation’ in Calvin’s Theology,” 112.

<sup>72</sup>Calvin, *Werke*, 49:144, quoted in Wübbenhorst, “Calvin’s Doctrine of Justification,” 111.

us his life and all the blessings which he has received from the Father.”<sup>73</sup> The same power of the Spirit remakes believers into Christ’s image. Wübbenhorst explains that “Calvin refuses to distribute the work of justification to Christ and the work of sanctification to the Spirit. Rather, he regards Christ as the material content of both the righteousness imputed to us in justification *and* the repentance inspired in us in sanctification. Similarly, the Spirit is the *energy* involved when sinners gain the power to believe *both* that their sins are forgiven *and* that God is graciously disposed toward them.”<sup>74</sup> In other words, the interrelatedness of justification and sanctification does not restrict one from the other because of the unity of God’s work through the Spirit. As Venema claims, “This unity between justification and sanctification in Calvin’s theology rests upon the unity of the Triune God’s work of redemption, not only in restoring fellowship with his sinful creatures, but also in recreating them after his image.”<sup>75</sup> The Spirit does not only unite us to Christ, but also continues to dwell within us and reign in us. Therefore, “the ‘motivation’ for the believer’s sanctification is not simply ‘gratitude’ for what has been received in justification. The principal basis for the believer’s sanctification is that it belongs to God’s gracious purpose in Christ to renew the believer in holiness.”<sup>76</sup> Sanctification cannot be separated from justification because being remade in the image of God is his purpose for reconciliation. Therefore, “in a soteriological

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<sup>73</sup>Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel according to John*, 183-84.

<sup>74</sup>Wübbenhorst, “Calvin’s Doctrine of Justification,” 115 (emphasis original).

<sup>75</sup>Venema, *Accepted and Renewed in Christ*, 206.

<sup>76</sup>Venema, “Union with Christ, the ‘Twofold Grace of God,’ and the ‘Order of Salvation’ in Calvin’s Theology,” 112.

context . . . To divorce the reality and necessity of sanctification from justification is in effect to tear Christ from his Spirit.”<sup>77</sup>

### **Justification and Good Works**

For Calvin, God’s declaration of righteousness (justification) is without works, but that does not eradicate good works in salvation: “For justification is withdrawn from works, not that no good works may be done, or that what is done may be denied to be good, but that we may not rely upon them, glory in them, or ascribe salvation to them.”<sup>78</sup>

Calvin denied good works as preconditional to or meritorious for justification, understanding that men must not have selfish reasons to boast about their salvation. Nevertheless, good works or Christian obedience are required of those who are saved. These works are not the “cause” of salvation but are within “an order sequence” of God’s ordained pattern of salvation.<sup>79</sup> Garcia explains that “good works belong to the established *ordo* of salvation as the *via* through which, according to the divine administration, those united to Christ ultimately receive their inheritance.”<sup>80</sup> Good works

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<sup>77</sup>Mark A. Garcia, “Christ and the Spirit: The Meaning and Promise of a Reformed Idea,” in *Resurrection and Eschatology: Theology in Service of the Church: Essays in Honor of Richard B. Gaffin Jr.*, ed. Lane G. Tipton and Jeffrey C. Waddington (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2008), 438.

<sup>78</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.17.1.

<sup>79</sup>Garcia, in *Life in Christ*, 89-147, argues that Calvin’s hermeneutical and theological principle in his soteriology, namely his “replication principle” supports the teaching that good works (non-meritious) are necessary for those who are justified. Specifically, he says, “The central theme of the replication principle is this: by virtue of union with Christ by the Spirit, the progress of eternal life reflects the pattern fleshed out in Christ’s own historical experience, which is first humiliation, and only then exaltation. More than a reflection (which would suggest mere resemblance with no existential connection in reality), however, the pattern is a Spirit-created replica in the life of the believer of what was and is true of Christ himself. Within this construct, the obedience of the believer, as the fruit of his union with Christ, is the *necessary* though *non-meritorious prerequisite* to eschatological reception of eternal life. Good works belong to the established *ordo* of salvation as the *via* through which, according to the divine administration, those united to Christ ultimately receive their inheritance” (141-42). Also see his conclusion on 255-57.

<sup>80</sup>Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 141-42.

are the necessary consequence or fruit of those who are justified, as ordained in the divine design of salvation.

More specifically, Calvin claimed good works are rooted in God's eternal election. Predestination does not destroy zeal for holiness and doing good works but motivates "the pursuit of good as the appointed goal of election."<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, although Calvin defined sanctification as internal renewal in mortification of sin and vivification of new life in relation to God, vivification involves "the desire to live a holy and devoted manner."<sup>82</sup> He did not limit sanctification to inward grace but saw it as a redirecting a person's entire life toward righteousness. Therefore, vivification under the governance of the Spirit leads believers to conform to the righteousness of God and manifests in their good works.

While Calvin encouraged the practice of good works for believers, he also refuted the false accusation that the doctrine of justification destroys the need for good works by stating, "For we dream neither of a faith devoid of good works nor of a justification that stands without them. This alone is of importance: having admitted that faith and good works must cleave together, we still lodge justification in faith, not in works. . . . it is that we are justified not without works yet not through works, since in our sharing in Christ, which justifies us, sanctification is just as much included as righteousness."<sup>83</sup> Good works are not excused for those who are justified because living faith necessarily produces good works. Bird similarly explains: "What this means is that

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<sup>81</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.23.12.

<sup>82</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.3.3.

<sup>83</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.16.1.

justification cannot be separated from the transforming power of the Spirit bequeathed to those who are ‘in-Christ.’”<sup>84</sup> Good works are the “fruits of regeneration as proof of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>85</sup> Therefore, good works necessarily emit from salvation as the fruit or the effect rather than the ground or the cause. A justified person will be sanctified by the Spirit and manifest new life in Christ by growing in faith and doing good works.

For Calvin, moreover, though good works are not the foundation of God’s acceptance of believers, they are “the means whereby we are gradually formed and strengthened in his fellowship.”<sup>86</sup> However imperfect, good works are accepted by God because believers’ sins have been pardoned. Consequently, these works are regarded as righteous because believers have been united to Christ and covered by his righteous.<sup>87</sup> William Edgar explains that “the good works of believers are counted righteousness because all is covered in Christ’s perfection. Good works are evaluated ‘otherwise than on their own merits.’ Indeed this kind of works righteousness only makes the power of justification shine stronger.”<sup>88</sup> Therefore, in his exposition of gospel, Calvin did not compromise God’s free grace in Christ but “properly included the renewal of the believer

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<sup>84</sup>Michael F. Bird, *The Saving Righteousness of God: Studies on Paul, Justification and the New Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 111.

<sup>85</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.14.19.

<sup>86</sup>Edgar, “Ethics,” 339. Cf. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.14.18.

<sup>87</sup>See Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.17.10. Calvin wrote, “After forgiveness of sins is set forth, the good works that now follow are appraised otherwise than on their own merit. . . . after the guilt of all transgressions that hinder man from bringing forth anything pleasing to God has been blotted out, and after the fault of imperfection, which habitually defiles even good works, is buried, the good works done by believers are accounted righteous, or, what is the same thing, are reckoned as righteousness [Rom. 4:22]” (3.17.8).

<sup>88</sup>Edgar, “Ethics,” 340.

by the indwelling power and work of Christ's Spirit."<sup>89</sup>

### **Justification, Sanctification, and the Christian Life**

Calvin understood that, with the double grace of union with Christ, the gospel “incorporates forensic and transformational images of salvation together, without absorbing one category into the other.”<sup>90</sup> In justification, God sets the believer free *from* the obligation to obey the law for salvation, and in sanctification, he sets the believer free *to* obey it for holiness.<sup>91</sup> In his doctrine of justification, Calvin repeatedly stressed the basis of God's acceptance of believers due to Christ's imputed righteousness and apart from any human works. On the other hand, he also strongly stressed that justification does not eliminate the need for good works (antinomianism) but, rather, encourages it.<sup>92</sup> While justification is definitive, those who are justified are free to obey the law, performing good works throughout their Christian life.

Therefore, by uniting to Christ, believers are not simply accepted by God but are also called to a life of obedience unto him. This union, which involves communion and fellowship with Christ, allows believers to participate in his supernatural life and share in his redemptive benefits. Calvin stated “that Christ is not outside us but dwells within us. Not only does he cleave to us by an indivisible bond of fellowship, but with a

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<sup>89</sup>Venema, “Union with Christ, the ‘Twofold Grace of God,’ and the ‘Order of Salvation’ in Calvin's Theology,” 111.

<sup>90</sup>Billings, “John Calvin's Soteriology,” 428.

<sup>91</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.19.1-16.

<sup>92</sup>Garcia states, “of those *not* focused upon, perhaps the Regensburg Colloquy, at which Calvin was present, is the most conspicuous by its absence. There, a consensus was reached among select Catholics and Protestants on the doctrine of justification. The importance of the *duplex iustitia* idea to this consensus was considerable, and supplies a useful backdrop for appreciating Calvin's own attempt to navigate the treacherous line between the sixteenth-century Scylla of a justification *on the grounds of* good works and the Charybdis of a justification *without* good works.” Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 5.

wonderful communion, day by day, he grows more and more into one body with us, until he becomes completely one with us.”<sup>93</sup> The grace that believers receive in their union and communion with Christ is an activating and liberating grace that enables them to grow daily in proportion to the life of Christ.<sup>94</sup> Therefore, union with Christ is not simply righteous fellowship; it is a living and transformative union that, by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, empowers believers to perform good works and be renewed after the image of God, meeting God’s purposes for redemption. The underlying nature of the union and communion is that they are *in* Christ, not apart from him, which keeps the two aspects of forensic and transformative indivisible and yet distinct. Thus, Calvin’s union as “a bond of fellowship and communion” is integrally connected to his doctrine of covenant.

### **John Calvin and Covenant Theology**

For decades, scholars have been divided on Calvin’s role in the development of covenant theology of the Reformed Orthodoxy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>95</sup> Some scholars have argued that there is a twofold development of covenantal thought within the Reformed tradition.<sup>96</sup> According to this “two-traditions” theory, one

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<sup>93</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.2.24.

<sup>94</sup>See Horton, *Calvin on the Christian Life*, 106.

<sup>95</sup>For Lillback’s summary of the three views that interpret Calvin’s theological system in tension with covenant theology (Federalism), see Peter Lillback, “Calvin’s Interpretation of the History of Salvation: The Continuity and Discontinuity of the Covenant: *Institutes* 2:10-11,” in Hall and Lillback, *A Theological Guide to Calvin’s Institutes*, 170-77.

<sup>96</sup>The idea of “two traditions” is suggested by scholars in their works such as, Charles S. McCoy and Wayne J. Baker, *Fountainhead of Federalism: Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991); J. Wayne Baker, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant: The Other Reformed Tradition* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1980); Baker, “Heinrich Bullinger, the Covenant, and the Reformed Tradition in Retrospect,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 29, no. 2 (1998), 359-76; Joseph C. McLelland, “Covenant Theology—A Re-Evaluation,” *Canadian Journal of Theology* 3 (1957): 182-88; Jens Møller, “The Beginning of Puritan Covenant Theology,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 14

line of thought was developed by the Rhineland Reformers, such as Huldrych Zwingli, Heinrich Bullinger, Johann Oecolampadius, and Martin Bucer, and the other was developed by the Genevan Reformers, such as Calvin and Theodore Beza. The latter emphasizes the monopleuric (i.e., unilateral) nature of the covenant, and the former emphasizes the dipleuric (i.e., bilateral) nature of the covenant. These are seen as competing and incompatible streams of covenant development. Moreover, this theory presupposes that Calvin's predestinarian theology is unilateral, unable to harmonize with a bilateral or mutual concept of covenant. However, many scholars have counter argued, insisting that there is a continuity between Calvin and the theology of a conditional covenant.<sup>97</sup> Richard Muller contends that scholars who maintain the "two-traditions" view have "dismissed the work of scholars who have identified Calvin's rather careful distinction between the unilateral and the bilateral aspects of covenant at the same time that they have refused to examine Calvin's biblical commentaries in which this distinction resides."<sup>98</sup> Specifically on the relation between predestination and covenant, Muller argues that

although there are some minor differences in formulation, both Calvin and Bullinger proposed a thoroughly gracious covenant given unilaterally by God as the basis of salvation and both used bilateral language in describing human responsibility in

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(1963): 46-67; Leonard Trinterud, "The Origins of Puritanism," *Church History* 20 (1951): 37-57; Richard L. Greaves, "The Origins and Early Development of English Covenant Thought," *The Historian* 21 (1968): 21-35; Kenneth Hagen, "From Testament to Covenant in the Early Sixteenth Century," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 3 (1972): 1-24.

<sup>97</sup>See Lillback, "Calvin's Interpretation of The History of Salvation," 178-80. Specifically, he contends that "there is no basis for the thesis that pits the Rhineland Reformers, Bullinger and Zwingli, against Calvin in terms of the mutuality and conditionality of the covenant of grace. There clearly is a difference of emphasis and difference of rationale for stating the distinctive doctrines of predestination and covenant in each of these Reformed theologians. But foundationally, all three affirm a conditional, mutual covenant of grace that is worked out in the context of a sovereign predestination that includes reprobation." Peter Lillback, "The Continuing Conundrum: Calvin and the Conditionality of the Covenant," *Westminster Theological Journal* 29 (1994): 73-74.

<sup>98</sup>Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition*, 66.

covenant with God. The Reformed doctrine of covenant is, therefore, neither opposed to nor in tension with the Reformed doctrine of predestination, which also declares a grace unilaterally bestowed by God and assumes human responsibility and obedience under and enabled by grace.<sup>99</sup>

Similarly, other Reformed scholars have argued that there is only one covenant tradition, affirming a harmony among the doctrine of predestination and a bilateral or mutual covenant of grace.<sup>100</sup> For instance, Bierma argues that tension between the unilateral and bilateral dimensions in the covenant of grace was found not only in Zwingli and Bullinger's doctrine of covenant but also in Calvin's.<sup>101</sup>

Both the Rhineland and Geneva Reformers understood the covenant of grace as God's unilateral promise of reconciliation and a bilateral covenant that demands commitment from those who are covenanted. Claiming one tradition as unilateral and another as bilateral is a false dichotomy because faith is demanded as an obligation or response in both Swiss theological traditions. The bilateral component in human response does not compromise the unilateral promise. Therefore, rather than claiming the Rhinelanders opposed the Geneva Reformers' unconditional covenant-promise by positing a law-covenant in which God's promise is conditional, the covenantal thoughts of both traditions consisted of monopleuric and dipleuric dimensions within the

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<sup>99</sup>Richard A. Muller, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 12.

<sup>100</sup>E.g., Lyle D. Bierma, "Federal Theology in the Sixteenth Century: Two Traditions?," *Westminster Theological Journal* 45 (1983): 304-21; Bierma, "Covenant or Covenants in the Theology of Olevianus," *Calvin Theological Journal* 22 (1987): 228-50; Bierma, "The Role of Covenant Theology in Early Reformed Orthodoxy," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 21/3 (1990): 453-62; Peter A. Lillback, *The Binding of God: Calvin's Role in the Development of Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001); Lillback, "The Continuing Conundrum," 42-74; Lillback, "Calvin's Interpretation of the History of Salvation," 168-204; Anthony A. Hoekema, "The Covenant of Grace in Calvin's Teaching," *Calvin Theological Journal* 3 (1967): 133-61; Paul Helm, "Calvin and the Covenant: Unity and Continuity," *Evangelical Quarterly*, 55 (1983), 65-81; Andrew A. Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought: A Study in the Reformed Tradition to the Westminster Assembly* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 253-343.

<sup>101</sup>Bierma, "Federal Theology in the Sixteenth Century," 321.

framework of a monergistic soteriology.<sup>102</sup> Although these two theological traditions were not in agreement on all points of the doctrine of covenant, there were no substantial difference in their understanding of the covenant.

### **Calvin's Use of the Covenant Idea**

As some scholars rightly recognize, though Calvin never wrote a separate chapter on the covenant of grace in the *Institutes* or a specific treatise on covenant, the covenant doctrine plays a significant role in his theology. His use of the covenant idea was extensive in the *Institutes* and also in his commentaries and sermons.<sup>103</sup> Many scholars acknowledge Calvin did not make covenant his central doctrine, “the dominating feature of his system,” or “the architectonic or governing principle,” but “certainly the idea of covenant is very widely dispersed throughout Calvin’s writings and impinges upon practically every area of doctrine.”<sup>104</sup> This observance is certainly correct because

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<sup>102</sup>In his survey of the covenantal thoughts of the early reformers, Bierma concludes, “all stressed both the conditions of human faith and obedience in the covenant and the divine sovereignty and initiative by which the elect are led to fulfill them. What has not always been recognized is, first, that in each of these thinkers there was both a monopleuric and a dipleuric dimension was never treated in such a way as to threaten the monergistic soteriology that underlay all early Reformed doctrine. That Calvin and the northern Swiss Reformed were not in agreement on all points of doctrine and practice cannot be denied, but their disagreements were not rooted in fundamentally different views of the covenant.” Lyle D. Bierma, *German Calvinism in the Confessional Age: The Covenant Theology of Caspar Olevianus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 61.

<sup>103</sup>Woolsey in *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought*, 255-56, outlines Calvin’s use of covenant terms in the four books of the *Institutes* in this way: about 4% in Book I (the Knowledge of God the Creator), 32% in Book II (the Knowledge of God the Redeemer), 17% in Book III (the Way we Receive the Grace of Christ), and 47% in Book IV (Means of Grace: Holy Catholic Church). Robert L. Reymond says, “Calvin makes extensive use of the covenant idea in his *Institutes* (see, e.g., II.ix-xi), but because he developed his *Institutes* along Trinitarian lines the covenant concept is not the architectonic or governing principle in that work.” Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 2nd rev. ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 504.

<sup>104</sup>Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought*, 254, 255. Cf. Helm, “Calvin and the Covenant,” 65-81. K. Scott Oliphint understands Calvin begins his *Institutes* covenantally not through using the term *covenant*, but in his expression of man’s relationship to God, his Creator, through the twofold knowledge of God and of self. See “A Primal and Simple Knowledge: *Institutes* 1:1-5,” in Hall and Lillback, *A Theological Guide to Calvin’s Institutes*, 16-43, especially 21. Similarly, Calhoun claims, “Calvin begins his treatment of ‘God the Redeemer in Christ’ with covenant history (II.1-11) rather than with Christological doctrine (which follows in II.12-17). He is concerned first of all to locate Christ in the

Calvin presupposed God is related to human beings in a covenantal relationship and he expressed history of salvation in a covenantal form.

## History of Salvation

Affirming humanity's covenantal relationship with God at creation, Calvin wrote that "all men adopted by God into the company of his people since the beginning of the world were covenanted [*foederatos*] to him by the same law and by the bond of the same doctrine as obtaining among us."<sup>105</sup> He also related covenant to the historical unfolding of salvation, expressing the history of redemption in one eternal covenant of God, the covenant of grace. In his concept of covenant, Calvin acknowledged differences between the Old and New Testaments and the superiority of the latter while insisting on continuity and unity between them.<sup>106</sup> Commenting on their unity and difference, Calvin stated, "The covenant with all the patriarchs is so much like ours in substance and reality that the two are actually one and the same. Yet they differ in the mode of dispensation."<sup>107</sup> The difference is not in substance, but in their external forms or ways by which God relates to his people. Calvin insisted God's covenant with Abraham is the same covenant as with Moses and David: "The Lord indeed entered into a covenant with

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Bible's full story, to understand where Christ begins to act in human history." Calhoun, *Knowing God and Ourselves*, 91.

<sup>105</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.10.1.

<sup>106</sup>Calvin stated five differences between the Old and the New Testaments in *Institutes*, 2.11.1-12. See Lillback's interpretation of Calvin's continuity and discontinuity of the covenant in *The Binding of God*, 142-61; Lillback "Calvin's Interpretation of The History of Salvation," 168-204; also Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought*, 268-76.

<sup>107</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.10.2. Calvin stressed the unity of the covenant in stating the spiritual covenant was common to the patriarchs in that "God of old bound the Jews to himself by this sacred bond, there is no doubt that he set them apart to the hope of eternal life. . . . the special mode which both illumines the souls of the pious into the knowledge of God and, in a sense, joins them to him. Adam, Abel, Noah, Abraham, and other spiritual patriarchs cleaved to God by such illumination of the Word" (2.10.7).

Abraham (Genesis xv. 5; xvii. 7), afterwards confirmed it by Moses (Exodus ii. 24; xxxiii.), and finally ratified this very covenant in the hand of David, that it might be eternal (II Samuel vii. 12).<sup>108</sup> This same covenant is ratified with the New Testament believers in the coming of Christ. Calvin also stressed that God's covenant with the Israelites unfolded from the covenant with Abraham. Furthermore, the Mosaic covenant that promulgated the law was not a distinct covenant. Though the Davidic covenant is referenced as "everlasting" in that God promises him a kingdom, it belongs to the same covenant.<sup>109</sup> Calvin pointed out that "that covenant by which God adopted to himself the sons of Abraham . . . has always separated believers from unbelieving folk, for it was found in Christ."<sup>110</sup> He further added: "There is no doubt that Adam, Noah, Abraham and the rest of the patriarchs . . . penetrated to the ultimate knowledge of him [i.e. as Redeemer] that in a way distinguished them from unbelievers."<sup>111</sup> The unity and continuity between the patriarchs of the Old Testament and the people of God in the New Testament is in their participation in a common salvation in Christ.<sup>112</sup> They share the same grace of salvation in Christ the Redeemer and are all covenanted to God through

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<sup>108</sup>Calvin, *Commentary on Isaiah 55:3*, VIII, iv, 160-1; *Johannis Calvini Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*, XXXVII, 284-85, quoted in Lillback, *The Binding of God*, 187.

<sup>109</sup>See Calvin, *Commentary on Isaiah 55:3*: "When God spoke once more of the covenant in David's name in relation to the return from exile, Calvin again emphasized the unity of the covenant: 'Nothing new is promised for which the Lord did not formerly enter into an engagement with his people; but it is a renewal and confirmation of the covenant that the Jews might not think that the covenant of God was made void on account of the long-continued banishment.'" Quoted in Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought*, 264.

<sup>110</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.6.1.

<sup>111</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.6.1.

<sup>112</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.10.1-23. In this section, Calvin presented "the similarity of the Old and New Testaments." The chief points of agreement are threefold: the hope of immortality, the free mercy of God, and the Mediatorship of Christ (2.10.2). Cf. Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought*, 260-65; Alister E. McGrath, *The Christian Theology Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 102.

Christ. Therefore, a basic continuity between the two testaments is that they are linked by *one* eternal covenant of grace.<sup>113</sup>

Moreover, Calvin described the various biblical covenants in this one covenant of grace as God's progressive revelation:

The Lord held to this orderly plan in administering the covenant of his mercy: as the day of full revelation approached with the passing of time, the more he increased each day the brightness of its manifestation. Accordingly, at the beginning when the first promise of salvation was given to Adam [Gen. 3:15] it glowed like a feeble spark. Then, as it was added to, the light grew in fullness, breaking forth increasingly and shedding its radiance more widely. At last—when all the clouds were dispersed—Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, fully illumined the whole earth [cf Mal., ch. 4].<sup>114</sup>

The covenant of grace thus comprises the entire scope of the history of salvation. It began at the Garden of Eden, expanded to gradually become clearer throughout history, and has finally culminated in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Noting the relationship between covenant and Christ, Calvin stated, “Let us then set forth the covenant that he once established as eternal and never perishing. Its fulfillment, by which it is finally confirmed and ratified, is Christ.”<sup>115</sup> Hoekema explains Calvin's position on Christ and the covenant, saying that “for Calvin the covenant idea is the thread which ties salvation history together. God saves his people by means of the covenant of grace which, though it passes through various historical phases, is basically one. That covenant is founded in Christ, who is therefore the center of history.”<sup>116</sup> Clearly, Calvin saw the unity and

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<sup>113</sup>See Hoekema, “The Covenant of Grace in Calvin's Theology,” 136.

<sup>114</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.10.20.

<sup>115</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.11.4; cf. He added, “the apostle contends that it ought to be terminated and abrogated, to give place to Christ, the Sponsor and Mediator of a better covenant.”

<sup>116</sup>Hoekema, “The Covenant of Grace in Calvin's Theology,” 139.

progressiveness of divine revelation in Scripture as centered on the covenant in Christ.

Was Calvin a covenant theologian? Calvin is recognized by some scholars as a forerunner of covenant theology whose covenant ideas were in substantial agreement with the Rhinelanders' mutual, conditional covenant and the later covenantal development within Reformed Orthodoxy. Certainly, not many later technical terms (covenant theology) are found in Calvin's works, but the main elements are there.<sup>117</sup>

Peter Lillback distinguishes between covenant idea and covenant theology (as a structural system in which covenant undergirds a dogmatic theology, an *ordo salutis*) and argues that Calvin developed "an extensive if incomplete" covenant theology.<sup>118</sup> According to Lillback, although Calvin did not develop the full extent of the doctrine of covenant as seen in later federal theology, the essential elements of this doctrine are present in his theology. Similarly, Woolsey distinguishes between covenant as an internal organizing or interpretive principle and an external theological system, assessing that although Calvin did not use covenant as a theological system, the covenantal character of Calvin's theology was pervasive in his writings: "Calvin saw the covenant as an integral part of God's dealing with his people and so it became for him a fundamental concept in his

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<sup>117</sup>R. Scott Clark concludes Calvin's points on covenant theology in this way: "It is true that there is relatively little of the later technical vocabulary (such as *pactum salutis*, *foedus operum*) in Calvin's *opera*. If one asks whether, for Calvin, there was an eternal agreement between the Father and the Son concerning the redemption of the elect, whether Adam was the federal representative of the human race, whether in him, all humanity broke the law, and whether Christ came to render obedience to that law promulgated in creation, and whether fallen humans are justified before God by an a covenant of grace *sola fide*, and whether those in the visible church are consequently obligated to obey the moral law of God—then Calvin's answers to such questions resonate quite strongly with the earlier covenant theology of the Swiss Reformed and the covenant theology of the late sixteenth century and that of seventeenth-century Orthodoxy." R. Scott Clark, "Christ and Covenant: Federal Theology in Orthodoxy," in *A Companion to Reformed Orthodoxy*, ed., Herman Selderhuis (Boston: Brill, 2013), 408.

<sup>118</sup>See Lillback, *The Binding of God*, 13-28, for his survey of the literature. He lists four general views on Calvin's role on the development of covenant theology: (1) Covenant theology is absent from Calvin's theology; (2) Calvin developed an incomplete form of covenant theology; (3) Calvin's theological system is in tension with covenant theology and especially with fully developed federalism; and (4) Calvin developed an extensive if incomplete covenant theology. Lillback supports the last group.

overall theological construction.”<sup>119</sup> Therefore, distinguishing between covenant idea as the organizing principle and covenant theology as the theological system, Calvin is recognized as a pioneer of covenant theology by using covenant idea to express the soteriological relationship.

### **Calvin’s Understanding of the God-Man Relationship**

Calvin described covenant as God’s way of accommodating himself to humanity to bind himself to humans for their wellbeing. God engaged with man in covenant because “the word covenant, was more honourable to the people. For when a king enjoins anything on his people, it is called an edict; but God deals with his own people more kindly, for he descends and appears in the midst of them that he may bind himself to his people, as he binds the people to himself.”<sup>120</sup> For Calvin, the idea of covenant is his understanding of the God-man relationship. Although God is unchangeable, he has accommodated himself to man’s capacity to engage himself to them and them to him. Lillback understands Calvin’s covenant as the binding of God: “the essence of Calvin’s conception of the covenant is the notion of the binding of God. This binding is God’s own act of joining Himself with His creatures. . . . the covenant is the means of union with God. It is the ‘bond’ between God and man. The gracious self-binding of the infinite God whereby He condescends to enter a mutual covenant with His

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<sup>119</sup>Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought*, 338. In fact, Woolsey claims that “the idea was used somewhere in the discussion of practically every area of doctrine demonstrates he integrated covenant into his theological system as a whole much more than can be found in any of his predecessors” (257).

<sup>120</sup>Calvin, *Commentary on Jeremiah*, 31:32, quoted in Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought*, 275.

fallen and unworthy yet sovereignly chosen people.”<sup>121</sup> God of the covenant is self-binding and binds his people to himself through his act of self-binding.<sup>122</sup> The covenant of grace is the manifestation of God’s initiative to restore his broken relationship with humans due to Adam’s sin. In this covenant, God binds himself in an oath and binds himself to his people with the promise of grace.

### **Mutuality and Conditionality of the Covenant**

Calvin’s view of covenant as God’s self-binding is not strictly one-sided or unconditional; it is a mutual binding of God to man and man to God. While God binds himself through covenant to bless his people, the corresponding human commitment is expected. Therefore, for Calvin, when God graciously establishes a relationship between himself and his people, he enters into a *mutual* agreement that obligates both parties to the covenant: “The relation, we know, between God and his people, as to the covenant, is, *mutual*.”<sup>123</sup> Calvin further described covenant as the means “by which God leagues himself with us, and we pledge ourselves to purify and holiness of life, since there is interposed here a mutual agreement between God and ourselves. For as in them the Lord promises to cancel and blot out any guilt and penalty contracted by us through our transgression, and reconciles us to himself in his only-gotten Son, so do we, in turn, bind

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<sup>121</sup>Lillback, *The Binding of God*, 137. Elsewhere, he writes, “Calvin believes the basic significance of the covenant to be the binding of God in sovereign self-humiliation with men, who are in turn bound to perform their duties of faith and obedience toward him” (307).

<sup>122</sup>This expression of covenant as God’s self-binding corresponds to Caspar Olevianus, who “understands the covenant of grace, then, first of all as a statement of God’s saving intention, a unilateral promise of reconciliation through Jesus Christ. When Scripture speaks of the ‘covenant of God,’ he maintains, it means the ‘oath of God,’ an oath with which God’s promises us His grace and thus binds Himself to us.” Bierma, *German Calvinism in the Confessional Age*, 64.

<sup>123</sup>Calvin, *Commentary on Zechariah*, 9:11 (emphasis mine).

ourselves to him by his profession, to pursue piety and innocence.”<sup>124</sup> The Abrahamic covenant was a mutual covenant for Calvin:

He now subjoins a more ample declaration of his grace, in order that Abram may endeavor more willingly to form his mind and his life, both to reverence towards God, and to the cultivation of uprightness; as if God had said, ‘See how kindly I indulge thee: for I do not require integrity from thee simply on account of my authority, which I might justly do; but whereas I owe thee nothing, I condescend graciously to engage in a *mutual* covenant.’<sup>125</sup>

Moreover, he asserted the Ten Commandments as God’s covenant that mutually binds himself to his people to govern them.<sup>126</sup>

Since covenant mutually binds God and his people, it entails a mutual stipulation. While God binds himself to bless his people in making the covenant, he also stipulates obedience from his servants. Calvin repeatedly commented in the *Institutes* that in his covenant with his people, God requires them to walk “in uprightness and sanctity of life.” Considering this mutual conception of the covenant, Calvin referred to its two parts in the covenant that God made with Abraham: “As God bind Himself to keep the promise given us, so the consent of faith and obedience is demanded from us.”<sup>127</sup>

Similarly, he said, “but the first access to God, the first entry into immortal life, is the forgiveness of sins. Accordingly, this corresponds to the promise of baptism that we shall

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<sup>124</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.14.19. Similarly, Zachary Ursinus defines God’s covenant as “a mutual promise and agreement, between God and men, in which God gives assurance to men that he will be merciful to them. . . . And, on the other side, men bind themselves to God in this covenant that they will exercise repentance and faith . . . and render such obedience as will be acceptable to him.” English Tr., G. W. Williard, *The Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism* (Grand Rapids: 1954), 97, quoted in Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray: Studies in Theology*, vol. 4 (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1982), 217.

<sup>125</sup>Calvin, Genesis 17:2, vol. I, I, 444; *Johannis Calvini Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*, XXIII, 235, quoted in Lillback, *The Binding of God*, 163.

<sup>126</sup>Calvin, *Sermons of the Ten Commandments*, ed. Farley, 45; *Johannis Calvini Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*, LIV, 242, quoted in Lillback, *The Binding of God*, 138.

<sup>127</sup>Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis*, 17:9, quoted in Poole, *Stages of Religious Faith in the Classical Reformation Tradition: The Covenant Approach to the Ordo Salutis*, 124.

be cleansed. Afterward, the Lord covenants with Abraham that he should walk before him in uprightness and innocence of heart [Gen. 17.1]. This applies to mortification, or regeneration.”<sup>128</sup> The mutual covenant consists of mutual obligations: “It is on God’s part a covenant of grace that he contracts with us, in which he promises forgiveness and a new life, so on our part it is an oath of spiritual warfare, in which we promise perpetual subjection to him.”<sup>129</sup> Furthermore, summarizing the covenant as a vow, Calvin stated “that, renouncing Satan, we yield ourselves to God’s service to obey his holy commandments but not to follow the wicked desires of our flesh [cf. Rom. 13:14]. It is not to be doubted that this vow, since it is attested by Scripture and indeed is required of all children of God, is holy and salutary.”<sup>130</sup> The mutual covenant does not only manifest in God’s promise of grace but also in his governance of his people. Because the covenant is mutual, it is conditional. Calvin also spoke of his governance of his people in the covenant as condition. The covenant demands the obedience of God’s people, and partaking of covenantal blessings is conditional to their obedience and observance of God’s law: “Blessings in this place are conditional: that is, blessed is he who observes the law of God, who maintains his service purely . . . who does not abuse his holy name. . . . This, I say, implies a condition.”<sup>131</sup> Therefore, Calvin used this mutual, bilateral, and

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<sup>128</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.16.3.

<sup>129</sup>Calvin, *Commentary on I Corinthians*, 1:13, quoted in Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought*, 307. Similarly, he wrote, as “mutual consent is required in all compacts, so when God invites His people to receive grace, He stipulates that they should give Him the obedience of faith.” *Commentaries*, Commentary on Exodus 24.5. Quoted in Bierma, *German Calvinism in the Confessional Age*, 41.

<sup>130</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.13.6.

<sup>131</sup>Calvin, *Corpus Reformatorum* 19, 86. Translation by Golding, op. cit., 175a. Calvin stated, “blessings in this place are conditional: that is, blessed is he who observes the law of God, who maintains his service purely, . . . who does not abuse his holy name. . . . This, I say, implies a condition. . . . Seeing then that we are all sinners . . . what shall become of us then? It is certain that we should be deprived of the

conditional language of the covenant to describe the obligation of humans who are in covenant with God.

### **Covenant Conditions**

Since the bilateral covenant has two parts, promise and condition, Calvin often used terms such as *stipulation*, *duty*, or *condition* to stress the human side of the covenant. As Muller observes, like Bullinger, Calvin “used bilateral language in describing human responsibility in covenant with God.”<sup>132</sup> The covenant is conditional upon human obedience for God’s blessings. For Calvin, obedience is inherent because a human is an image bearer of God, the Creator. Thus, covenant is a divine arrangement binding man to God, yet it is also a “condition” for man to have the promise of life. As Woolsey understands, “Calvin clearly stated that the *imago dei*, which man was to reflect, was expressed in the law which man as a creature was to obey. The ‘gracious’ accommodation of God in Eden was decidedly expressed in a legal manner designed to bind and unite Adam to God. Implicitly, it promised, on condition of obedience, the continuance of life.”<sup>133</sup> Human beings are image bearers of God who have his law written

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hope of salvation, if we had nothing else to lean upon than our own righteousness. But the promises which imply a condition depend on this, that God has received us for His people, and will have us take him for our father. Now this thing is grounded on nothing but his mercy. . . . And, secondly, it remains that since God has chosen us out, and set us apart for his service, we may not take liberty to do all manner of wickedness, but must endeavour to obey him. For this reason we must be aroused and spurred on by his promises to serve him. Thus you see how the conditional promises shall not be in vain in respect of us, namely, when they are referred to the freely bestowed goodness of God, whereby he receives us though we are not worthy to be so received; and secondly, when he does not impute our vices to us but though there are many stains and corruptions in us, yet he hides them and will not call them to account.” Quoted in Poole, *Stages of Religious Faith in the Classical Reformation Tradition*, 124. Similarly, he wrote blessings upon the observance of the law are conditional in the covenant: “And not only does the Lord adjudge them [our works] pleasing; he also extends to the blessings which under the covenant were owed to the observance of the law.” *Institutes*, 3.17.3.

<sup>132</sup>Muller, *After Calvin*, 12.

<sup>133</sup>Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought*, 281.

upon their hearts. In this way, the covenant is expressed in legal manner that its condition of obedience is implicit, the inherent duty of men.

Calvin also related obedience to the performing good works and observing the moral law as conditions or obligations of the covenant.<sup>134</sup> He maintained that justified believers are required to keep the law:<sup>135</sup> “In all covenants of his mercy the Lord requires of his servants in return uprightness and sanctity of life, lest his goodness be mocked . . . he wills to keep in their duty those admitted to the fellowship of the covenant.”<sup>136</sup> Calvin stressed the need for God’s children to embrace the Lord of the covenant with their whole hearts and minds by keeping his Word, the law of the covenant. Nevertheless, Calvin claimed that the conditions contributing to a believer’s justifying grace are not meritorious. In fact, he insisted that no one can fulfill the condition of the covenant by perfect obedience to the law given humanity’s depravity after the fall. The meritorious condition of the covenant could only be fulfilled by Christ’s obedience. Human good works are acceptable to God on the basis of the covenant. Consequently, although believers’ works are defiled and imperfect, they are pleasing to God because of his justifying grace in the covenant of grace.

For Calvin, believers’ obedience to the law is not simply a way of regulating the covenant relationship, but also an identity marker and a calling for the genuine

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<sup>134</sup>Garcia understands Calvin’s use of conditional language as within the gospel context. Garcia, “Christ and the Spirit: The Meaning and Promise of a Reformed Idea,” 430-38. Cf. Garcia, *Life in Christ*, 98-100.

<sup>135</sup>Calvin wrote, “I understand by the ‘law’ not only the Ten Commandments, which set forth a godly and righteous rule of living, but the form of religion handed down by God through Moses.” Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.7.1. Nevertheless, for Calvin, the *moral* law is the Ten Commandments (Decalogue) and Jesus’ summary of the law, as expounded in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.8. Moreover, the Decalogue (two Tables) is the same law that was engraved upon the hearts of all men (2.8.1).

<sup>136</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.17.5.

children of God:

Whenever, therefore, we hear that he [God] does good to those who keep his law, let us remember that the children of God are there designated by the duty that ought in them to be perpetual, and that we have been adopted for this reason: to reverence him as our Father. Accordingly, not to renounce our right of adoption, we must ever strive in the direction of our call. But again, let us keep in mind that the fulfillment of the Lord's mercy does not depend upon believers' works but that he fulfills the promise of salvation for those who respond to his call with upright life, because in those who are directed to the good by his Spirit he recognizes the only genuine insignia of his children.<sup>137</sup>

For Calvin, entry into the covenant is not due to personal moral performance. However, faith and obedience are evidences of personal participation in the covenant and in divine election, and of the lives of the true children of God: "For we have been adopted as sons by the Lord with this one condition: that our life express Christ, the bond of our adoption."<sup>138</sup> Ultimately, Calvin saw that faith and obedience are fruits of the Spirit rather than results of human effort. Believers can fulfill covenantal obligations because the Spirit works within them to do so.

### **Unilateral and Bilateral Covenant of Grace**

In Calvin's covenant of grace, God graciously enters into covenant with his people and graciously regenerates them to respond in faith and obedience. God establishes the covenant unilaterally and unconditionally, but it is nevertheless bilateral in that the covenant is mutual with conditions attached. The covenant is absolute in God's perfect grace in his "sending a Saviour and Redeemer, because this stood connected with the original adoption of those to whom the promise was made, which was itself free. . . . but as there were other things which were accessories to the covenant, a condition was

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<sup>137</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.17.6.

<sup>138</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.6.3.

appended, to the effect that God would bless them if they obeyed his commandments.”<sup>139</sup> For Calvin, the covenant is unconditional in that God’s promise is fulfilled by the life and death of his Son; therefore, it is solely in God’s undeserved grace, and yet “the obedience which God demands is particularly stated to be the obedience of his covenant, to teach us that we must not serve him by human inventions, but confine ourselves within the prescription of his word.”<sup>140</sup> Bierma sees in Olevianus this “Calvinistic notion of unilateral testament” on the one hand and “a bilateral commitment between God and the believer” on the other hand: “The covenant in this [latter] sense is the realization of the promise of reconciliation in the life of the believer through a mutual coming to terms. God not only binds himself to us in an oath that he will be our father, but we also bind ourselves to him in a pledge of acceptance of his beneficence. God promises that he will blot out all memory of our sins; we in turn promise that we will walk uprightly before him.”<sup>141</sup> Clearly Calvin maintained the covenant consists of two aspects. “First, the promise of reconciliation through Christ and, second, the reconciliation itself in the life of the believer; first, a monopleuric divine oath and, second, a dipleuric divine-human pledge.”<sup>142</sup> Similarly, Woolsey understands this duality: “Calvin was simply saying that with respect to the initiation, establishment, and ultimate intention of the covenant, the promise was gratuitous, unilateral, and inviolable; but with respect to participation in the

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<sup>139</sup>Calvin, Psalm 132:12, vol. VI. 154-55, *Johannis Calvini Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*, XXXII, 348-349, quoted in Lillback, *The Binding God*, 170.

<sup>140</sup>Calvin, Psalm 132:12, vol. VI. 154-55, *Johannis Calvini Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*, XXXII, 348-349, quoted in Lillback, *The Binding God*, 170.

<sup>141</sup>Bierma, “Federal Theology in the Sixteenth Century,” 317.

<sup>142</sup>Bierma, “Federal Theology in the Sixteenth Century,” 319.

blessings of the covenant, it was conditional and bilateral.”<sup>143</sup> Calvin believed the covenant’s unconditionality stemmed from God’s eternal nature while its conditionality was from humans’ temporal nature.<sup>144</sup> Nevertheless, the conditional aspect of the covenant is fundamentally held by the gratuitous and inviolable promise of God.

God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility intersect harmoniously in Calvin’s doctrine of covenant. His predestinarian theology that emphasizes God’s sovereign grace does not absolve humans’ responsibility, which is evident in his covenantal teachings. Calvin understood that because covenant is not strictly unconditional, it is bilateral, demanding human reciprocity. Therefore, a view suggesting the development of covenant theology as a way to give a certain level of responsibility to creaturely agents in Calvin’s one-sided doctrine of predestination does not stand.<sup>145</sup> In Calvin’s theology of covenant, God’s unilateral election in salvation and human actions are harmonious. As with other theologians in Switzerland, his doctrines of covenant (even conditional covenant) and predestination (even double predestination) are perfectly compatible. John von Rohr summarizes Calvin’s covenant theology:

Calvin’s theology was not unmindful of the covenant of grace and made it a prominent, though not central, feature. Calvin never wrote a treatise on the covenant, nor did he devote a separate chapter to it in the *Institutes*, but he read biblical history as the story of God’s covenant relationship with a chosen people and then further saw that relationship as one in which there is a mutual binding. God’s mercy is a committed mercy and calls for a committed response.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>143</sup>Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought*, 316.

<sup>144</sup>See Bierma, “Federal Theology in the Sixteenth Century,” 321; Hoekema, “The Covenant of Grace in Calvin’s Teaching,” 133-61.

<sup>145</sup>See R. Michael Allen, *Reformed Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2010), 45.

<sup>146</sup>John von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986),

Calvin's absolute covenant does not eliminate its bilateral and mutual qualities that call for commitment and obedience.

### **Covenant and Dual Covenantal Benefit: Justification and Sanctification**

#### **Union with Christ and Covenant**

Calvin believed union with Christ was a means to commune and fellowship with God in covenant of grace. He described union with Christ in a covenantal context and thus indicated union has an indispensable "covenantal" character. It is in Christ through covenant of grace, believers receive the double grace: "And there is no obstacle in the fact that no one can maintain in this life the perfect obedience to the law which God requires for us. For inasmuch as this stipulation is included in the covenant of grace under which are contained both forgiveness of sins and the Spirit of sanctification"<sup>147</sup> Calvin saw two aspects to the covenant of grace: partaking of Christ's righteousness (justification) and being cultivated in the sanctified life by Christ's Spirit (sanctification). Therefore, justification and sanctification are the two primary *covenantal* benefits for the believer in uniting with Christ. Commenting on these benefits, Edgar claims, "There is a primacy in Calvin's understanding of living for the glory of God. In his view we are being claimed by God for his own glory in such a way that both justification and sanctification are 'members' of the same covenant of grace, through our union with Christ."<sup>148</sup> Similarly, Lillback says, "Calvin's basic thesis argues for the believer's union with Christ, which through the covenant of grace, offers the dual, distinct yet inseparable

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<sup>147</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.13.6.

<sup>148</sup>Edgar, "Ethics," 322.

covenant benefits of justification and sanctification, a sanctification that begins with and encompasses regeneration or renewal by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>149</sup> Since Calvin understood union with Christ in a soteriological context, this union has a relational and covenantal concept.

In the covenant of grace, Calvin saw justifying grace and sanctifying grace as distinct and yet inseparable. He believed all legal conditions of the Edenic relationship, including righteous requirements and penalties or punishments, have been fully met by Christ’s substitutionary works: “Forgiveness of sins, then, is for us the first entry into the church and kingdom of God. Without it, there is for us not covenant (*foederis*) or bond (*conjunctionis*) with God.”<sup>150</sup> Nevertheless, for “Calvin . . . the covenant of grace did not end with the forgiveness of sins and the justifying of ungodly sinners through the works of Christ. It also incorporated the entire Christian life of obedience, prayer, warfare, and good works.”<sup>151</sup> Calvin never separated justification and sanctification because he maintained God “justifies no-one whom he does not at the same time sanctify.”<sup>152</sup> He explained it is the nature of the gospel: “Now if it is true—a fact abundantly clear—that the whole of the gospel is contained under these two headings, repentance and forgiveness of sins, do we not see that the Lord freely justified his own in order that he

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<sup>149</sup>Peter A. Lillback, “Calvin’s Development of the Doctrine of Forensic Justification: Calvin and the Early Lutherans on the Relationship of Justification and Renewal,” in *Justified in Christ: God’s Plan for Us in Justification*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2007), 79. Moreover, Lillback claims “the covenantal basis of the two graces of salvation are encountered in differing contexts of Calvin’s teaching. Thus the history of salvation in its covenantal form has had these dual benefit from the very beginning of the world.” *The Binding of God*, 181.

<sup>150</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.1.20.

<sup>151</sup>Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought*, 300.

<sup>152</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.16.1.

may at the same time restore them to true righteousness by sanctification of his Spirit?”<sup>153</sup> Moreover, those who claim only one benefit “tear apart God’s covenant, in which we see our salvation contained, and topple it from its foundation. Not only are they guilty of sacrilege in separating things till now joined.”<sup>154</sup> A distinct forensic justification does not exclude the need of renewal and obedience in sanctification for those who are united to Christ. This inseparability of justification and sanctification is related to Calvin’s view of law and gospel in the covenant.<sup>155</sup>

### **Covenant, Law, and Grace**

For Calvin, the law and the gospel are not antithetical; they are harmonized in God’s forgiveness and in the Spirit who enables believers to obey the law.<sup>156</sup> He maintained the law in threefold division: ceremonial, judicial, and moral. He attributed the first two exclusively to the nation of Israel.<sup>157</sup> However, he viewed the moral law as expressing God’s character and will for his creatures. The moral law “is nothing else than a testimony of natural law and of that conscience which God has engraved upon the minds of men,”<sup>158</sup> and it is the standard of his “eternal rule of righteousness” even after

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<sup>153</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.3.19.

<sup>154</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.10.45.

<sup>155</sup>Byung-Ho Moon, *Christ the Mediator of the Law: Calvin’s Christological Understanding of the Law as the Rule of Living and Life-Giving* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2006). By examining Calvin’s Christological understanding of the law in light of his concept of *Christus mediator legis*, Moon argues that Calvin developed the theological use of the law from its normative (third) use and furthermore sustained the unity and continuity between *lex vivendi* (rule of living) and *lex vivificandi* (life-giving). Therefore, Calvin’s Christological understanding of the law on the basis of his view of *Christus mediator legis* grounds the continuity of the covenant of works (the Adamic administration) and the covenant of grace.

<sup>156</sup>See Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.17.1-15; Lillback, “The Agreement of Law and Gospel in the Covenant of Mercy,” in *The Binding of God*, 194-209.

<sup>157</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.20.15.

<sup>158</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.20.16.

the fall.<sup>159</sup> Salvation in Christ does not change this fact. The law of God “did not supplant the entire law as to bring forward a different way of salvation. Rather, it confirmed and satisfied whatever the law had promised and gave substance to the shadows.”<sup>160</sup> Calvin claimed Christ as the substance of the law and as the legal substitute who perfectly obeyed the law on behalf of the law-breakers. Additionally, Christ’s status as this substitute does not do away with the law but allows those who are justified to be free *from* the bondage of sin and also free *to* obey God’s law willingly. Calhoun expounds on this concept, noting that “the Christian is freed from the law by the righteousness of Christ, but we are now free from the law, free to embrace it joyously and to live according to it.”<sup>161</sup> Calvin understood that Christ sets believers free from the curse and constraint of the law in order to set them free to obey the law without compulsion.<sup>162</sup> In other words, Christ’s obedience to the law frees sinners from the law and justifies them, restoring them to obey the law’s instruction.

Furthermore, Calvin viewed the moral law to have three uses: 1) it shows God’s righteousness and human sin, pointing them to Christ;<sup>163</sup> 2) it restrains humans’ sin; and 3) it serves as the “rule of life” for the believers.<sup>164</sup> For Calvin, the first use of the law is its preparative use that discloses to sinners God’s righteousness and their sinfulness, leading them to seek salvation in Christ. He developed the second use in the

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<sup>159</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.20.15.

<sup>160</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.9.4.

<sup>161</sup>Calhoun, *Knowing God and Ourselves*, 198.

<sup>162</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.19.1-16.

<sup>163</sup>See Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.7-8.

<sup>164</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.20.15.

context of his discussion of “civil government,” from which he claimed the moral law provides the moral principle for a civil society. Moreover, Calvin referred to the third use of the law as the “principal use.” It applies to the regenerates, those in whom the Spirit dwells and who have the law written upon their hearts.<sup>165</sup> The law profits them by instructing them in God’s divine will and exhorting them to be strengthened in obedience unto God so they progress in sanctification. Therefore, for Calvin, the law’s power to condemn and bind is abrogated but continues to function in believers’ renewal after the image of God.<sup>166</sup> For believers, the law is “not now acting toward us as a rigorous enforcement officer who is not satisfied unless the requirements are met;” rather, “the law points out the goal toward which throughout life we are to strive.”<sup>167</sup> Woolsey states that “Calvin’s third use of the law was unfolded in the doctrine of the Christian sanctification, or ‘rightly orderly life,’ by which God’s image was restored.”<sup>168</sup> The law is annulled for believers in relation to justification but not with respect to sanctification. As the expression of his will and character, God’s law continues to be the directive for a believer’s life—“a rule of life.” By his coming, Christ fulfilled the law to “remedy transgression of it,” rather than to take “away from the observance of the law.” Therefore, according to Calvin, “through Christ the teaching of the law remains inviolable.”<sup>169</sup> There is no disharmony between Christ and the law. In fact, Christ himself has restored the right

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<sup>165</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.7.12.

<sup>166</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.7.14-17.

<sup>167</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.7.13.

<sup>168</sup>Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought*, 299-300. Cf. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.6.1.

<sup>169</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.7.14.

understanding of the law.<sup>170</sup>

### **Law/Gospel Distinction: Letter-Spirit**

Calvin formulated his understanding of the agreement between the law and the gospel from the pneumatological emphasis in his theology. For Calvin, “the law was never intended to be a rule of life apart from the gift of the Spirit. The Law itself teaches that ‘for the fulfillment of all God’s commands the grace of the Lawgiver is both necessary and is promised to us.’”<sup>171</sup> Therefore, the Spirit does not simply apply salvation to believers but also indwells them to transform and renew them after his image. Supporting this renewal, Calvin said, “Since we are clothed with the righteousness of the Son, we are reconciled to God, and renewed by the power of the Spirit to holiness.”<sup>172</sup> Furthermore, relating the third use of the law and the Spirit, Calvin stated, “The third and principal use, which pertains more closely to the proper purpose of the law, finds its place among believers in whose hearts the Spirit of God already lives and reigns.”<sup>173</sup> The indwelling Spirit enables believers to be obedient and do good works to fulfill the law. Therefore, for Calvin, law-gospel distinction is not antithetical but has a letter-spirit basis.<sup>174</sup> In the covenant, the law, rather than the letter that kills, is enlivened by the Spirit. As Jones claims, “The Spirit of Christ is necessary for fulfillment of the covenant precepts, and the covenant Lord graciously promises the illumination and enablement of

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<sup>170</sup>See Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.8.7.

<sup>171</sup>David Clyde Jones, “The Law and the Spirit of Christ: *Institutes* 2:6-9,” in Hall and Lillback, *A Theological Guide to Calvin’s Institutes*, 315.

<sup>172</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.11.17.

<sup>173</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.7.12.

<sup>174</sup>E.g., Lillback argues Reformed theology in the tradition of Calvin maintains a letter-spirit hermeneutic rather than Lutheran’s law/gospel distinction. *The Binding of God*, 207.

his Spirit to bring it to fruition.”<sup>175</sup> This harmony of the law and the gospel in the covenant led Calvin to insist that the obligations of the moral law are contained in the covenant itself. Expounding on these notions, Woolsey states that “Calvin was insisting that the conditions of the covenant, or the obligations of the moral law, were contained in the covenant itself. The true believer was enabled to fulfill them acceptably, though still imperfectly, through the grace of the covenant and the power of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>176</sup> Thus, believers can keep the covenantal condition of obedience because of the enabling work of the Spirit.

Since the law and the gospel are not meant to be antithetical, they are in agreement in the covenant. Calvin understood the “oldness” of the Old Testament as the bare law, separated from its purpose. This law also separates from Christ, from the gospel, and only brings condemnation. The “newness” of the New Testament is that the law is written in the heart of the regenerated person by the operation of the Holy Spirit. Additionally, because the law is not antithetical to the gospel, it becomes the “rule of life” from the gospel in Christ.<sup>177</sup> Uniting with Christ and the Spirit in the covenant, the law is restored to God’s original design.<sup>178</sup> As Billings argues, Calvin understood that “participating in Christ and obeying the law are not separate acts for believers. Rather,

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<sup>175</sup>Jones, “The Law and the Spirit of Christ,” 315.

<sup>176</sup>Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought*, 303-4.

<sup>177</sup>As Jones claims, “Calvin carefully distinguishes between the power of the law (to condemn) and the instruction of the law (to be observed). For those who are united to Christ by faith, the law is a teacher, but to an enforcer (2.7.15). The law continues to exhort believers, ‘to pinch them awake to their imperfection,’ but ‘it may no longer condemn and destroy their consciences by frightening and confounding them’ (2.7.14). The law has no power to bind the consciences of believers by a curse because Jesus has fully endured the curse of the law on the cross.” Jones, “The Law and the Spirit of Christ,” 314.

<sup>178</sup>Edgar says, “Basically Calvin argues that the promises of the law are still in effect, only they must be understood through the gospel. The law by itself only condemns our pretended good works. But the law as lived-out because of the gospel enables us to walk in righteousness without having to earn our salvation (*Institutes*, 3.17.3).” Edgar, “Ethics,” 338-39.

obedience to the moral law and participation in Christ are inseparable dimensions of God's gracious accommodation to reunite humanity to God."<sup>179</sup> He adds, "Calvin's vision of the Christian as participating in Christ through obeying the law of love takes on a new cast. Obedience to the law is a participation in God's accommodating covenant consummated in Christ. Obedience to the law involves nothing less than a participation in Christ, the mediator who reveals the true content of the law and acts as the substance of the law."<sup>180</sup> Therefore, for Calvin, obedience to the law is obedience to Christ.

Calvin used the covenant of the law in twofold sense. Strictly, it is used as a "works-righteousness principle," and, broadly, it is the "rule of life." Discussing these uses, Lillback asserts, "In the first, there is a profound difference between law and gospel. In the second, however, there is no longer any difference between law and gospel since the Spirit has been added to the law along with Christ's forgiveness."<sup>181</sup> Therefore, for Calvin, the gospel brings freedom *from* guilt and curse a freedom *to* the obedience of the law. The observance of the law in duty and obligation is itself not legalistic since believers' obedience in sanctification is entirely within the framework of the covenant of grace: "For Calvin the law did 'constitute an inalienable part' of the covenant, but it was no 'petty casuistic legalism' which was mediated through the commandments. It was rather the will of a gracious God, who having reconciled his disobedient and ungrateful people to himself, was to be known in a living personal relationship through obedience to

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<sup>179</sup>J. Todd Billings, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift: The Activity of Believers in Union with Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 159.

<sup>180</sup>Billings, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift*, 163.

<sup>181</sup>Lillback, *The Binding of God*, 158.

the demands of his character and will.”<sup>182</sup> In justification, Calvin asserted an antithesis between law or works and gospel, but he did not support the same in sanctification. There is no place for good works for those God accepts to be in union and communion with Christ, but he approves of and demands that good works follow true faith.<sup>183</sup>

Calvin’s double covenantal benefit helps to explain God’s free grace that necessitates good works for believers. He clarified how the two come together without contradiction in his covenantal doctrine. Moreover, his view of the law and the gospel distinction in the covenant is consistent with this understanding. Lillback adequately summarizes Calvin’s doctrine of justification and sanctification in the covenant of grace:

Calvin’s final expression of justification is in a covenantal context that declares that renewal or regeneration is the beginning of the Holy Spirit’s work of sanctification and is thus not part of justification. Instead, it is a distinguishable benefit of the covenant, a covenantal benefit that is simultaneous and inseparable with forensic justification although clearly distinct from it and logically subordinated to it. . . . Calvin, by teaching an explicit forensic justification that excludes renewal, is able to give renewal its full expression of the new nature’s new obedience, since it is a necessary yet distinguishable accompaniment of God’s covenant of grace.<sup>184</sup>

Calvin saw the harmony among forensic justification and transformative sanctification in a covenantal context because “Christ cannot be teared in pieces,” for it is God’s intention that he does not only grant sinners the benefit of justifying grace but also renews them by the Spirit.

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<sup>182</sup>Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought*, 305.

<sup>183</sup>Lillback argues that the Reformed hermeneutic from the tradition of Calvin uses the covenantal hermeneutic that maintains the agreement between the law and the gospel in the covenant which is different from Luther’s grace and law antithesis. Lillback, *The Binding of God*, 125.

<sup>184</sup>Lillback, “Calvin’s Development of the Doctrine of Forensic Justification,” 54. Lillback is criticized in making “a serious theological mistake when he applies Calvin’s ‘mutuality and conditionality of the covenant of grace’ to the doctrine of justification and salvation, denying the substantial implication of the distinction between law and gospel in its arena” and moved to the monocovenantal thought of the Union with Christ School scholars at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia. See Jeong Koo Jeon, *Covenant Theology and Justification by Faith: The Shepherd Controversy and Its Impacts* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 248-50.

## Unconditional and Conditional Covenant in Respect to Dual Benefits

For Calvin, the covenant is utterly gracious because God enters into it with believers and supplies what is needed to activate it, yet he also claimed that the covenant consists of “conditions.” Nevertheless, he never explicitly made the connection between the covenant’s unconditionality and conditionality to its dual benefits of justification and sanctification or specifically denoted justification as the “unconditional” covenantal benefit and sanctification as the “conditional” covenantal benefit. However, this implication is logical.<sup>185</sup> As discussed above, it can be supported by Calvin’s view of the covenant as both unconditional and conditional and his emphasis on the two chief covenantal benefits of justification and sanctification as distinct and yet inseparable in union with Christ. While he maintained justification as God’s unmerited grace, he stressed the covenant as mutual and conditional—conditioned upon obedience and good works. The substance of the covenant or the sum of the gospel consists of remission of sin and renewal after God’s image. While remission of sin is solely God’s unilateral grace, renewal in Christian life involves human responsibility.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>185</sup>Like Calvin, Heidelberg theologian Caspar Olevianus (1536-87) was known for making the double benefit of justification and sanctification in union with Christ central to his covenant theology. He maintained the double benefit as forgiveness of sin (justification) and inner renewal (sanctification) within a unilateral and bilateral covenant of grace, the latter of which is a process that never completes in this life, but with the help of the Holy Spirit makes progress daily. Olevianus did not make an explicit connection between justification and sanctification to the unilateral and bilateral covenant. Nevertheless, his covenant theology consists of a hint of their relationship, as Calvin’s does. See Bierma, *German Calvinism in the Confessional Age*; Bierma, “Covenant or Covenants in the Theology of Olevianus,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 22 (1987): 228-50; Bierma, “The Role of Covenant Theology in Early Reformed Orthodoxy,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 21/3 (1990): 453-62; R. Scott Clark, *Caspar Olevian and the Substance of the Covenant: The Double Benefit of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008).

<sup>186</sup>Bierma understands Olevianus’ double benefit of the covenant in this way: “The Kingdom of God is not merely a promise of reconciliation but the realization or fulfillment of that promise in the lives of its citizens. It is the administration of salvation whereby Christ the King calls and gathers. . . . He applies the *double benefit* of the covenant, forgiveness and inner renewal, to their hearts. This is a gradual process, never complete in this life. Day in and day out the first of the Holy Spirit burns away the rubbish of our old allegiances. . . . in his discussion of covenant in the broader sense, Olevianus emphasizes that the reconciliation between King and subject involves a mutual commitment.” Bierma, *German Calvinism in*

Calvin used bilateral and conditional language, as noted earlier, to describe human obligation in the process of sanctification for believers in covenant with God. The doctrine of justification does not eliminate sanctification, as one cannot be without the other. Since Calvin maintained justification and sanctification within union with Christ in an absolute and mutual covenant context, what is implicit in his teaching can become explicitly known. Specifically, because of the reciprocal nature of the mutual and bilateral covenant, justification is God's unilateral or unconditional bestowal of undeserved grace to his elect, and sanctification is his conditional demands of obedience. Woolsey summarizes that Calvin "painstakingly demonstrated the unity and continuity of the covenant throughout his works. He showed the harmony of law and gospel in the context of the covenant. He explained both the unilateral and bilateral significance of the covenant. He related the covenant to his doctrine of predestination and election, thereby showing the twofold application of the covenant in relation to the visible church in 'hidden' elect of God."<sup>187</sup> Calvin's stress of human obedience, obligations, and the performance of good works in the covenant is consistent with his view of the law and the gospel, which are harmonized in the covenant.

Out of his pure grace, God elects his people from eternity unconditionally and justifies them in time and space without any precondition. Furthermore, by binding himself to his people in covenant, God simultaneously binds them to himself and demands obedience and uprightness in the process of renewal. As Lillback claims, "The covenant is synonymous with the two great redemptive benefits of Christ, namely,

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*the Confessional Age*, 71.

<sup>187</sup>Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought*, 337.

justification by faith alone and the sanctification of the Holy Spirit. This bipartite nature of the covenant allows Calvin to assert justification by faith alone, that is nevertheless accompanied simultaneously by an inseparable, yet distinguishable and subordinate inherent righteousness.”<sup>188</sup> Therefore, Calvin properly linked imputation and impartation of Christ’s righteousness in a covenantal framework, freeing him “to discuss the inseparable character of good works with justification, all the while affirming justification by faith alone.”<sup>189</sup> With the two aspects of the union, imputation and impartation (or transformation), Calvin held together an unconditional and conditional covenant. The conditional aspect of the covenant is not contingent on human effort but on God’s ongoing work by the Spirit. For Calvin, there is no real tension between a gracious salvation achieved by Christ, applied by the Spirit, and received by faith and the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit to indwell and transform believers into Christ’s image. These two aspects are not detached but are held together properly in a gracious salvation that allows for human responsibility. In other words, Calvin was able to support believers’ salvation by divine grace alone and emphasize their need for obedience and good works in their salvation precisely because they are undergirded by a unilateral and bilateral covenant.

### **Conclusion**

Calvin was not the initiator of covenant theology, as his covenant ideas were already present in Zwingli and Bullinger’s theologies. Nevertheless, Calvin was one of the first early Reformers who integrated the covenant concept pervasively in his theological system. He coordinated the two major salvific benefits, justification and

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<sup>188</sup>Lillback, *The Binding of God*, 307.

<sup>189</sup>Lillback, *The Binding of God*, 209.

sanctification, under the rubric of union with Christ, the sum of the gospel. His explicit distinction of the double-benefit of justification and sanctification within an unconditional and mutual or bilateral covenant of grace implies that the covenant's dual aspects of divine promise and mutual binding of wills correspond to justification and sanctification respectively. Therefore, Calvin's doctrine of covenant brings together the double grace that allowed him to stress the conditionality of the covenant without revoking the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Therefore, Calvin's doctrine of predestination and human responsibility intersects harmoniously in his doctrine of covenant.

As the next chapter will demonstrate, Calvin's stress of justification and sanctification as distinct and inseparable in a unilateral and bilateral covenant found continuity in his successors, the Reformed federal theologians of the post-Reformation. As Hoekema claims, Calvin taught "that the covenant reveals both the priority of God's grace and the solemn responsibility of man." While Calvin did not use the later covenant theology expression such as "the covenant of grace is *monopleuric* or *unilateral* in its origin, but *dipleuric* or *bilateral* in its fulfillment," he "expressed essentially the same thought, however, in different words: the covenant of grace has its origin wholly in the undeserved grace of God, but, when once established, that covenant imposes mutual obligations on both God and man."<sup>190</sup> Therefore, the federal theologians did not deviate from Calvin but continued to integrate the doctrine of predestination with the doctrine of the covenant. In doing so, they joined divine sovereignty and human responsibility with

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<sup>190</sup>Hoekema, "The Covenant of Grace in Calvin's Teaching," 140.

justification and sanctification in union with Christ to develop a covenant theology within the context of a monergistic soteriology.

CHAPTER 4  
POST-REFORMATION DEVELOPMENT OF  
COVENANT THEOLOGY

**Unity and Continuity of Covenantal Thought from  
John Calvin to Reformed Orthodoxy**

Continuities and discontinuities between Calvin and his successors in the Reformed Orthodoxy was a focus of considerable contention in past decades.<sup>1</sup> Reformed *Scholasticism*, the latter's theological method, has been prominent in these disputes. Some scholars understand that Reformed scholastics returned to the medieval patterns of thought by committing to the scholastic method and using Aristotelian categories in their theological formulations.<sup>2</sup> Reformed scholastics were also thought to hold human reason as a source of truth on the same level as God's revelation in Scripture, and, as a result, their theology has been regarded as highly rationalistic and speculative. Therefore, Reformed Scholasticism became depicted as a caricature of the biblical and Christ-centered theology of the Reformers as it deviated from their methods by relying on a systematized and scholastic form of theology.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Richard A. Muller identifies five approaches to interpreting this issue in "Calvin and the 'Calvinists': Assessing Continuities and Discontinuities between the Reformation and Orthodoxy," in *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 63-102.

<sup>2</sup>For a brief discussion on Medieval Scholasticism, see Peter L. Rouwendal, "The Method of the Schools: Medieval Scholasticism," in *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism*, ed. Willem J. van Asselt (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011), 56-72.

<sup>3</sup>Willem J. van Asselt in *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism* explains the difference between Reformed scholasticism, Reformed orthodoxy, and Reformed theology: "Reformed Scholasticism (1) refers to the academic theology of the schools (2) as practiced in the period of orthodoxy, (3) using scholastic method in the exposition of doctrine and (4) in content, is bound to the Reformed confessions."

Contrary to this stereotype, other scholars have argued Reformed Scholasticism primarily refers to as a particular method of teaching, without direct implications for content.<sup>4</sup> Trueman contends that “the question of scholasticism is in fact a question first and foremost of context and genre, not of theological content.”<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Asselt concurs with De Rijk’s definition on scholasticism as “a method which is characterized, both on the level of research and on the level of teaching, by the use of an ever recurring system of concepts, distinctions, definitions, propositional analyses, argumentational techniques and disputation methods.”<sup>6</sup> Making a similar distinction between method and content, Richard Muller asserts, “The term scholasticism well describes the technical and academic side of this process of the institutionalization of Protestant doctrine.” He describes scholasticism as “preeminently a school-theology,” or “a theology designed to develop system on a highly technical level and in an extremely

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(9) “‘Reformed orthodoxy’ refers to the period of institutionalization and codification that followed the Reformation. Beginning in the late sixteenth century and extending well into the eighteenth century, it was the dominant form of Reformed theology for two hundred years. Historically, this theology is identified as orthodox or confessional because it attempted to codify and systematize right teaching within the bounds created by the Reformed confessions of the sixteenth century” (194).

<sup>4</sup>Asselt, *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism*, 7, 9, 194-95; see also 11-43 for the summaries of the reevaluation of Protestant Scholasticism. Other works which attempt to reassess the philosophical and theological prejudices of the earlier scholarship and argue Reformed Scholasticism as a phenomenon on the level of method not content: Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003); Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998); Muller, *After Calvin*; Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000); Muller, “Calvin and the ‘Calvinists’: Assessing Continuities and Discontinuities Between the Reformation and Orthodoxy,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 30 (1995): 345-74; Carl R. Trueman and R. S. Clark, eds., *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* (Carlisle, England: Paternoster, 1999); Carl R. Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen’s Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle, England: Paternoster, 1998).

<sup>5</sup>Carl R. Trueman, “Calvin and Calvinism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 234. For a brief history and theology of Reformed Orthodoxy in Britain, see Carl R. Trueman, “Reformed Orthodoxy in Britain,” in *A Companion to Reformed Orthodoxy*, ed. Herman Selderhuis (Boston: Brill, 2013), 261-91.

<sup>6</sup>Asselt, *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism*, 7. He quotes *Middeleeuwse wijsbegeerte: Traditie en vernieuwing*, 11.

precise manner by means of the careful identification of topics, division of these topics into their basic parts, definition of the parts, and doctrinal or logical argumentation concerning the divisions and definitions.”<sup>7</sup> Therefore, Muller sees scholasticism as a “highly technical and logical approach to theological system” that divides theological topics “into its component parts, the parts analyzed and then defined in careful propositional form.”<sup>8</sup> It was a method designed to facilitate clarity in biblical teaching and debate and to make use of Scripture and Christian tradition for development of doctrines. Its goal was “to provide an adequate technical theology for schools—seminaries and universities” and the church with “‘right teaching’, literally, ‘orthodoxy.’”<sup>9</sup> This understanding of scholasticism is largely a scientific method of research and teaching and does not conflate with content.

The institutionalized orthodoxy of Reformed Scholasticism was bound to the confessions of the Reformation. As Richard Lints asserts, “The Reformed scholastics did not abandon the faith of the first generation of the Reformers. If anything, they maintained the faith with vitality under circumstances that demanded institutionalization and a willingness to draw substantively from parts of the church tradition that had been

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<sup>7</sup>Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, Ca. 1520 to Ca. 1725* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1:34.

<sup>8</sup>Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 8. Elsewhere, Muller describes the Reformed scholastic method as: “the logical tools of the early Reformation, notably the Agricolan place-logic as modified by Melanchthon, and the later method known as Ramism, were used by Reformed thinkers to give form and structure to their theology. The formal and methodological result of this development was a Reformed scholasticism, a theology academic in its method, structured around the traditional method of disputation and definition, but altered from the medieval versions of scholastic method by its training in late Renaissance logic and rhetoric.” Richard A. Muller, “Approaches to Post-Reformation Protestantism,” in *After Calvin*, 10.

<sup>9</sup>Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 8.

cast aside only a century earlier.”<sup>10</sup> Similarly, rather than taking the view that the “scholastic” and “orthodox” theology of the post-Reformation deteriorated the biblical teaching of Calvin and other early Reformers, Muller argues, “The methodological vehicle of scholasticism carried Calvinist thought forward into the seventeenth century different in form but virtually the same in basic content as the thought of Calvin and his contemporaries.”<sup>11</sup> Although Reformed scholastics used a scholastic method in their teaching and exposition of doctrines, the content was consistent with the Reformed confessions. After the first generation of Reformers, there was a need to shift from polemic to systematization “to define and defend the faith of the Reformed churches. The result of that effort was a theology, grounded in the confessions of the church and defended at length against all adversaries.”<sup>12</sup> In other words, Reformed Orthodoxy used a scholastic method to teach and defend the Reformation faith in a new and different theological context. Polemics against the views of Roman Catholicism, Arminianism, and Cartesianism forced Reformed scholastics to articulate the Reformation faith to meet the challenges of the time. As Asselt asserts, “That change in method is precisely what is required in order to formulate the *same* content in a *new* context.”<sup>13</sup> Therefore, although the Reformed scholastics used different methodology in their theological teaching, the institutionalization of Protestantism in the later generations still carried the basic

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<sup>10</sup>Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1993), 171.

<sup>11</sup>Richard A. Muller, “John Calvin and Later Calvinism: The Identity of the Reformed Tradition,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology*, ed., David Bagchi and David C. Steinmetz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 140-41.

<sup>12</sup>Muller, “Scholasticism and Orthodoxy in the Reformed Tradition: Definition and Method,” in *After Calvin*, 46.

<sup>13</sup>Asselt, *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism*, 197.

commitments of the Reformation.<sup>14</sup>

Reformed scholastics maintained the same metaphysical theology of the Reformers, and their institutionalization and systematization of doctrines were attempts to be faithful to God's revelation in the Bible. Consequentially, Reformed orthodoxy of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries "can appropriately be described as scholastic in form, but not rationalistic in content."<sup>15</sup> Rather than being increasingly rationalistic in their theology, Reformed scholastics subordinated human reason to God's revelation and distinguished between the ministerial and magisterial use of human reason. Also, rather than upholding human reason as the ultimate criteria of truth, they employed reason for their theological method within the context of God's special revelation. They insisted God's revelation as foundational to knowledge, and without it, human reason would be inadequate. Therefore, rather than holding to autonomous human reason, "reason was consistently given an instrumental function whereas revelation was given magisterial authority."<sup>16</sup>

Specific Reformed scholastics such as Francis Turretin (1623-1687) did not support a rationalist philosophy upholding absolute of human reason. Rather, in institutionalizing and catholicizing Reformation theology, such scholars "manifest[ed] a consistent hope that Protestantism might affirm a traditional orthodoxy that rests on the

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<sup>14</sup>Asselt recognizes Reformed theology was not a uniform structure solely influenced by Calvin but was formed from diverse trajectories in its development. Nevertheless, there is a unity within its diversity because it maintained the faith of the first-generation Reformers. *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism*, 200-1. Cf. Michael A. G. Haykin and Mark Jones, eds., *Drawn into Controversie: Reformed Theological Diversity and Debates Within Seventeenth-Century British Puritanism* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011).

<sup>15</sup>Stephen J. Casselli, *Divine Rule Maintained: Anthony Burgess, Covenant Theology, and the Place of the Law in Reformed Scholasticism* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2016), 132.

<sup>16</sup>R. S. Clark, "The Authority of Reason in the Later Reformation: Scholasticism in Caspar Olevian and Antoine de La Faye," in Trueman and Clark, *Protestant Scholasticism*, 114.

universally recognized essential and cognitive foundations of the theological system, that is, on the God and his biblical revelation.”<sup>17</sup> Muller argues that, in his theological formulation, Turretin “demonstrates both a concern to state the theology of the Reformed tradition in a fully systematized and scholastic form and to employ the breadth of the tradition and the techniques of scholasticism in the defense of the orthodox confessional stance without detriment to the original message of Protestantism.”<sup>18</sup> Therefore, although methodological discontinuities exist between Reformed scholastics and the Reformers, the two retain strong affinities. In particular, Reformed scholastics labored to preserve the confessional and theological codification of the Reformation under the duress of different circumstances.

Besides methodological discontinuities, a specific disputed theological issue regarding Reformed Orthodoxy’s consistency to Calvin rests in the distinction between a prelapsarian covenant of works and a postlapsarian covenant of grace.<sup>19</sup> Those who maintain the view that Calvin’s covenant idea is in tension with the federal theologians have argued that a covenant of works was not found in Calvin. They contend that since Calvin only taught a covenant of grace, the later development by Reformed scholastics deviates from Calvin’s view of a “testamentary” or monopleuric covenant by introducing

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<sup>17</sup>Richard Muller, “Scholasticism Protestant and Catholic: Francis Turretin on the Object and Principles of Theology,” in *After Calvin*, 145.

<sup>18</sup>Muller, “Scholasticism Protestant and Catholic,” 145.

<sup>19</sup>For the discussion of some contemporary criticism on covenant theology, see Ligon Duncan, “Recent Objections to Covenant Theology: A Description, Evaluation and Response,” in *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century: Essays in Remembrance of the 350th Anniversary of the Westminster Assembly*, ed. Ligon Duncan (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2009): 3:467-500; David B. McWilliams, “The Covenant Theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith and Recent Criticism,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 53 (1991): 109-24; Cornelis P. Venema, “Recent Criticisms of the ‘Covenant of Works’ in the Westminster Confession of Faith,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 9, no. 2 (1993): 165-98.

a bilateral or dipleuric covenant doctrine.<sup>20</sup> By deviating, covenant theology of Reformed orthodoxy develops a covenant of works, representing a legal tendency, in contrast to the theology of grace of the reformers.

### **The Covenant of Works**

The theological formulation of covenant of works and covenant of grace, codified in the Westminster Confession of Faith, 1646, (WCF) fostered diverse views. Karl Barth and some of his neo-orthodox followers have understood the two covenants as antithetical because they represent the Law and the Gospel and, by definition, are in absolute contrast.<sup>21</sup> These scholars believe that the two-covenant scheme introduces a

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<sup>20</sup>See Venema, "Recent Criticisms of the 'Covenant of Works' in the Westminster Confession of Faith," 166.

<sup>21</sup>See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, 4:1, ed., Geoffrey William Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 1-78; see esp. 54-66, where he discusses federal theology. Barth believes grace and merit could not coexist; thus the covenant of works is entirely legalistic because God's original covenant with man would depend on human merit. As a result, he rejects the Reformed tradition's two-covenant distinction, a dual between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. He also insists that there is only one covenant, a thoroughly gracious covenant, because Adam could not merit anything from God. Furthermore, those who argue Calvin and later covenant theologians diverged theologically assert that the two-covenant scheme of later Reformed dogmatics was not present in Calvin's theology since he never spoke of a specific doctrine of a covenant of works. For this understanding (or denial) of covenant of works after the pattern of Karl Barth, see e.g., James B. Torrance, "Covenant or Contract? A Study of the Theological Background of Worship in Seventeenth-Century Scotland," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 23, no. 1 (1970): 51-76; Torrance, "The Concept of Federal Theology: Was Calvin a Federal Theologian?" in *Calvinus Sacrae Scripturae Professor: Calvin as Confessor of Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1994), 15-40; Torrance, "Strengths and Weaknesses of the Westminster Theology," in *The Westminster Confession in the Church Today: Papers Prepared for the Church of Scotland Panel on Doctrine*, ed. Alasdair I. C. Heron (Edinburgh: St. Andrew Press, 1982), 40-54; Holmes Rolston III, "Responsible Man in Reformed Theology: Calvin Versus the Westminster Confession," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 23 (1970): 129-56; Rolston, *John Calvin Versus the Westminster Confession* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1972). However, scholars such as Peter Lillback and Richard Muller successfully argue that law and grace were complementary rather than mutually exclusive in Calvin's understanding. There was more continuity between the early Reformers and the post-Reformation scholastics. See Mark W. Karlberg, "The Original State of Adam: Tensions within Reformed Theology," *Evangelical Quarterly* 59 (1987): 291-309; Peter A. Lillback, *The Binding of God: Calvin's Role in the Development of Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001); Lillback, "The Continuing Conundrum: Calvin and the Conditionality of the Covenant," *Calvin Theological Journal* 29 (1994): 42-74; Richard A. Muller, "The Covenant of Works and the Stability of Divine Law in Seventeenth-Century Reformed Orthodoxy: A Study in the Theology of Herman Witsius and Wilhelmus à Brakel," in *After Calvin*, 175-89; Andrew A. Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought: A Study in the Reformed Tradition to the Westminster Assembly* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), esp. 129-98; John Halsey Wood, Jr., "Merit in the Midst of Grace: The Covenant with Adam Reconsidered in View of the Two Powers of God," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 10, no. 2 (April 2008): 133-40; Venema, "Recent Criticisms of the 'Covenant of Works' in the Westminster Confession of Faith," 165-98. Greg Beale also defends the traditional view that there was a covenants of

theology of legalism in contrast to Calvin's theology of grace.<sup>22</sup> Specifically, James Torrance asserts that "this distinction between a Covenant of Works and a Covenant of Grace was unknown to Calvin and the Reformers—nor indeed would Calvin ever have taught it."<sup>23</sup> He further claims that "the whole federal scheme is built upon the deep-seated *confusion between a covenant and a contract*, a failure to recognize that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is a Covenant-God and not a contract-God."<sup>24</sup> Donald Bruggink concurs, saying, "Even in this brief glimpse of the system, it becomes evident that despite its popularity, federal theology was not a logical development of Calvin's theology. Rather it was a perversion of great seriousness, for it introduced a covenant of works as a valid relation between man and God, and then carried works into the very covenant of grace."<sup>25</sup> These criticisms center on the idea that the prelapsarian covenant of works introduced a work principle that was not found in the Reformers. As Rolston contends, "A covenant of works has a very deadening effect on anything said about grace. The overall emphasis was that God did not come to primal man in a relationship of grace, for man did not yet need that grace, but stood by his works."<sup>26</sup> In understanding the covenant of works as a legal covenant, the critics object to the WCF's designation of the

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works in the Garden of Eden. See *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 916-20. For Michael Allen's summary of James Torrance's critiques of the covenant of works and his responses, see Michael Allen, *Sanctification*, ed. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2017), 102-10.

<sup>22</sup>Muller, "Calvin and the 'Calvinists,'" 345-74, esp., 349.

<sup>23</sup>Torrance, "Covenant or Contract?," 61-62.

<sup>24</sup>Torrance, "Covenant or Contract?," 66. Torrance sees covenant as contract is inconsistent with Calvin's theology. He argues Calvin was not a federal theologian in two respects: (1) covenant versus contract; (2) distinction on covenant of grace and covenant of works. See Torrance, "The Concept of Federal Theology," 15-40.

<sup>25</sup>Donald J. Bruggink, "Calvin and Federal Theology," *The Reformed Review* 13, no. 1 (1959), 22.

<sup>26</sup>Rolston, *John Calvin Versus the Westminster Confession*, 17.

Adamic covenant as a covenant of works, insisting there is only one covenant—a covenant of grace. The legalism of the covenant of works excludes grace and threatens fellowship and communion with God, both of which cease to be gifts of God's favor, becoming, instead, rewards for good works. Therefore, claiming the covenant of works as the postulation for theologically prioritizing the law perverts the Reformers' theology on grace.

### **A Covenant of Works in Calvin**

A foundational problem of Barth and some neo-orthodox theologians who follow him is their approach of “Calvin against Calvinist,” which has “driven a wedge between Calvin’s theology as a whole and that of the later Calvinists, contrasting the biblical Christocentrism of Calvin with the Aristotelian predestinarianism of the Reformed scholastics, and Calvin’s theology of grace with the legalism of the federal theologians.”<sup>27</sup> Specifically on the issue of covenant of works, some scholars have argued that although Calvin did not use the term *foedus operum* to refer to Adam’s original state, his covenant ideas consist of the basic elements of a covenant of works. In this polemic, Calvin’s theology holds to an inchoate covenant of works.<sup>28</sup>

Moreover, Calvin’s Adamic administration consists of legal elements. Zacharias Ursinus (1534-1583), an author of the Heidelberg Catechism and Calvin’s contemporary, was known as one of the first Reformed Orthodox theologians who

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<sup>27</sup>Lyle D. Bierma, “Law and Grace in Ursinus’s Doctrine of the Natural Covenant: A Reappraisal,” in Trueman and Clark, *Protestant Scholasticism*, 110.

<sup>28</sup>See Lillback, *The Binding of God*, 276-304; Lillback, “Ursinus’ Development of the Covenant of Creation: A Debt to Melancthon or Calvin?,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 43 (1981): 281-86. Richard Muller also argues that there is doctrinal continuity between Calvin and the seventeenth-century scholastics Witsius and à Brakel in their understanding of a covenant of works. See Muller, “The Covenant of Works and the Stability of Divine Law,” 175-89.

expressed the Adamic administration as a covenant, a covenant of creation or a covenant of nature. Bierma argues that Ursinus's doctrine of the natural covenant concurs with Calvin's thought. Bierma observes, "Ursinus' doctrine of the natural covenant offers no indication of the priority of law over grace." Continuing to comment on the law, he states, "many of the 'legal' elements of Ursinus' creation covenant are anticipated already in Calvin, and Calvin's emphasis on divine grace in the prelapsarian relationship with Adam clearly resurfaces in Ursinus."<sup>29</sup> For Calvin, the Adamic administration legally expresses the divine design to bind humans to God or regulate their relationship with God. Nevertheless, Calvin affirms it as a "gracious" arrangement in which God condescends to relate to humans' fallibility as creatures: "Obedience was man's duty as a creature and no reward for it was ever deserved, but nevertheless God condescended to bind himself to do just that."<sup>30</sup> Relating to Adam's obedience specifically, Lillback also states, "Calvin's idea of Adam in a probationary period, under the duty of obedience to law, with life as the benefit, anticipates the federal arrangement."<sup>31</sup> The legality of humans' duty of obedience to God in Calvin's and Ursinus's covenants of creation exemplifies a basic doctrinal continuity in the development of Reformed theology from the age of Reformation to the age of Orthodoxy.

### **The Covenant of Works as a Gracious Covenant**

Some scholars recognize that the nomenclature of *covenant of works* is

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<sup>29</sup>Bierma, "Law and Grace in Ursinus's Doctrine of the Natural Covenant," 109.

<sup>30</sup>Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought*, 338.

<sup>31</sup>Lillback, *The Binding of God*, 311.

potentially misleading because it suggests that humans can achieve life by their own efforts. However, opposing critics who assume this understanding, Robertson claims the traditional Reformed understanding of the *gracious* covenant of works is “a matter of grace” and “the totality of God’s relationship with man. . . . Although ‘grace’ may not have been operative in the sense of a merciful relationship despite sin, the creational bond between God and man indeed was gracious.”<sup>32</sup> Similarly, arguing that Calvin’s theology consists of ingredients of a covenant works, Woolsey states that Calvin

viewed the Edenic relationship as essentially a “gracious” one (distinguishing grace before and after the fall), expressed in a legal manner, binding Adam to God under the promise of life for obedience and the threat of death for disobedience. Because of the essential condescension of God and the gracious nature of the arrangement, the idea of meriting life by obedience constituted no difficulty for Calvin. Obedience was man’s duty as a creature and no reward for it was ever deserved, but nevertheless God condescended to bind himself to do just that.<sup>33</sup>

In distinguishing between grace before the fall and grace after the fall,<sup>34</sup> Reformed orthodox theologians regarded the former as “condescending” grace and the latter as “redemptive” grace. This distinction provides a covenant of works that is certainly gracious because “it is not a matter of meriting something before God; the blessing finds its source and root in God’s unmerited decision to offer the promise of continued life

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<sup>32</sup>O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1980), 56.

<sup>33</sup>Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought*, 338.

<sup>34</sup> Mark A. Herzer concludes, “The covenant of works . . . was not ‘legalistic’ as some of the writers have tried to argue. We have seen that a great many of the divines argued for the presence of God’s grace in the covenant of nature. The exact meaning of what kind of ‘grace’ they have in mind is not always apparent. Condescending grace may be what they believed existed in the original covenant; it definitely was not salvific grace. One thing becomes apparent though, the idea of ‘strict merit’ or ‘strict justice’ is assiduously avoided.” Mark A. Herzer, “Adam’s Reward: Heaven or Earth?,” in Haykin and Jones, *Drawn into Controversie*, 182. Similarly, David B. McWilliams writes, “On the confessional construction there is grace before the fall, but grace after the fall must be defined in radically different terms than grace prior to the fall, because sin is sin against *God*—the God of grace and law. Because *demerit* brought into *Historie* by sin, grace must be viewed in different terms than before the fall—grace must be seen as redemptive grace.” David B. McWilliams, “The Covenant Theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith and Recent Criticism,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 53 (1991), 115.

upon Adam meeting the condition that was laid down.”<sup>35</sup> Moreover, this covenant of works cannot be a covenant of merit due to “the great disparity between God and man prohibiting any possibility of man’s works by their own merit earning salvation.”<sup>36</sup>

In fact, the Reformed orthodox theologians regarded the covenant of works as gracious in character.<sup>37</sup> The Scottish covenant theologian Thomas Boston (1676-1732) believed “there was grace and free favour in the first covenant.”<sup>38</sup> John Ball (1585-1640) also taught that “this Covenant God [was] made in Justice; yet so as it was of Grace likewise to make such a free promise, and to bestow so great things upon man for his obedience.”<sup>39</sup> He further argued the covenant of works was, in a sense, a covenant of grace:

God enters into Covenant with man not as his equal but as his Sovereign, and man is bound to accept the conditions offered by his Creator. There is no equality of power and authority between God and the creature of such a kind that the creature may make a bargain with the Most High. The covenant is of God, and as such *is an expression of His free grace and love*: for although . . . the good is promised in justice for man’s works, yet it is of grace that God is pleased to bind Himself to man

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<sup>35</sup>Duncan, “Recent Objections to Covenant Theology,” 493.

<sup>36</sup>John H. Leith, *Assembly at Westminster: Reformed Theology in the Making* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 92.

<sup>37</sup>Herzer in “Adam’s Reward: Heaven or Earth?,” 162-82, examines two major views of Reformed Orthodoxy on Adam’s Reward as represented by Thomas Goodwin and Francis Turretin. Goodwin believed Adam’s reward for his obedience was perpetual life in paradise and Turretin believed God promised heaven to Adam. Though they differed as to the destiny of that reward, both, as other Reformed orthodox theologians, maintained the covenant of works, including the notions of Adam’s prelapsarian estate and his reward, which is gracious and non-meritorious. Similarly, J. Mark Beach in *Christ and the Covenant: Francis Turretin’s Federal Theology as a Defense of the Doctrine of Grace* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007) analyzes Turretin’s understanding of the twofold covenant in federal theology. Beach maintains a continuity view between federal theology developed by the Reformed Orthodox and the theology of the early Reformers. He argues Turretin’s federal theology, with the covenant of nature, does not compromise the gracious theology of the early Reformers.

<sup>38</sup>Thomas Boston, *The Complete Works of Thomas Boston*, ed. Samuel M’Millan (Stoke-on-Trent, England: Tentmaker Publications, 1853; reprint, 2002), 8:18.

<sup>39</sup>John Ball, *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace: Wherein the Gradually Breakings Out of Gospel-Grace From Adam to Christ Are Clearly Discovered, the Differences Betwixt the Old and New Testament Are Laid Open, Divers Errors of Arminians and Others Are Confuted* (London: Forgotten Books, 2015), 9.

. . . and it is far beyond anything that man deserves. Thus, though the reward is given in justice, it is also given in grace.<sup>40</sup>

Another theologian of the time, Samuel Rutherford (1600-1661), agreed, stating that “God then never loved to make any Covenant, yea even that of Works, without some acts and out goings of grace.”<sup>41</sup> Additionally, the Westminster divines saw the covenant of works as gracious because it is God’s act of “voluntary condescension” to bestow blessings upon his creatures (WCF 7.1). While this gracious act is not *saving grace*, it is God’s *voluntary* grace; it is not a debt that God owes to humanity but, simply, is “his gratuitous condescensions to his creatures.”<sup>42</sup> If the covenant with Adam is not the “voluntary condescension on God’s part,” he as a creature “could never have any fruition of Him as . . . blessedness and reward” (WCF 7.1). Therefore, although graciousness in the covenant of works was not in the same vein as postlapsarian grace, it was also God’s grace. The divines saw that Adam’s reward for his obedience did not come from the dignity of work but primarily from God’s gracious promises. Adam’s obedience did not merit his reward, but the reward ultimately depended on God’s goodness and promises.

The divines also frequently spoke of the covenant of works as friendship between God and Adam. In this thinking, they conversed as loving friends in an estate of goodness and graciousness. Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669), a German born, Dutch Reformed theologian, was a strong advocate on the doctrine of the covenant of works. He

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<sup>40</sup>E. F. Kevan, “The Law and the Covenants—A Study in John Ball,” in *Puritan Papers: 1956-1959*, ed. David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2000), 1:46 (emphasis original.)

<sup>41</sup>Samuel Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life Opened: A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace* (Edinburgh: Andro Anderson for Robert Brown, 1655), 22. Cf. Thomas Manton said, “The first covenant, it was grace for God to make it. It was the grace of God to accept of man’s perfect obedience. . . . Grace engaged the reward, there was no more merit in Adam’s obedience than in ours.” *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton* (London: James Nisbert, 1870-1875), 8:376.

<sup>42</sup>Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 232.

viewed the covenant of works not as a contract but as a “friendship with God (*amicitia cum Deo*).”<sup>43</sup> Like other covenants between God and man, it is “one-sided” by divine initiation and “two-sided” in engaging with man.<sup>44</sup> Because it is initially one-sided, this friendship covenant cannot be considered a simple legal contract.

### **An Equal Ultimacy of Grace and Law**

The covenant of works is not simply gracious; it consists of both God’s grace and his law. Against the Barthians’ polarization of grace and law, McWilliams argues, “There is an equal ultimacy between grace and law because both are essential in God’s character. Orthodoxy is content to leave the tension and affirm that the covenant is a gracious condescension of God articulated in terms of law. The grace of God is unintelligible apart from his righteous demands.”<sup>45</sup> Similarly, Muller contends that the Reformed doctrine of the covenant of works does not radically prioritize the law over grace but is balanced in the ultimate equality of law and grace. While the eternal “covenant of redemption” points to the priority of God’s grace over law and is grounded in God’s intention to fellowship with his creatures, their condition as revealed in natural law and the Decalogue is a reflection of divine nature, pointing to the image of God in man. Therefore, Muller notes that the condition for fellowship with God “is the divinely

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<sup>43</sup>Johannes Cocceius, *The Doctrine of the Covenant and Testament of God* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2016), 27. Willem J. van Asselt views, “The core of Cocceius’ concept of covenant is *not* that of a contract (‘Adam shaking hands on a deal with God in paradise’), but rather *amicitia*, friendship—a concept that has medieval roots and which extends back into classical antiquity.” Willem J. van Asselt, *The Federal Theology of Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669)* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 24n3. A unique view of Cocceius’s covenant theology is in his doctrine of the covenant of works which he saw it progressively abrogated as salvation history unfolded and advanced. He worked out in detail what we today call a biblical-theology, redemptive-historical approach of presenting covenant theology.

<sup>44</sup>Cocceius, *The Doctrine of the Covenant and Testament of God*, 22-23.

<sup>45</sup>McWilliams, “The Covenant Theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith and Recent Criticism,” 115.

given reflection of God himself in his creature, understood as the fundamental law or order for creaturely existence.”<sup>46</sup> Continuing to comment on fellowship and the image of God, Muller proposes, “The purported legalism of the continuing covenant of works as presented in the demands of the law is nothing less than permanence of the original divine intention to ground fellowship in the nature of God and in the *imago Dei*.”<sup>47</sup>

Despite language difference between the Reformers and their successors when describing the covenant of the works, their commonality is the stability of law in God’s covenants with humanity. Muller adds that

the fundamental points of the doctrine, that the work of redemption must be understood both in terms of law and grace, that human beings were created in and for fellowship with God under terms both of promise and of law, that Adam’s fall was a transgression of God’s law, that human inability after the Fall in no way removes the standard or the demands of the law, and that the gift of salvation through Christ’s satisfaction for sin both sets believers free from the law’s condemnation and upholds the law’s demands, remain virtually identical. The free gift of grace in the one covenant respects the stability of law in the other, while the presence of law under different uses in both covenants echoes both the immutability of the divine nature and the constancy of the divine promises.<sup>48</sup>

The covenant of works, God’s fellowship with man, combines elements of promise and law. While both Calvin and the federal theologians of the seventeenth century recognized grace in the Garden of Eden, they also emphasized the need for Adam’s obedience. Therefore, God’s grace and righteous requirements are not inherently antithetical but extend to the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.

In regard to Reformed predestinarian theology, scholars have suggested that the development of a covenant theology consisting of a dipleuric dimension gives a level

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<sup>46</sup>Muller, “The Covenant of Works and the Stability of Divine Law,” 188.

<sup>47</sup>Muller, “The Covenant of Works and the Stability of Divine Law,” 188.

<sup>48</sup>Muller, “The Covenant of Works and the Stability of Divine Law,” 189.

of responsibility to creaturely agents.<sup>49</sup> This understanding pens later Reformed Orthodox theology that develops a mutual and conditional covenant of grace, making it inconsistent with Calvin's covenantal thought. However, as argued in the previous chapter, the Reformed doctrine of predestination harmonizes with a mutual and conditional covenant of grace. Moreover, Muller argues that

many Reformed writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries employ both definitions, the unilateral and the bilateral, in their identification of different aspects or stages in the covenant relationship between God and humanity. . . . whether Bullinger and Calvin in the sixteenth century or Perkins and Cocceius in the seventeenth, are monergistic in their soteriology and intent on defining covenant within the boundaries of the confessional tradition. There is, in other words, one variegated Reformed tradition in which there are several trajectories of thought. Ultimately, whatever differences may be identified between the individual formulations of various theologians, all stood within the Reformed confessional tradition.<sup>50</sup>

Similarly, Clark "argues that Reformed Orthodoxy saw federal or covenant theology as a redemptive-historical way of expressing substantially the same Reformation theology taught in their dogmatic works and confessional symbols."<sup>51</sup> Therefore, there is an overall theological continuity between the early Reformers and the later Reformed orthodox covenant theologians, not only in the prelapsarian covenant of works, but also in a bilateral and conditional covenant of grace that balances God's sovereign grace and human responsibility.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, the covenant theology of Reformed Orthodoxy

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<sup>49</sup>See Michael Allen, *Reformed Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2010), 45.

<sup>50</sup>Muller, "Approach to Post-Reformation Protestantism," 9.

<sup>51</sup>R. Scott Clark, "Christ and Covenant: Federal Theology in Orthodoxy," in Selderhuis, *A Companion to Reformed Orthodoxy*, 404. Elsewhere, he also says, "Reformed Orthodoxy viewed federal theology as a redemptive-historical way of expressing substantially the same Reformation theology taught in their dogmatic works and confessional symbols and inherited from first generation Protestants" (427).

<sup>52</sup>See Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought*, 540-51; Paul R. Schaefer, *The Spiritual Brotherhood: Cambridge Puritans and the Nature of Christian Piety* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011); John von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986).

developed organically, rising from the Reformation and within the Reformed confessional tradition.

### **Covenant Theology: Covenant of Works, Grace, and Redemption**

Both explicitly or implicitly, covenantal teaching is found in the Reformed confessions and individual Reformed Orthodox theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>53</sup> This covenantal teaching not only permeates their writings but also their preaching.<sup>54</sup> Trueman notes the significance of the doctrine of the covenant for Reformed Puritans because it “allows for the bridging of the ontological chasm that exists between an infinite, self-existent Creator and a finite, dependent creation.”<sup>55</sup> Commonly understood in Reformed Orthodoxy, God normally dealt with humans by means of covenant.<sup>56</sup> Thus, one is either under a covenant of works or a covenant of grace.

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<sup>53</sup>E.g., Richard Alleine and Joseph Alleine, *Heaven Opened: The Riches of God's Covenant Grace* (Lafayette, IN: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 2000); Thomas Brooks, *The Covenant of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1971); Samuel Petto, *The Great Mystery of the Covenant of Grace: Or, the Difference between the Old and New Covenant Explained* (Stoke-on-Trent, England: Tentmaker, 2007); Ezekiel Hopkins, *The Doctrine of the Two Covenants: Wherein the Nature of Original Sin Is Explained and St. Paul and St. James Reconciled in the Great Article of Justification* (London: Forgotten Books, 2015); Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man: Comprehending a Complete Body of Divinity*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010); Johannes Cocceius, *The Doctrine of the Covenant and Testament of God*; Thomas Boston, *A View of the Covenant of Grace* (Choteau, MT: Old Paths Gospel Press, n.d.); Ball, *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 2, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1994); Nehemiah Coxe and John Owen, *Covenant Theology: From Adam to Christ* (Palmdale, CA: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2005); William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. John Dykstra Eusden (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997).

<sup>54</sup>E.g., Matthew Henry, *The Covenant of Grace: Matthew Henry's Unpublished Sermons*, ed. Allan Harman (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2002).

<sup>55</sup>Carl R. Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007), 67.

<sup>56</sup>For some secondary works see Andrew T. B. McGowan, *The Federal Theology of Thomas Boston* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 1997); John von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986); John L. Girardeau, *The Federal Theology: Its Import and Its Regulative Influence* (Greenville, SC: Reformed Academic Press, 1994); Mark W. Karlberg, *Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective: Collected Essays and Book Reviews in Historical, Biblical, and Systematic Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000); Peter Golding, *Covenant Theology: The Key of Theology in Reformed Thought and Tradition* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2004); van Asselt, *The Federal Theology of Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669)*; John Murray, “Covenant Theology” in *Collected Writings* (Edinburgh:

## Covenant Structure of the Westminster Confession of Faith

Within the ramifications of the Reformed tradition, English Puritan theology expressed redemptive history and Christian gospel in the covenants.<sup>57</sup> In the mid-seventeenth century, covenant theology was fully developed with a threefold covenant structure—covenants of redemption, works, and grace—as common in Reformed Orthodoxy. Although all Puritans did not view divine covenants in the same manner, general consensus distinguished between the covenants of works and grace. The distinction between these two covenants, a distinguish characteristic of covenant theology, was codified in the Westminster Standards.<sup>58</sup> The Westminster Confession is, in the words of Geerhardus Vos, “the first Reformed confession in which the doctrine of the covenant is not merely brought in from the side, but is placed in the foreground and has been able to permeate at almost every point.”<sup>59</sup> B. B. Warfield similarly remarks that “the architectonic principle of the Westminster Confession is supplied by the schematization of the Federal theology, which had obtained by this time in Britain, as on

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The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), 4:216-40; Donald Macleod, “Covenant Theology,” in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1993), 214-18.

<sup>57</sup>Beeke and Jones say, “supernatural revelation . . . the covenant as the context for understanding the mind of God.” Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 25.

<sup>58</sup>For a historical analysis of the development and formulation of the doctrine of the covenant, see Golding, *Covenant Theology*, 9-66. For a discussion on the doctrine of covenant among Reformers and Reformed covenant theologians, see David, N. J. Poole, *Stages of Religious Faith in the Classical Reformation Tradition: The Covenant Approach to the Ordo Salutis* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1995), 91-267.

<sup>59</sup>Geerhardus Vos, “The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology,” in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B Gaffin (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1980), 239. Similarly, Robert L. Reymond asserts, “Influenced as they were by the labors of these men, the framers of the Westminster Confession of Faith placed the concept of the covenant in the foreground of their confessional deliverance, giving creedal status to the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.” Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 2nd rev. ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 505.

the Continent, a dominant position as the most commodious mode of presenting the *corpus* of Reformed doctrine.”<sup>60</sup> In this line of thinking, the doctrine of covenant is the “architectonic principle” of the Westminster Confession.

### **The Covenant of Works**

Tracing the development of the origins of “the covenant of works” (*foedus operum*) in federal theology is not an easy task.<sup>61</sup> A general consensus is that the Reformed Orthodox theologians paved a pathway to understand God’s providence, his relationship with humanity, and the nature of Adam’s original sin (Westminster Larger Catechism [WLC] 20-29) by distinguishing between Adam in his innocent state (prelapsarian) and all humankind in its fallen and sinful state (postlapsarian).

Specifically, the prelapsarian covenant of works in covenant theology explains how “sin and death entered the world through Adam and passes on to all men”<sup>62</sup> and why God cannot be blamed for their sin.

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<sup>60</sup>Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly and Its Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1931), 56 (emphasis original).

<sup>61</sup>For a discussion of the development of the origins of the covenant of works, see David A. Weir, *The Origins of the Federal Theology in Sixteenth-Century Reformation Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Robert Letham, “The *Foedus Operum*: Some Factors Accounting for Its Development,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 14 (1983): 457-68. Specifically, Weir claims that Zacharias Ursinus, “first proposed, in 1561 and 1562, the idea of a prelapsarian *foedus naturale* with Adam.” *The Origins of the Federal Theology in Sixteenth-Century Reformation Thought*, 87. Similarly, scholars such as Woolsey in *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought*, 541, regard Ursinus and Olevianus, the Heidelberg theologians, as the first Reformed theologians who used the terms *foedus naturale*, *foedus creationis* and *foedus operum*; Lyle D. Bierma regards Olevianus as “the first to use the term *foedus creationis* (later called *foedus operum*, ‘covenant of works’), to devote some discussion to it, and to link this prelapsarian covenant to the *foedus legale* established at Mt. Sinai.” Lyle D. Bierma, “Covenant or Covenants in the Theology of Olevianus,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 22 (1987): 249. Cf. Peter Golding, *Covenant Theology*, 28. Nevertheless, Muller has noted that the doctrine of works “probably originated with Cocceius, but its roots are most probably to be found in the earlier Reformed meditation on the trinitarian nature of the divine decrees.” Muller, “The Covenant of Works and the Stability of Divine Law,” 187. Moreover, there are also scholars such as Robert Letham who think “the term *foedus operum* (covenant of works) was not used until 1585, by the Puritan Dudley Fener.” Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading Its Theology in Historical Context* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2009), 227, citing Fenner’s *Sacra theologia*.

<sup>62</sup>Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 235.

For Reformed covenant theologians, humans enter creation under a covenant. This creation covenant is referred to as a “covenant of works” and a “covenant of life” in the Westminster Standards. It denotes a universal Creator-creature relationship in the Garden of Eden. Despite the absence of the word *covenant* in the Genesis account of creation, John Ball acknowledged that “we reade not the word Covenant betwixt God and man, ever since the Creation . . . but we have in Scripture what may amount to as much.”<sup>63</sup> Defining both covenants, the Westminster Confession states, “the first covenant made with man was a *covenant of works*, wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience” (WCF 7.2). Moreover, the Creator entered “into a *covenant of life* with him, upon condition of personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience, of which the tree of life was a pledge; and forbidding to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, upon the pain of death” (WLC 20; cf. Westminster Shorter Catechism [WSC] 12).<sup>64</sup> The first covenant is referred to as the *covenant of works* because only under the condition of obedience could Adam receive the promised blessing of the covenant. Adam served as humanity’s federal head in the first covenant, but his act of disobedience made himself and his descendants incapable of life through this covenant. When Adam sinned, all sinned in him, as the Westminster Confession explains: “They [Adam and Eve] being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed; and the same death in sin, and corrupted nature, conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation” (6.3). Therefore, Adam as

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<sup>63</sup>Ball, *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace* (1645), 6, quoted in Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 218.

<sup>64</sup>For a discussion on similarity and difference between the Westminster Confession and the London Baptist Confession (1689), see Greg Nichols, *Covenant Theology: A Reformed and Baptist Perspective on God’s Covenants* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2014), 5-15.

the head and representative of the covenant works brought himself and his descendants into the state of sin by his disobedience.

As argued above, Reformed Orthodox theologians understood the covenant of works as primarily gracious, as God's "act of divine grace and favour."<sup>65</sup> Out of his goodness, God condescends to humanity in his covenant with Adam and his offspring, offering them life upon the condition of perfect obedience. God's condescension attests to his desire to relate to his people; the goal of creation is "covenant with God." However, this covenant relationship does not suggest that Adam earns eternal life by his works or merit. In an act of grace, God created Adam in his image and enjoyed a covenant relationship with him. Even if Adam had passed the test successfully, it was still grounded in God's unmerited favor.

The significance of the covenant of works in Reformed covenant theology was not because it suggested salvation can be obtained by works; the opposite applies.

Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635-1711) stated the covenant's significance in this way:

Acquaintance of this covenant is the greatest importance, for whoever errs here or denies this covenant of works, will not understand the covenant of grace, and will readily err concerning the mediatorship of the Lord Jesus. Such a person will readily deny that Christ by His active obedience has merited a right to eternal life for the elect. . . . whoever denies the covenant of works, must rightly be suspected to be in error concerning the covenant of grace as well.<sup>66</sup>

For à Brakel and other Reformed orthodox theologians, a covenant of works was not to advocate life and salvation can be obtained by human righteousness, rather it points to the work of Christ on behalf of sinners in the covenant of grace. Like à Brakel, Witsius

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<sup>65</sup>Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 230-31.

<sup>66</sup>Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service: in Which Divine Truths Concerning the Covenant of Grace are Expounded, Defended against Opposing Parties, and Their Practice Advocated, as well as the Administration of This Covenant in the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 1992), 1:355.

argued after the fall, the promised life in the covenant of works is no longer possible by human obedience, but awaits Christ, the mediator of the covenant of grace, by whose perfect obedience believers are made partakers of the original promised life.<sup>67</sup>

Interpreting Witsius' and à Brakel's doctrine on the covenant of works, Muller claims, "Both theologians . . . manifest the central reason for the doctrine of a covenant of works and its fundamental relationship to the doctrines of justification by grace through faith and Christ's satisfaction for sin: the issue is not to hammer home a legalistic view of life and salvation but precisely the opposite, while at the same time upholding the stability of divine law."<sup>68</sup> Since the doctrine of the covenant of works is founded on "by grace through faith," it affirms that salvation can only be attained through faith in Christ. Due to sin, the law no longer can hold forth the original promised life, so humans' sinful condition necessarily points them to another person—Christ—to fulfill the condition.

While God's covenant promises life on the condition of obedience, it also carries the penal sanction or curse of eternal death upon disobedience.<sup>69</sup> When Adam breached the covenant in his disobedience, not only did he forfeit the promised life but also had to bear the consequence of punishment. His failure needed to be remedied to reverse his punishment. Adam's failure (original sin) is twofold: he sinned against God's law by eating the forbidden fruit, and he failed to fulfill his calling as a perfect, obedient covenant keeper. In other words, he not only sinned against God's law by commission

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<sup>67</sup>See Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man*, 1.4.7.

<sup>68</sup>Muller, "The Covenant of Works and the Stability of Divine Law," 186.

<sup>69</sup>Cf. "God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works, by which he bound him and all his posterity, to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience, promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it, and endued him with power and ability to keep it" (WCF 19:1); WLC 20.

but also by omission—he could no longer live up to the standard of God’s righteousness in his law. Since God’s natural law remains eternal and irrevocable and the requirement of obedience remains as well as the punishment for failure, the restorative work of the Savior in the covenant of grace resolves the twofold need of those who have broken the covenant of works. Therefore, the doctrine of the covenant of works provides a biblical framework for a proper understanding of the person and work of Christ in relation to God’s grace and redemption. Furthermore, this framework reveals how a covenant relationship with God in the covenant of works requires perfect obedience and is upheld in the covenant of grace.<sup>70</sup>

### **The Covenant of Grace**

By the disobedience of the first Adam, humankind fell into sin and misery. The resulting need was another covenant, the covenant of grace. God neither abandoned humans to eternal punishment nor yoked them to his standards of holiness and righteousness, but “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” (WSC 20). Also describing this covenant, WCF states, “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; wherein He freely offers unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life His Holy Spirit, to make them

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<sup>70</sup>Cornelis P. Venema, *Christ and Covenant Theology: Essays on Election, Republication, and the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2017), 431.

willing, and able to believe” (7.3). Within the covenant of grace, all of God’s saving activities take place. The sole basis of this covenant is God’s love, favor, and mercy, and its purpose is to reconcile man to God by the mediation of Christ: “The covenant of grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in him with all the elect as his seed” (WLC 31).<sup>71</sup> As the covenant head of the covenant of grace and by his obedience, Christ remedied Adam’s failure in the covenant of works: “As in the covenant of works, God promised life to Adam’s natural seed; upon condition of his perfect obedience; which is evident from death’s coming on them by his disobedience: so in the covenant of grace, he hath promised life to Christ’s spiritual seed, upon condition of his obedience.”<sup>72</sup> Men are incapable of life by their own works, but God’s plan in redemption has always been to accept Christ’s perfect obedience on the behalf of those who believe in him.

The WCF presents a pre-fall covenant of works and a post-fall covenant of grace as counterparts. As Johannes Cocceius asserted, “The *covenant of God* with man is *twofold* according to opposing ways of receiving the love of God: *of works* and *of grace*. Indeed, Scripture sets these two ways of obtaining righteousness and thus all happiness in opposition, clearly indicating opposition between *works* and *faith*.”<sup>73</sup> While recognizing the significance of two distinct covenants, the WCF is right to emphasize that the prelapsarian covenant of works requires Adam’s perfect obedience as the basis of blessings, and the postlapsarian covenant of grace depends on Christ’s obedience as the

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<sup>71</sup>Cf. Ball similarly wrote, “*This Covenant* [of grace] *was made with Christ*, in and through whom man is reconciled to God: for since God and man were separated by sin; no Covenant could be made between them, no reconciliation could be expected, and no pardon could be obtained, but by means of a Mediation.” Kevan, “The Law and the Covenants—A Study in John Ball,” 47 (emphasis original).

<sup>72</sup>Boston, *A View of the Covenant of Grace*, 93.

<sup>73</sup>Cocceius, *The Doctrine of the Covenant and Testament of God*, 26 (emphasis original).

meritorious basis for salvation. Although the covenant of works and the covenant of grace lead to life and salvation differently, they are not in utter opposition. Woolsey understands that the two early Reformed orthodox theologians, Dudley Fenner and Thomas Cartwright, maintained the unity and continuity of the covenant of grace in the Old and the New Testaments and

that the unity and continuity of the eternal covenant of grace was in no way threatened by their teaching on the covenant of works. The latter was not set up in opposition to the former. After the fall of man salvation could only be through the covenant of grace, and the continuing validity of the covenant of works lay in its creative obligation, but supremely in its service to the covenant of grace. Christ's work as the Mediator of the covenant was interpreted as a law-work, fulfilling all the requirements of the covenant of works and thus providing salvation for all the faithful in all age.<sup>74</sup>

Despite differences in these two covenants, they are connected by the same law which Christ, the Mediator, fulfilled in the covenant of grace.

Reformed covenant theologians agreed the covenant of grace (the gospel) was first revealed in the *protoevangelium* (Gen. 3:15), was renewed and applied to the patriarchs, and then progressively expanded and unfolded in the Old Testament. This process continued until the climatic event of the incarnation of the mediator in the New Testament when redemptive promises of the covenant of grace were fulfilled by Christ. Therefore, the term *covenant of grace* applies to all historical covenants after the fall, describes God's relationship to his people after the fall, and highlights God's gracious redemption as humanity is in the stage of sin.<sup>75</sup> Although the covenant of grace includes various stages of development, two are broadly recognized: the covenant of promise

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<sup>74</sup>Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought*, 458.

<sup>75</sup>See Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 512-35, for his five arguments for the unity of the covenant of grace.

(from Adam to Christ) and the new covenant. The latter surpasses the former in quality and quantity, but both belong to the covenant of grace. Since both stem from grace, they are the same in substance which contains the same promises and requirements.

Expounding on the covenants of works and grace, theologian John Ball explained,

They both flow from the free grace and mercy of God directed towards sinners in Jesus Christ. They are both the same in substance, they require of the obedience of faith and the promise of life everlasting. They both have the same object, Jesus Christ, Who, being promised to the fathers in prophetic Scriptures, God has in due time made known under the Gospel. They both have the same general end, namely, the praise of the glorious grace of God in Jesus Christ. Both Covenants are made with...sinners...who no longer rely on their own law-keeping, but put their trust in Him Who justifies the ungodly. In both, it's the same Spirit who seals the truth of the Covenant to all who are under Covenant.<sup>76</sup>

The Reformed divines saw the history of redemption from Genesis to Revelation covenantally.<sup>77</sup> In the covenant of grace, God restores in his new creation what was lost in the old creation through Christ, who fulfills both obligation and penalty of the covenant of works for the elect by his penal substitutionary atonement. Therefore, the covenant of grace expresses the doctrine that God provides salvation for his people apart from any human initiative but only through the person and work of the Mediator, Jesus Christ.

### **The Covenant of Redemption**

The doctrine of the “covenant of redemption,” or in Latin the *pactum salutis*, was developed as a distinct covenant within the Reformed Orthodoxy in the mid-

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<sup>76</sup>Kevan, “The Law and the Covenants—A Study in John Ball,” 50.

<sup>77</sup>As Fesko writes, “We must recognize that not only did the divines believe that the Bible was a revealed organic whole, but that this redemptive revelation came through God’s covenantal dealings with man and centered on the progressive revelation of God in Christ (cf. WCF 8).” J. V. Fesko, “On the Antiquity of Biblical Theology,” in *Resurrection and Eschatology: Theology in Service of the Church: Essays in Honor of Richard B. Gaffin Jr.*, ed. Lane G. Tipton and Jeffrey C. Waddington (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2008), 466.

seventeenth century.<sup>78</sup> It was used “to express the eternal roots of the plan of salvation in the common life of the Trinity, something of a conjoining of the doctrines of election and Trinity.”<sup>79</sup> It has also been called *counsel of peace*, *eternal transactions*, *eternal compact*, or *covenant of suretyship*.<sup>80</sup> It was described as an intra-trinitarian covenant between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit regarding the eternal plan of salvation. In this plan, the three persons of the Trinity propose salvation of the elect covenantally. Teaching on this intra-trinitarian covenant of redemption, William Ames said, “This agreement between God and Christ was a kind of advance application of our redemption and deliverance of us to our surety and our surety to us. Upon that latter redemption, to be completed in us, it has the effect of a kind of an efficacious example; the former is a representation of the latter and the latter is brought into being by the former.”<sup>81</sup> This pre(supra)-temporal or eternal covenant or agreement is distinct from the temporal covenant of grace. The former was regarded as the eternal basis of the latter, which is

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<sup>78</sup>Bierma says, “To be sure, Olevianus was the first Reformed theologian to apply covenant terminology to the pretemporal redemptive agreement between the Father and the Son that later became known as the *pactum salutis* or covenant of redemption.” Bierma, “Covenant or Covenants in the Theology of Olevianus,” 249. On this understanding, the doctrine of covenant of redemption was not the novelty of the Reformed Orthodox but developed from the teachings of the early Reformers.

<sup>79</sup>Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, *Reformed Catholicity: The Promise of Retrieval for Theology and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 127. For discussions on the origins and development of the covenant of redemption, see John Fesko, *The Covenant of Redemption: Origins, Development, and Reception* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015); Fesko., *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2016); Richard A. Muller, “Toward the *pactum salutis*: Locating the Origins of a Concept,” *Mid-America Theological Journal* 18 (2008): 11-65; Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 133-39, 206-26; Muller, “From Calvin to Gillespie on Covenant: Mythological Excess or an Exercise in Doctrinal Development,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 11, no. 4 (2009): 378-97; Willem J. van Asselt, *The Federal Theology of Johannes Cocceius* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), chap. 10 and appendix 1; Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 237-58; Vos, *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation*, 248. For a defense of the Reformed doctrine of the covenant of redemption, see Scott R. Swain, “Covenant of Redemption,” in *Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Church Catholic*, ed. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 107-25; J. Mark Beach, “The Doctrine of the *Pactum Salutis* in the Covenant Theology of Herman Witsius,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 13 (2002): 101-42.

<sup>80</sup>Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 257n155.

<sup>81</sup>Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 1.24.3 (149). Cf. Jan van Vliet, *The Rise of Reformed System: The Intellectual Heritage of William Ames* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013), 30-31.

actualized in time-space.<sup>82</sup> Although not all Puritans made this distinction, many spoke of the covenant of grace consisting of an eternal and temporal aspect.<sup>83</sup>

Although the exact term *covenant of redemption* is not present in the WCF,<sup>84</sup> elements applicable to it are in chapter 8, “Of Christ the Mediator.” It summarizes an agreement between the Father and the Son: “It pleased God, in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, His only-begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and man, the Prophet, Priest, and King; the Head and Saviour of His Church, the Heir of all things, and Judge of the world: unto whom He did from all eternity give a people, to be His seed, and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified” (8.1). The appointment of Christ as the mediator is found in God’s eternal purpose. In addition, some scholars argue that since John Owen and Thomas Goodwin (1600-1679) extensively used *covenant of redemption* in their writings, the Savoy Declaration’s added phrase “*according to a covenant made between them both*” reflects

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<sup>82</sup>See Thomas Brooks, *The Covenant of Redemption Very Clearly and Largely Open* (Grand Rapids: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1971), 231-305. He affirmed the difference between the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace and elucidated the eternal covenant of redemption. Other primary resources that affirm and express the economy of salvation in light of the covenant of redemption are: Patrick Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened; or a Treatise of the Covenant of Redemption Between God and Christ as the Foundation of the Covenant of Grace* (London: 1677); Ezekiel Hopkins, *The Doctrine of the Two Covenants: Wherein the Nature of Original Sin Is Explained and St. Paul and St. James Reconciled in the Great Article of Justification* (London: Forgotten Books, 2015), 95-100; Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man*, 1:163-280 (Book II); à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 251-63; John Owen held to the doctrine of *pactum salutis*, featured prominently in his works, such as *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (1647), *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith* (1677), and *On Communion with God in Three Persons* (1657).

<sup>83</sup>Muller notes that in establishing the relationship between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, “virtually all of the major Reformed covenant theologians of the seventeenth century in their discussion of the ‘covenant of redemption’ or *pactum salutis* between God the Father and God the Son.” Muller, “The Covenant of Works and the Stability of Divine Law,” 187. Cf. Trueman argues Owen’s Trinitarian-Christological structure of salvation reflects his theology of Trinitarian covenant of redemption in Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*.

<sup>84</sup>However, as Greg Nichols in *Covenant Theology*, 14-15, points out, the LCF 7:3 explicitly asserts that the covenant of grace is rooted in an “‘eternal covenant transaction’ that is between the Father and the Son about the redemption of the elect.”

what was implicit in the Westminster Standards.<sup>85</sup> Conceptually, the covenant of redemption is distinguished from God's decree of election: the covenant of redemption's "specific focus is the eternal self-determination of the Triune God to manifest his glory in making sons and daughters of elect sinners through the mediation of Jesus Christ."<sup>86</sup> This Trinitarian covenant is regarded as providing the eternal foundation for the historical outworking of the covenant of grace: "The Reformed orthodox in particular used the covenant of redemption as an argument for the *ad intra* Trinitarian grounding for the *ad extra* work of salvation."<sup>87</sup> Therefore, it is understood as the plan of redemption acting together by the three persons of the Trinity. The Father willed for Christ to be the mediator to accomplish salvation, and the Holy Spirit applies the work of salvation in human hearts. Thus, the covenant of grace is the execution of the Triune God's commitments in the eternal covenant of redemption within time and space.

In sum, regarding covenant, the architectonic structure of the WCF reflects the Westminster divines' understanding of God's revelation of himself in Scripture. The Westminster standards present the all-encompassing nature of covenant as God's ways of dealing with men. Moreover, between the three persons of the Trinity, the eternal covenant of redemption serves as the basis for the outworking of the two historical covenants,<sup>88</sup> which in their own dual-covenant framework present the essence of

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<sup>85</sup>Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 240.

<sup>86</sup>Swain, "Covenant of Redemption," 108. Cf. Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man*, 1:163-280 (Book II); Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 12.2.11.

<sup>87</sup>Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 237.

<sup>88</sup>Trueman points out that John Owen viewed the threefold covenantal structure of the Reformed tradition expresses two lines of God's revelation in Scripture: "First, there is the vertical line of God's gracious will to save, which, thanks to the Son's consubstantiality with the Father and his participation in the covenant of redemption, is revealed in the person of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit whose task is to bear witness to the will of the Father revealed in the Son. Second, there is the

covenant theology. Of these historical covenants, the covenant of works between God and Adam placed him as the federal head for humanity in his innocent state. However, because Adam was disobedient, failing to keep this first covenant, his posterity was corrupted by inherited original sin. This sin prevented anyone from observing the law to attain the promised life. Therefore, through the second covenant, the covenant of grace, God propitiated his wrath by willing Christ as a sacrifice, an act that in turn placed the sins of Adam and his posterity upon himself.

Furthermore, distinguishing the covenant of works and the covenant of grace does not set the two in antithesis but highlights the superiority of God's grace in the covenant of grace: "The development of the *foedus operum* served as a perfect backdrop for the blessings of the Covenant of Grace. The orthodox divines never confused this."<sup>89</sup> The bi-covenantal structure of WCF distinguishes between God's favor and communion enjoyed by man before the fall and his favor restored through the Second Adam's obedience on behalf of sinners in the covenant of grace. It also demonstrates that the saving works of Christ do not only satisfy the requirement of justice (penalty) but also fulfill the obligation to law by his obedience (obligation). Thus, the bi-covenantal structure of "the WCF helps us to see more clearly the glory of our covenant Mediator, by whose life, death and resurrection the believer is restored to covenantal life and fellowship with God."<sup>90</sup>

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horizontal line of the gradual revelation of God's salvific will in history which starts in the Garden of Eden and culminates in the birth, life, and death of Christ." Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 74.

<sup>89</sup>Herzer, "Adam's Reward: Heaven or Earth?," 180-81.

<sup>90</sup>Venema, "Recent Criticisms of the 'Covenant of Works' in the Westminster Confession of Faith," 197-98. Allen also says, "The very distinction of covenant of works and covenant of grace should tip us off to this need to appreciate all that the Scriptures provide: God's natural demands, God's gracious

## The Nature of the Covenants: Unilateral and Bilateral

Reformed orthodox covenant theologians as the early Reformers recognized that the covenant of grace consists of both a monopleuric or unilateral (*foedus monoplueron*) and a dipleuric or bilateral (*foeus dipleuron*) dimension within the context of monergistic soteriology.<sup>91</sup> Because of these two dimensions, “by the seventeenth century, the covenant of grace provided a tool for understanding not only what God had done for His people, but also what God required of His people who were in covenant with Him.”<sup>92</sup> The Puritan covenant theologians used the idea of covenant to describe God’s saving promise and the obligations of Christians to God and others. While God’s saving work is not synergistic, human obligation is nonetheless implied given the fundamental nature of the covenant.<sup>93</sup> Therefore, Puritan covenant theologians explicitly affirmed and further developed their covenant theology in their historical context because it was consistent with Calvin’s teaching on the compatibility of God’s sovereignty and human responsibility in his covenantal thought, which consisted of both a monopleuric and a dipleuric dimension in a monergistic soteriology.

### Covenant Defined

Reformed covenant theologians generally defined *covenant* as a mutual agreement that binds two parties, God and man, together. Its mutuality involves God’s

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provision, and then also the demands and deliverance provided by God’s grace (for his gospel brings with it duties as well). Allen, *Sanctification*, 108-9.

<sup>91</sup>See von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought*, especially 1-2, 33, 53-85; Richard A. Muller, “Covenant and Conscience in English Reformed Theology: Three Variations on a 17<sup>th</sup> Century Theme,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 42, no. 2 (1980): 308-34.

<sup>92</sup>Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 280.

<sup>93</sup>See Mark E. Dever, *Richard Sibbes: Puritanism and Calvinism in Late Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000), 111.

promise and man's consent to its duties and obligations.<sup>94</sup> On the divine-human covenant, William Strong (d. 1654) wrote that it "implies two things, something on God's part, which is the promise, and something on man's part, which is the duty, and unto both these consent of parties is required; God's consent unto the promise, and man's consent unto the service."<sup>95</sup> The first part in this covenant involves God's promise and the second part is man's reciprocal response: "The action of God in promising, is the first part of the covenant, in which God pledges that he will be God to men, for the blessing of life, if they shall satisfy the condition annexed. . . . The action of man undertaking the agreement, in the second part of the covenant, in which man pledges to be a people for God, to the blessing of life, according as he shall fulfill the condition annexed."<sup>96</sup> Because God's covenant is binary, involving two parties, it is mutual. Similarly, John Owen (1616-1683) defined *covenant* as a "voluntary convention, pact, or agreement, between distinct persons, about the ordering and disposal of things in their power, unto their mutual concern and advantage."<sup>97</sup> Thus, for Owen, a covenant is a mutual arrangement between two parties, God and man. He also understood that the ends and purposes of a covenant "are no other than that man might serve him aright, be blessed by him, and be brought unto the everlasting enjoyment of him;—all unto his glory."<sup>98</sup>

Puritans used this language of mutuality and conditionality to describe not only Adam's

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<sup>94</sup>Beeke, *A Puritan Theology*, 219-21.

<sup>95</sup>William Strong, *Discourse of Two Covenants*, 24.1, quoted in von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace*, 35.

<sup>96</sup>Dudley Fenner, *Sacra theologia*, 48a-b, quoted in Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought*, 450.

<sup>97</sup>Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, in *The Works of John Owen*, 19:82. See also Owen, *Works*, 6:470; 10:210; 19:77-82; 23:55, quoted in Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 220.

<sup>98</sup>Owen, *Exposition of Psalm CXXX*, in *The Works of John Owen*, 6:471.

innocent state in the garden but also the covenant of grace. While the first covenant is conditional upon perfect obedience, the second is God's provision for salvation apart from human works. For this reason, the covenant is unconditional, but this status does not remove conditions for God's people. Furthermore, since mutuality is a common feature in both covenants, they naturally consist of unconditional and conditional elements or unilateral and bilateral aspects.

### **Unconditional and Conditional**

Reformed orthodox theologians also agreed that God's covenants with humanity are both absolute and conditional.<sup>99</sup> The development of covenant theology in the early Reformed Orthodoxy<sup>100</sup> distinguished between unilateral promise or establishment and bilateral administration or application, holding these two aspects of the covenant in harmony with the doctrine of predestination.<sup>101</sup> While the early Reformed covenant theologians insisted that the covenant of works and the covenant of grace are two distinct covenants, they also maintained that "God initiates the covenant, but there is mutuality to the covenant."<sup>102</sup> This mutuality extends to not only the covenant of works but also the covenant of grace. Commenting on one such theologian, Franciscus Junius

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<sup>99</sup>von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought*, 53-85.

<sup>100</sup>Richard A. Muller divides the Post-Reformation into three periods: Early (ca. 1565-1618/1640), High (ca. 1640-1685/1725), and Late Reformed Orthodoxy (1725 and afterward) in his *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, Ca. 1520 to Ca. 1725, Prolegomena to Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1:60-84.

<sup>101</sup>Muller observes, "Early synthesizers of covenantal theology such as Fenner, Rollock, and Perkins held to clearly enunciated doctrines of predestination and often were able to fold both unilateral and bilateral definitions of covenant into their theologies." Muller, "Approaches to Post-Reformation Protestantism," 13. Similarly, von Rohr writes, "The one covenant has two qualities: it is, on the one hand, the instrument of the mutuality of divine-human commitment and, on the other hand, the instrument of God's sovereign rule in all that pertains to salvation. In the terminology of the Puritans the covenant of grace is both absolute and conditional." von Rohr *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought*, 53.

<sup>102</sup>Clark, "Christ and Covenant," 416.

(1545-1602), Scott Clark writes that Junius “taught a mutual covenant between God the Father, ‘in the son of his love with our first parents, initiated in the garden of Eden, promising supernatural life’ and by virtue of which they in turn owed to God reverent worship and obedience.”<sup>103</sup> Other early Puritans such as Thomas Cartwright (1535-1603) and Dudley Fenner (1558-1587) also supported the mutual nature of the covenant. In their understanding of covenant, “the unilateral emphasis on grace did not exclude a bilateral element.”<sup>104</sup> Mark Jones further explains that “the covenant of grace was in the first place one-sided (*foedus monopleuron*); humanity’s fallen condition meant that they could receive the benefits of the covenant only by God’s grace. That did not, however, rule out conditions for God’s people.”<sup>105</sup> Therefore, although they prioritized grace and insisted on faith and good works as gifts of God’s grace, they also spoke of the mutuality and conditionality of the covenants. Commenting on another early Reformed orthodox theologian, Muller explores John Cameron’s (ca. 1579-1625) understanding of God’s covenants: “The understanding of God’s covenants, both of nature or works and of grace as hypothetical or conditional does not set Cameron apart from the main line of Reformed theological development as evidenced in Olevianus, Ursinus, Fenner, Perkins, Polanus, and Rollock.”<sup>106</sup> He adds, specifically in reference to Cameron’s thought, that “the hypothetical or conditional nature of the covenants was carefully balanced by the absolute divine willing of particular salvation and the effective divine fulfillment of the

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<sup>103</sup>Clark, “Christ and Covenant,” 413. Clark cites Junius, *These Theologicae* 25.3.

<sup>104</sup>Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought*, 453.

<sup>105</sup>Jones, “The ‘Old’ Covenant,” in Haykin and Jones, *Drawn into Controversie*, 183.

<sup>106</sup>Richard A. Muller, “Divine Covenants, Absolute and Conditional: John Cameron and the Early Orthodox Development of Reformed Covenant Theology,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 17 (2006): 55-56.

conditions of the covenant of grace.”<sup>107</sup> Moreover, Mark Dever recognizes that both the unilateral and bilateral aspects are present in Richard Sibbes’s (1577-1635) covenant language. Dever states, “Sibbes’s retention of both these aspects of the covenant was achieved by ‘combing furious opposites, by keeping them both, and keeping them both furious.’”<sup>108</sup> Thus, the early Reformed orthodox theologians consistently maintained a doctrine of predestination and a doctrine of covenant that are monopleuric or unilateral in origin and dipleuric or bilateral in administration.

The unconditionality and mutuality of the covenant are also in harmony in the theology of William Perkins (1558-1602).<sup>109</sup> Perkins, often called the ‘father of Puritanism,’ “saw the covenant to be the means by which God worked out his decree of election locating the *ordo salutis* . . . within the broader context of the covenant of grace.”<sup>110</sup> Moreover, in *A Golden Chaine*, Perkins defined “God’s covenant” as “his contract with man, concerning the obtaining of life eternall, upon a certen condition. This covenant consists of two parts: Gods promise to man, Mans promise to God. Gods promise to man, is that, whereby he bindeth himself to man to bee his God, if he performe the condition. Man’s promise to God, is that, whereby hee voweth his allegiance unto his Lord, and to performe the condition betweene them.”<sup>111</sup> In his

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<sup>107</sup> Muller, “Divine Covenants, Absolute and Conditional,” 56.

<sup>108</sup> Dever, *Richard Sibbes*, 121. He quotes G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, in *Collected Works* (San Francisco, 1986), 1:299.

<sup>109</sup> See Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought*, 472-89.

<sup>110</sup> Vliet, *The Rise of Reformed System*, 37. Cf. Young Jae Timothy Song, *Theology and Piety in the Reformed Federal Thought of William Perkins and John Preston* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1998), 30-49.

<sup>111</sup> William Perkins. *A Golden Chaine in The Workes of that Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the Universitie of Cambridge. Mr. William Perkins* (London: John Legatt. 1612-1613). 1.31-1.32, quoted in Vliet, *The Rise of Reformed System*, 44. Cf. Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought*, 473. Elsewhere, Perkins defined covenant of grace as “that whereby God freely promising Christ

theology of the covenant, therefore, Perkins rigorously bound God’s eternal decree of election and reprobation and man’s voluntary participation. Muller also observes, “Perkins taught a doctrine of full, double predestination and taught a unilateral bestowed covenant of grace and at the same time (without either apparent contradiction or internal tension) argued a bilateral character of covenant once bestowed, according to which human beings were called on to act responsibly before God.”<sup>112</sup> Similarly, Dever says, “In Perkins’s sermons, like Calvin’s before him, the ‘covenant-God offered grace and demanded obedience, but he did not recompense obedience by offering grace.’”<sup>113</sup> Perkins saw that God’s covenants with humanity are bilateral because they are covenant relationships between two parties. Nevertheless, this bilateral nature in administration does not annul the unilateral or absolute characteristic in establishment because covenant is God’s outward means of executing his decree of election.

In the Calvin-Perkins tradition, Williams Ames (1576-1633) also supported the unconditional and demanding character of the covenant grace. He defined covenant as

a kind of transaction of God with the creature whereby God commands, promises, threatens, fulfills; and the creature binds itself in obedience to God so demanding. Deut. 26:16-19, *This day the Lord your God commands you . . . this day you have demanded a guarantee from the Lord . . . the Lord demanded a guarantee from you this day . . . to make you holy . . . so that you be a holy people.* This way of entering the covenant is not between those who are equal before the law but between lord and servant. It, therefore, rightly pertains to the government. It is very rightly called the covenant not of man but of God, who is the author and chief executor. Deut. 8:18,

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and his benefits, exacts again of man that he would by faith receive Christ and repent of his sins. . . . In this covenant we do not so much offer or promise any great matter to God, as in a manner only receive.” Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, 1.70. Cf. Paul R. Schaefer, “Protestant ‘Scholasticism’ at Elizabethan Cambridge: William Perkins and a Reformed Theology of the Heart,” in *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment*, ed. Carl R. Trueman and R. Scott Clark (Carlisle, England: Paternoster, 1999), 163-64.

<sup>112</sup>Muller, “Approaches to Post-Reformation Protestantism,” 13.

<sup>113</sup>Dever, *Richard Sibbes*, 112. He quotes Jens G. Moller, “The Beginnings of Puritan Covenant Theology,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 14, no. 1 (1963), 67.

*That he may confirm his covenant. In this covenant the moral deeds of the intelligent creature lead either to happiness as a reward or to unhappiness as a punishment.*<sup>114</sup>

Without sacrificing the necessity of the believer's covenant of obedience, Ames emphasized the monopoleuric nature of the covenant of grace: "This obedience manifest[s] itself in an informed piety, the alignment of life with doctrine, the meeting of orthodoxy with orthopraxy, a practical Christian living that demonstrates complete harmony between grace and obedience."<sup>115</sup> Ames recognized that God unilaterally initiates the covenant, but the mutuality of the covenant demands human obedience. Ames also "demonstrated the biblical truth that although justification is by grace alone through faith alone, and never by works and obedience, the believer's response of obedience is absolutely vital to authentic covenant life and to Christianity itself. While tenaciously holding to the one-sided, unconditional character of the covenant of grace, Ames also stressed the responsibility of the covenant child."<sup>116</sup> While the covenant is absolute and requires nothing from the sinners, it is also conditional in its administration since God's people are required to obey God and his law. Therefore, God's sovereign grace in salvation is not in conflict with his call for trust and obedience.

### **High Reformed Orthodoxy**

The understanding of biblical covenants as both unilateral and bilateral in the

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<sup>114</sup>Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 1.10.9-11(book, chapter, paragraph).

<sup>115</sup>Vliet, *The Rise the of Reformed System*, 266. On Ames's teaching on the relation between the *ordo* and *historia salutis*, Vliet assesses, "The horizontal movement and the vertical 'strikes' are continually in a state of intersection; predestination and covenant meet in unity." Vliet, "Decretal Theology and the Development of Covenant Thought: An Assessment of Cornelis Graafland's Thesis with a Particular View to Federal Architects William Ames and Johannes Cocceius," *Westminster Theological Journal* 63, no. 2 (2001), 416.

<sup>116</sup>Joel R. Beeke and Jan van Vliet, "The Marrow of Theology by William Ames (1576-1633)," in *The Devoted Life: An Invitation to the Puritan Classics*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Randall C. Gleason (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 64.

Early Reformed Orthodoxy found unity and continuity in the High Reformed Orthodoxy (ca. 1640-1685/1725). Johannes Cocceius was a prominent seventeenth-century biblical scholar who made significant contribution toward Reformed covenant theology. He is generally described by others “as teaching a ‘conditional’ doctrine of covenant in ‘opposition’ to the rigid predestinationism of ‘Reformed scholasticism.’”<sup>117</sup> However, Cocceius asserted God’s covenant with humans is unlike manmade, mutual covenants. By contrast, God’s covenant is a “divine declaration of the way of receiving the love of God as well as the union and communion of becoming a partaker in Him.”<sup>118</sup> Cocceius also stated that because it is a divine declaration, “therefore, the covenant of God with man is μονόπλευρον (one-side), insofar as it is the design and arrangement of God alone concerning the way of receiving His love and benefits.”<sup>119</sup> However, “every covenant of God . . . is not so μονόπλευρον (one-side) that obligation is entirely absent from the other party.”<sup>120</sup> Thus, since human obligation is a necessary element, “the covenant of God is δίπλευρον (two-sided) or mutual, when man, clinging to God according to the law of the covenant, obligates himself τῇ ὁμολογίᾳ, by confession, to the force of the divine arrangement, as if to guarantee His love and benefits.”<sup>121</sup> Thus, God’s covenant with humans is certainly one-sided by God’s initiation, but it becomes mutual. Within the mutuality of God’s covenant, “through Him [Christ] we are certainly approved by the exacting God and assent and agree that we choose the way that He has revealed to us for

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<sup>117</sup>Muller, “Approaches to Post-Reformation Protestantism,” 13.

<sup>118</sup>Cocceius, *The Doctrine of the Covenant and Testament of God*, 22.

<sup>119</sup>Cocceius, *The Doctrine of the Covenant and Testament of God*, 23.

<sup>120</sup>Cocceius, *The Doctrine of the Covenant and Testament of God*, 23.

<sup>121</sup>Cocceius, *The Doctrine of the Covenant and Testament of God*, 23.

communion with Him, our highest good, and the law that God brings to us. We in turn devote ourselves to God.”<sup>122</sup> Muller concludes that Cocceius “actually combined the unilateral and bilateral definitions of covenant in a system that taught an orthodox doctrine of predestination.”<sup>123</sup> Therefore, in his theology, Cocceius maintained God’s covenant with man as both one-sided (unilateral) and two-sided (mutual).

Similar to Cocceius, Ezekiel Hopkins (1633-1690) claimed that God’s covenant of grace with man is twofold: absolute and conditional.<sup>124</sup> On the one hand, “it is called an absolute covenant, because the first grace of conversion unto God cannot be given upon conditions. It is indeed commonly wrought in men by the right use of means; as, hearing the word, mediation, prayer, &c. but these means are not conditions of grace, because we have found, that, in some instances, God hath not limited himself to them.”<sup>125</sup> On the other hand, God’s covenant “is not absolute, but the conditional covenant that the apostle speaks of in the text. For life and salvation are there promised upon the terms and conditions of believing on Christ with the heart, and confessing him with the mouth; that is, of faith and obedience . . . it is called the conditional covenant, because these conditions must be first fulfilled on our part, before any engagement can lie upon God to give us the salvation promised.”<sup>126</sup> Thus, along with other Reformed orthodox theologians, Hopkins distinguished between the covenant’s unconditional, divine

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<sup>122</sup>Cocceius, *The Doctrine of the Covenant and Testament of God*, 23.

<sup>123</sup>Muller, “Approaches to Post-Reformation Protestantism,” 13.

<sup>124</sup>Ezekiel Hopkins, *The Doctrine of the Two Covenants: Wherein the Nature of Original Sin Is Explained and St. Paul and St. James Reconciled in the Great Article of Justification* (London: Forgotten Books, 2015), 107.

<sup>125</sup>Hopkins, *The Doctrine of the Two Covenants*, 109.

<sup>126</sup>Hopkins, *The Doctrine of the Two Covenants*, 110.

promises and its conditional administration entailing obligations. Comparably, Peter Bulkeley (1583-1659) stated, a “promise is the ground of the duty, and the duty is the way to the promise.”<sup>127</sup> From God, this covenant promise is unconditional, but for humans, it is based on duty and condition.

As other Reformed covenant theologians, Herman Witsius (1636-1708) and Wilhelmus à Brakel also called on the concepts of monopleurism and dipleurism. Witsius indicated that a covenant between God and humans is primarily a covenant of “one party” initiated only by God. Nevertheless, understanding covenant in a broader sense, he clarified that “a covenant of God with man is an agreement between God and man, about the way of obtaining consummate happiness; including a commination of eternal destruction, with which the contemner of the happiness, offered in that way, is to be punished.”<sup>128</sup> Similarly à Brakel wrote, “A covenant consists in *a mutual, binding obligation between two or more individuals, who, contingent upon certain conditions, promise certain things to each other*. Between God and man there is therefore such a covenant of grace in the true sense of the word.”<sup>129</sup> Muller contends that their understanding of the covenant concurs with that of the Reformers: “That all covenants between God and human beings are founded on divine initiative and are, in that sense, unilateral. At the same time, these covenants, once made, bespeak a mutuality: The human partner must in some way consent to the covenant and exercise responsibility

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<sup>127</sup>Peter Bulkeley, *The Gospel Covenant or the Covenant of Grace Opened* (London, 1646), 157. Cf. Ball, *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, 19-21; Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 278.

<sup>128</sup>Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man*, 1.1.9.

<sup>129</sup>à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, 429 (emphasis original).

within it.”<sup>130</sup> Therefore, Reformed covenant theologians and Reformers are in agreement understanding God’s covenants with humans are unilateral or unconditional when established and bilateral or mutual when administered, the latter of which always demands commitment.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Reformed covenant theologians typically agreed that God’s covenant with humans is both absolute and conditional. Even Nehemiah Coxe (died 1688), a Reformed Particular Baptist, defended the monopleuric and dipleuric nature of God’s covenant. He defined God’s covenant as “a declaration of his sovereign pleasure concerning the benefits he will bestow on them [humans], the communion they will have with him, and the way and means by which this will be enjoyed by them.”<sup>131</sup> Similar to Cocceius, Coxe saw God’s covenant with humans as one-sided in his “condescending love and goodness,” bringing them “into a blessed state in the eternal enjoyment of himself.”<sup>132</sup> However, it is also two-sided because it simultaneously demands humans’ obedience as a way of walking with God.

Therefore, whether the Reformed Orthodox theologians use the terms *monopleuric* and *dipleuric* or *absolute* and *conditional*, they express the nature of God’s covenants with humans as his sovereign, unilateral arrangement, which results in bilateral or conditional administration requiring obedience of his human covenant partners as a way of expressing their consent to the covenant. This voluntary consent occurs when

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<sup>130</sup>Muller, “The Covenant of Works and the Stability of Divine Law,” 181. Cf. Muller, “Covenant and Conscience in English Reformed Theology,” 308-34.

<sup>131</sup>Nehemiah Coxe, *Covenant Theology: From Adam to Christ* (Palmdale, CA: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2005), 36n7. Coxe is paraphrasing Cocceius’ *The Doctrine of the Covenant and Testament of God*, 22.

<sup>132</sup>Coxe, *Covenant Theology*, 36.

humans exercise their responsibility toward the covenant, which is grounded in God's gracious election or divine initiation. Notably, the covenant is absolute because of God rather than due to humans' actions in response to the covenant: "As the human condition renders impossible, therefore, the purely human fulfillment of the covenant conditions, God gives in the covenant those absolute promises which are without condition and become ground for the covenant's ultimate completion."<sup>133</sup> Therefore, the covenant arises from God's sovereign pleasure and love in eternal election, and only secondarily is it covenant of two parties. Speaking of the Reformed divines, Muller asserts, "Whether supra- or infralapsarian in their views on predestination, [they] understood covenant as conditional, grounded in divine promises and stipulations, the latter being restipulated by the human partners in covenant."<sup>134</sup> At times, Reformed orthodox theologians emphasized the unconditional nature of the covenant, and at other times, they focused on the conditional nature of the covenant. Stressing the sovereignty of grace did not prevent them from equally emphasizing the conditional aspect of the covenant. While affirming God's covenant as absolute, they also spoke of it as conditional and, thus, requiring reciprocal response from humans. Laying important groundwork to covenant theology, therefore, Reformed theologians understood that the dual nature of the covenant as absolute and conditional is not contradictory; rather, these two aspects of the covenant harmoniously join divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

### **Covenantal Conditions**

Clearly, the Reformed divines maintained that God's covenant with humans is

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<sup>133</sup>von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought*, 82-83.

<sup>134</sup>Muller, "Divine Covenants, Absolute and Conditional," 56.

unilateral or unconditional and is not in tension with its mutual administration. In the application of the saving benefits of the new covenant, they also affirmed and emphasized that the covenant carries the conditions of faith and obedience. Arguing against the Antinomians' claim that the gospel is only unconditional, the Reformed theologian Rutherford stated that there are conditions without which one cannot be saved. He contended, "To deny the Gospel to be a conditional covenant, is to bely the Gospel . . . that repentance and doing of God's will, and new obedience, are conditions, is evident by Scripture."<sup>135</sup> Therefore, Puritan covenant theologians maintained the covenant of grace as conditional—conditional upon faith and evangelical obedience.

### **Meritorious and Non-Meritorious Conditions**

The term *condition* carried various meanings for the Puritans. On covenant conditions, they largely distinguished between *meritorious* and *non-meritorious* conditions and between *antecedent* and *consequent* conditions. Additionally, Reformed Orthodox theologians recognized that the gracious nature of the covenant of grace is fundamentally rooted in Christ's substitutionary atonement. Therefore, they referred to Christ as the meritorious condition who, as the Mediator, acts on behalf of his elect.<sup>136</sup> Speaking of condition in this way, Thomas Boston said, "The condition of the covenant of grace, properly so called, is, Christ in the form of a bond-servant, as last Adam, Representative, Kinsman-Redeemer, Surety, and Priest, his fulfilling all righteousness

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<sup>135</sup>Samuel Rutherford, *The Spirituall Antichrist*, 2:40, quoted in Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 328.

<sup>136</sup>See Michael Brown, *Christ and the Condition: The Covenant Theology of Samuel Petto (1624-1711)* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012).

owing, in virtue of the broken covenant of works, unto God by his spiritual seed.”<sup>137</sup>

Boston argued, Christ’s obedience “alone is the condition of the covenant,”<sup>138</sup> adding that “faith and obedience are benefits promised in the covenant . . . in virtue of the promises of the covenant, they are produced in the elect: therefore they cannot be the condition of the covenant.”<sup>139</sup> Like Thomas Boston, most Puritan divines understood that the meritorious condition of the covenant is fulfilled in Christ’s obedience, and he alone is the ground of believers’ acceptance before God and their partaking of covenant benefits.

### **Antecedent and Consequent Conditions**

Some Puritan divines articulated differences between an *antecedent* condition and a *consequent* condition. For instance, John Ball wrote:

It is true that the promises rest on a condition of obedience; but conditions are of two sorts, antecedent or consequent. (a) It is an *antecedent* condition when the condition is the cause of the thing promised or given . . . (b) It is a *consequent* condition when the condition is annexed to the promise as a qualification of the subject. It was therefore in this latter sense that obedience to the commandments was a condition of the promise.<sup>140</sup>

In this sense, only Christ the mediator is the *antecedent* condition of the covenant. While speaking of faith and obedience as conditions, Puritan theologians also referred to them as *consequent* conditions, which neither meritorious nor causal. Thus, they are *non-meritorious*,<sup>141</sup> seen simply as a qualification for the subject capable of receiving the

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<sup>137</sup>Boston, *A View of the Covenant of Grace*, 64.

<sup>138</sup>Boston, *A View of the Covenant of Grace*, 65.

<sup>139</sup>Boston, *A View of the Covenant of Grace*, 65.

<sup>140</sup>Kevan, “The Law and the Covenants—A Study in John Ball,” 55; Cf. John Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*, ed. Don Kistler (Grand Rapids: Soli Deo Gloria, 2009), 67-68.

<sup>141</sup>Woolsey discusses Dudley Fenner’s understanding of faith as a consequent covenant condition: “Fenner’s description of ‘the covenant of the promise of grace’ was similar: ‘It is a covenant (a) concerning Christ and the blessings prominent (*extante*) in him, graciously promised through grace, (b)

promise.

### **Faith and New Evangelical Obedience as Non-Meritorious Conditions**

When Puritan divines spoke of faith and obedience as conditions of the covenant, they do not refer to them as meritorious.<sup>142</sup> Nevertheless, although they are non-meritorious, they are necessary conditions for salvation. Some Puritan divines distinguished between faith as the antecedent condition and obedience in good works as the consequent condition. In this sense, they spoke of “the covenant of grace as conditional. The conditions of the covenant were principally faith in Christ and its fruit of new obedience. The former condition was understood, against the Antinomians, as an antecedent condition, so that no blessing procured by Christ could be applied to the believer until he or she exercised faith in Christ. Only then did actual justification take place.”<sup>143</sup> In addition, after believers exercise their initial faith in Christ by “being in covenant with God,” they are “required to believe and keep God’s commandments. Therefore the pursuit of holiness and the practice of righteousness are also conditions, but they are consequent to the initial exercise of faith. . . . that the necessary of evangelical obedience and good works functioned as the proper and obligatory response to the grace

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wherein is the condition, if Christ is received,’ that is by faith. In the context of the full exposition of faith in Fenner and Cartwright the condition could only be a consequent condition, one which had no meritorious value whatsoever. The action of faith was inspired and given by the Holy Spirit, who brought sorrow for sin, witnessed to the adoption of believers into God’s family, and united them with Christ. Faith was inseparable from its effects which provided evidence of its true nature.” Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought*, 454. Woolsey quotes Dudley Fenner’s *Sacra theologia*, 49a, 62b-63b.

<sup>142</sup>For a summary of three principal categories as non-meritorious conditions or requirements of the covenant: (1) faith; (2) evangelical obedience; (3) good works for salvation, see Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 305-18.

<sup>143</sup>Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 318.

of God held forth in the covenant.”<sup>144</sup> In this light, faith is an antecedent condition to justifying grace and obedience is a consequential condition, flowing from participating in Christ. Nevertheless, both are non-meritorious. Although salvation is fundamentally unconditional, “the Reformed orthodox spoke of requirements or conditions demanded of those who would inherit the promise of salvation.”<sup>145</sup> There are necessary non-meritorious conditions—faith, obedience, and good works for those who receive the gracious salvation in Christ.

### **Covenant Obligation or Duty**

Certainly, Reformed orthodox theologians distinguished between Christ as the meritorious condition and faith and obedience as non-meritorious conditions. Subsequent to being received in the covenant, believers’ requirements are not conditions meriting their salvation but are more appropriately understood as human “response” or covenant “obligation” or “duty.” On these conditions, John Owen spoke of covenant obligation: “If by conditions we intend the duties of obedience which God requireth of us in and by virtue of that covenant; but this I say, the principal promises thereof are not in the first place remunerative of our obedience in the covenant, but efficaciously assumptive of us in the covenant, and establishing or confirming the covenant.”<sup>146</sup> Similarly, John Bradford asserted that faith and obedience are required not as causes of salvation; instead, they are covenant obligations “because he [God] is our Father and we his children,

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<sup>144</sup>Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 318.

<sup>145</sup>Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 318.

<sup>146</sup>John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews in The Works of John Owen, D.D.* (Edinburg: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850-55), 23:68-69, quoted in Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 279.

through his own goodness in Christ, *therefore* requireth he faith and obedience.”<sup>147</sup> For Samuel Petto, the new covenant is absolute in that the condition of the covenant is fulfilled by Christ with no need of additional performance. Nevertheless, it is also expressed conditionally. The condition of the new covenant is “that which is only a connex action, or, *medium fruitionis*, a necessary duty, way, or means, in order to the enjoyment of promised mercies.”<sup>148</sup> In this expression, the conditional form of the covenant is related to believers seeking promised blessings, but believers have a duty to seek these blessings. Therefore, the covenant’s condition is duty, which believers are encouraged to meet as they earnestly seek the promised blessings.

### **Faith and Obedience: Conditions and Gifts**

Though faith and obedience are necessary conditions to obtain the promise of the gospel, they are also gifts from God. Hopkins claimed that God gives these covenantal conditions in his covenant promises: “Though faith and obedience are the conditions, which God requires for the obtaining of salvation, yet these conditions are themselves as much the free gift of God, as the salvation promised upon them.”<sup>149</sup> According to the covenant of grace, God requires “faith in Christ,” but he promises “to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life His Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe” (WCF 7.3). Thus, the covenant is conditional in that it requires a person’s faith, but it is unconditional because it is produced by the Spirit. While Richard Sibbes supported a covenant that is both unilateral and bilateral, consists

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<sup>147</sup>John Bradford, *The Writings of John Bradford: Letter to Mistress Mary Honeywood* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1979), 2:153 (emphasis added).

<sup>148</sup>Petto, *The Great Mystery of the Covenant of Grace*, 176.

<sup>149</sup>Hopkins, *The Doctrine of the Two Covenants*, 111.

of unconditional and conditional elements, he avered that its conditionality does not revoke its absoluteness. He contended, “propounded conditionally, in the performance they are absolute, because God performs the covenant himself; he performs our part and his own too. For since Christ, though he propounded the promises of the gospel with conditions, yet he performs the condition; he stirs us up to attend upon the means, and by his Spirit in the word he works faith and repentance, which is the condition. Faith and repentance is his gift.”<sup>150</sup> Although faith and repentance are necessary requirements or conditional for the promise of salvation, the power and strength to exercise these demands are given by God as gifts of election. Thus, God does not only promise his part in the covenant, but he also enables believers to perform the conditions on their part.<sup>151</sup>

### **Good Works for Salvation**

The Puritan divines also believed that good works are conditions for salvation.<sup>152</sup> For example, John Ball wrote about the faith that justifies, it brings forth good works. He claimed, “A disposition to good works is necessary to justification, being the qualification of an active and living faith. Good works of all sorts are necessary to the believer’s continuance in the state of justification.”<sup>153</sup> Turretin also affirmed good works as necessary for salvation even though they are not required meritoriously. They serve as the required means for possessing salvation: “Although works may be said to contribute

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<sup>150</sup>Richard Sibbes, *A Learned Commentary or Exposition Upon The First Chapter of the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, in *Works*, 3:394, quoted in Dever, *Richard Sibbes*, 116.

<sup>151</sup>In the covenant of grace, God requires evangelical obedience which believers obey with a hearty willingness. Some Puritans spoke of conditions of the covenant as the Savior’s wooing of his beloved. See Dever, *Richard Sibbes*, 115.

<sup>152</sup>E.g., Colquhoun, “The Nature, Necessity, and Desert of Good Works,” in *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*, 283-320.

<sup>153</sup>Kevan, “The Law and the Covenants—A Study in John Ball,” 56.

nothing to the acquisition of salvation, still they should be considered necessary to the obtainment of it, so that no one can be saved without them.”<sup>154</sup> He proposed five reasons for good works as necessary for salvation: (1) the command of God; (2) duties of the covenant of grace; (3) rules of faith and life; (4) freedom from the curse and bond of law as freedom to obedience; (5) the purpose of sanctification and the means of obtaining glory.<sup>155</sup> As faith and obedience, good works are necessary conditions for salvation. Thus, the Reformed divines largely concur that they are covenant obligations or duties, *consequent* and *non-meritorious* conditions.

In this line of thinking, the covenant is grounded in God’s free and undeserved goodness, and the attached duties or obligations in no way merit his goodness. Golding distinguishes between meritorious and instrumental causes: “If condition is understood in the sense of meritorious cause, then the Covenant of Grace is not conditioned: it is wholly gratuitous and depends solely upon God’s good pleasure. But if understood as instrumental cause, receptive of the promises of the covenant, then it cannot be denied that the Covenant of Grace is conditioned.”<sup>156</sup> The Puritan theologians maintained similar understanding that the conditions of faith and obedience in the covenant of grace are simply instrumental, not meritorious. Therefore, when they spoke of covenant conditions as obligations or duties, they were not revoking the covenant’s unconditionality and its gracious root.

While the conditionality of the covenant is not contingent on human autonomy,

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<sup>154</sup>Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:703.

<sup>155</sup>Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:703-5.

<sup>156</sup>Golding, *Covenant Theology*, 137.

Puritan theologians understood that humans cannot obtain covenant fellowship with God apart from their responsorial faith, repentance, and obedience. However, the conditions of faith, repentance, and obedience are not absolute; they are only a means or instrument. In the covenant, therefore, God promises what he requires. For Puritans, God's gracious covenant is not in conflict with its required conditions; rather, it is complementary to those conditions. As von Rohr claims, the covenant theology of Puritanism affirms the harmony of two seeming binaries: God's sovereignty and human responsibility. In this harmony, the "ultimate human destiny as divinely and unconditionally determined by God's eternal decree" is not conflict with the evangelical "call for faith and obedience as the believer's response to God's proclaimed Word."<sup>157</sup> For believers, God's covenants involve both privilege and responsibility, both of which are clearly expressed in Westminster's catechisms: The Scriptures principally teach what man is to *believe* concerning God, and what *duty* God requires of man (WSC 3 and WLC 5). The duty which God requires of man is obedience to his revealed will (WSC 39 and WLC 91).<sup>158</sup> These two aspects, what man ought to *believe* and what man ought to *do*, outline these catechisms. In their covenantal understanding of salvation, Puritans supported "the unity

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<sup>157</sup>von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought*, 1.

<sup>158</sup>Correspondently, John Murray notes, "When the Confessions deals with the application of redemption, it is noteworthy how the various topics are arranged. It sets forth first the phases which are the actions of God—Calling, Justification, Adoption, Sanctification (X-XIII)—and then those which are concerned with human response—Faith, Repentance, Good Works, Perseverance, Assurance of Grace (XIV-XXIII). Undoubtedly, the consideration that salvation is of the Lord and that all saving response in men is the fruit of God's grace dictated this order. It is consonant with the pervasive emphasis upon the sovereignty of grace." Moreover, he says, "In the two Catechisms produced by the Westminster Assembly, it is striking to observe how large a proportion is devoted to the exposition of the ten commandments. This shows how jealous the divines were in the matter of the Christian life. A similar proportion is not devoted to the law of God in the Confession. But the emphasis is proportionate to what a Confession should incorporate. It is well to note what is said about good works (XVI), the law of God (XIX), Christian liberty (XX), the Sabbath day (XXI), marriage and divorce (XXIV). Grace has often been turned into license. No creed guards against this distortion more than the Confession of the Westminster Assembly. Grace pure and sovereign is the theme throughout. But grace is unto holiness, and it confirms and enhances human responsibility." John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray: The Claims of Truth* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1976), 1:320-21.

and complementarity of two defining characteristics of the Reformed tradition: the gracious nature of a God who has sought to redeem through unconditional covenant, and the related injunction to live in covenant obedience.”<sup>159</sup> In this understanding, faith and works as well as grace and obedience are wonderfully joined and harmonized. Furthermore, the Puritans’ recognition of the relationship between law and grace undergirds their understanding of the salvation covenant. In an absolute and mutual covenant, therefore, the elements of command and promise, of law and gospel, are harmoniously embedded.

### **Unity of Law and Grace in the Covenants**

The Westminster divines affirmed the traditional threefold classification of the law: moral, ceremonial, and judicial.<sup>160</sup> Moreover, like Calvin, they believed salvation consists of both gospel and law. The law is gracious, and grace contains law.<sup>161</sup> From this relationship, Puritans taught that law and grace are not in opposition.<sup>162</sup> Rather, they are harmonious, a state that continues from the moral law, or the covenant of works, to the covenant of grace, which is affirmed in WCF 19:2: “This law [the same law that was first written in the heart of man], after his [Adam’s] fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness; and as such, was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments, and written in two tables; the four first commandments containing our

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<sup>159</sup>Vliet, *The Rise the of Reformed System*, 266.

<sup>160</sup>Westminster Confession of Faith, 19:1-5.

<sup>161</sup>Ernest F. Kevan, *The Grace of Law: A Study in Puritan Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965).

<sup>162</sup>Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 130-34.

duty towards God; and the other six, our duty to man.”<sup>163</sup> Similarly, Colquhoun specified grace is in harmony with law because the same law is given to humankind in three forms: “first, as written on the heart of man in his creation; second, as given under the form of a covenant of works to him; and third as a rule of life in the hand of Christ the Mediator to all true believers.”<sup>164</sup> However, the Reformed orthodox faced opposition in their understanding of the relationship between the law and the gospel. For the Puritan divines, although the law and grace are antithetical regarding one’s justification in a narrow sense, the law is not incompatible with grace in a broad sense. The moral law remains as a standard of obedience for believers in the covenant of grace. By contrast, the Antinomians often rejected the moral law as a standard of obedience and denied the conditionality of the new covenant. Puritan divines disagreed, seeing that obedience to the law for a believer ultimately shows God’s gracious purposes for the law. Rather than an infringement, keeping this law as a duty and responsibility for covenant obedience grants the believer freedom from the bondage of sin and curses of the law; believers are free to wholeheartedly obey the law to serve the law Giver.<sup>165</sup>

### **Creation and Law**

The law was first inscribed in the heart of man in creation. This law of creation is called the *law of nature* and manifests “the holy and righteous nature of God, and was interwoven with then nature of the first man; because it corresponds both the nature of

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<sup>163</sup>Cf. Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689, 19:2, affirms the same.

<sup>164</sup>Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*, 3.

<sup>165</sup>E.g., Samuel Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1964), 51-147.

God who is the author of it, and to that of man who is subjected to it.”<sup>166</sup> It is also called the *moral law* “because it was a revelation of the will of God as his moral governor to the first man, and was the standard and rule of all the man’s moral qualities and actions.”<sup>167</sup> Since he had been created upright and in God’s image, the law was recorded on the tablets of Adam’s heart (Gen 1:26). In a broader application, God also implants his moral law in the heart of every human he creates. However, more specifically, God inscribed the moral law in Adam’s heart to make a covenant with him, promising eternal life if he was perfectly obedient to this law. In the Garden of Eden, the tree of life functioned sacramentally, as “a sign and pledge of that eternal life which Adam would have obtained by his own personal and perfect obedience to the law of God if he had continued in it.”<sup>168</sup> Like Adam, humans are obligated to this natural or moral law that represents God’s sovereign authority, which commands humans’ perfect obedience.<sup>169</sup> In Genesis 2:17 when Adam violates God’s law, he also violates the eternal law written in his heart. Even though humans have fallen into sin by Adam’s disobedience, they are perpetually obligated to the law because of its universal application.

### **The Law Given to Moses**

Reformed covenant theology identifies unity and diversity in the relationship of the law and the gospel to the covenants. For instance, Reformed orthodox theologians held varying viewpoints on the relationship between the Mosaic covenant, or God’s

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<sup>166</sup>Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*, 6.

<sup>167</sup>Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*, 7.

<sup>168</sup>Coxe, *Covenant Theology*, 45.

<sup>169</sup>Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*, 7.

covenant with the Israelites at Mount Sinai, and the covenants of works and grace.<sup>170</sup>

Some of these theologians saw the Mosaic covenant as a continuation or republication of the covenant of works, and others regarded it as a covenant subservient to the covenant of grace. In addition, Reformed orthodox theologians known as dichotomists viewed it as a further dispensation of the covenant of grace, while trichotomists understood it as a third or distinct covenant, a combination of the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.<sup>171</sup> The majority of Reformed Orthodox theologians supported the third viewpoint, believing the Mosaic covenant is part of the covenant of grace.<sup>172</sup> Although most of these divines agreed that the grace of God is displayed in a full and better form in the new dispensation rather than the old, dichotomists held that the Mosaic covenant in the old dispensation is the same in substance in the new, the covenant of grace.<sup>173</sup>

Despite the Reformed orthodox theologians' different views on the Mosaic covenant, they agreed the law in the Mosaic covenant was not humanity's means for

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<sup>170</sup>For discussions on Puritan theologians' understanding of/disagreement on the relationship between the old and new covenants, see "The Puritans on the Old and New Covenants: A Gracious Moses?," in Beeke, and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 279-91; Jones, "The 'Old' Covenant," 181-203.

<sup>171</sup>See Casselli, *Divine Rule Maintained*, 81-98. Generally, scholars categorize these viewpoints into three groups by putting the subservient view and the third covenant view together. For von Rohr's summary of the three viewpoints of the Mosaic covenant among the Puritans, see von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought*, 50. See also Beeke and Jones, "The Puritans on the Old and New Covenants," 279-91; Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 113-17; Golding, *Covenant Theology*, 164-70; Petto, "The Nature of the Mount Sinai Covenant" in *The Great Mystery of the Covenant of Grace*, 113-68.

<sup>172</sup>Samuel D. Renihan summarizes the three views of the Mosaic covenant: "For some Reformed theologians, the Mosaic covenant was the original covenant of works delivered again to Israel. For others, the Mosaic covenant contained the law from the original covenant of works, but it was not itself a covenant of works. It was the covenant of grace legally dispensed, or in the form of a covenant of works, or obscurely revealed. For others, the Mosaic covenant contained the law from the original covenant of works, but it was not the covenant of works nor was it the covenant of grace. It was an earthly covenant of obedience for Abraham's natural offspring in Canaan, pointing to salvation in Christ through typology." Samuel D. Renihan, *From Shadow to Substance: The Federal Theology of the English Particular Baptists (1642-1704)* (Oxford: Centre for Baptist History and Heritage, 2018), 247.

<sup>173</sup>Generally, those who held to a subservient view and a mixed or third covenant view (trichotomists) emphasize the difference or the superiority of the new covenant over the old covenant. While Baptists view the law/grace antithesis as reflected the old/new covenant antithesis, the Paedobaptists view the law/grace antithesis as a covenant of works/covenant of grace antithesis.

attaining righteousness leading to eternal life. They also understood that the law requires perfect obedience, which humans have been incapable of achieving since the fall. Therefore, the law displayed in the Mosaic covenant “was for a very different purpose. . . . His great design in displaying it to Israel at Sinai was that they, by contemplating it, might see what kind and degree of righteousness it was by which they could be justified before God, and that, finding themselves wholly destitute of that righteousness, they might be excited to take hold of the covenant of grace in which a perfect righteousness for justification is graciously provided.”<sup>174</sup> Furthermore, the Ten Commandments published in the form of a covenant, serving as an annex of duties for the Israelites to follow. In full, the Mosaic covenant “was not proposed to them in order that they might consent, by their own works, to fulfil the condition of it; but it was displayed before them in subservience to the covenant of grace that they might see how impossible it was for them as condemned sinners to perform that perfect obedience which is the immutable condition of life in it.”<sup>175</sup> Even as the Reformed orthodox theologians agreed that the Mosaic covenant was not Israel’s path to eternal life, they also concurred that salvation cannot be found apart from the new covenant and Jesus Christ.<sup>176</sup> Thus, the Mosaic covenant was *legally dispensed* and given as a preparation or guide to Christ.

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<sup>174</sup>Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*, 63.

<sup>175</sup>Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Law and Gospel*, 55. Similarly, he wrote, “One reason, therefore, why the Lord displayed the law as a covenant of works on Sinai was that self-righteous Israelites, and all pharisaic professors to the end of time might see that as they have sinned, and so have not performed perfect obedience, it is absolutely impossible for them to attain justification and eternal life on the footing of their own works (Romans 3:20). The law was there displayed in its covenant form in order to discover sin and condemn for it; and so to stir up secure sinners to inquire after the perfect fulfillment of it by the second Adam (Deuteronomy 27:26), for until self-righteousness is overthrown, a man will never submit to the righteousness of Jesus Christ” (74-75).

<sup>176</sup>Jones points out that although not everyone shared the same view of Sinai’s relationship to the covenant of grace, there was general agreement on certain points among the Reformed orthodox. John Owen highlights some of these agreed-upon truths. First, they agreed “that from the giving of the first promise none was ever justified or save but by the new covenant, and Jesus Christ.” They also agreed that

In addition, the Puritan divines agreed that the Mosaic law is the written expression of the natural or moral law in creation. This law is to reveal and convict sin, lead sinners to Christ, and serve as “a rule of righteousness” (WCF 19.2).<sup>177</sup> For example, Samuel Bolton perceived that adding the law in the old covenant to the promise brings the old and new covenants into one covenant, a covenant of grace, although the law is subservient to the covenant of grace and the administrations of the two covenants differ.<sup>178</sup> God’s purpose for the law is “to awaken men, and convince them of their own impotency, to humble them for their impotency, and to drive them to Christ for salvation.”<sup>179</sup> Since the law ultimately points to Christ, it is subservient to the promise. Nevertheless, Bolton also perceived “that the law, for the substance of it, remains as a rule of obedience to the people of God, and that to which they are to conform their walk under the Gospel.”<sup>180</sup> Similar to Bolton, John Ball explained that the old and new covenants are the same in substance, arguing, “The Mosaic law was the enactment of the covenant of grace which ‘was given . . . first, that it might serve to reveal sin and drive the Israelites to flee to the mercy of God revealed in Jesus; and second, that it might be a

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the Old Testament contains the doctrine of salvation in and through the person and work of Christ, and the old covenant, “separated from its figurative relation unto the covenant of grace,” could not save. Finally, they concurred “that all of the institutions in the old covenant typified Christ. Thus, more specific points of contention will be addressed since the arguments made by Owen are not in dispute, though the ‘dichotomists’ no doubt felt that Owen’s arguments favored their own position.” Jones, “The ‘Old’ Covenant,” 191. Likewise, Petto maintained that the Sinai Covenant is ultimately centered on the obedience of Christ and has only temporal purposes for Israel’s obedience: (1) to provoke Israel to look unto a Mediator, the Lord Jesus, to fulfil and accomplish it for them; (2) to constrain to duty, and restrain from sin; (3) to be a directory to Israel for worshipping God; (4) to be a platform, model, or rule for government, ecclesiastical and civil; (5) to give a typical representation of many glorious mysteries appertaining to the covenant of grace. Petto, *The Great Mystery of the Covenant of Grace*, 165-68.

<sup>177</sup>Colquhoun wrote, “The law of God was promulgated from Mount Sinai in its threefold character: as a rule of life to believers, as a covenant of works, and as the matter of a national covenant between God and the Israelites.” Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*, 69.

<sup>178</sup>See Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*, 99-101.

<sup>179</sup>Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*, 105-6.

<sup>180</sup>Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*, 109.

rule of life to a people in covenant.”<sup>181</sup> Furthermore, the Puritan divines who maintained the Mosaic covenant is subservient to the covenant of grace similarly claimed the Mosaic covenant is “a covenant of preparation, to make way for the advancement of the covenant of grace in Christ.”<sup>182</sup> It is subservient because “God required obedience from Israelites in respect of the moral, ceremonial, and judicial laws. Blessings in the possession of Canaan were promised to obedience, and curses and miseries to those who broke the covenant, and all to this end, that God might thus encourage their hearts in the expectation of the Messiah to come.”<sup>183</sup> Turretin belongs to the group who supported the Mosaic covenant as a republication of the covenant of works, but he also emphasized the pedagogical function of the moral law, revealed on Mount Sinai and ultimately pointing to Jesus Christ.<sup>184</sup> Moreover, although Owen held a third, mediating position on the Mosaic covenant (a trichotomist),<sup>185</sup> he understood that the law in the covenant of works was renewed at Sinai. To Owen, the Mosaic covenant is temporary, replete with rules

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<sup>181</sup>Kevan, “The Law and the Covenants—A Study in John Ball,” 52.

<sup>182</sup>Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*, 90.

<sup>183</sup>Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*, 95. Similarly, Colquhoun wrote, “Although the Sinaic transaction was a mixed dispensation, yet the covenant of grace and the covenant of works were not blended together in it. The latter, as well as the ceremonial law, was added to the former, and was added to it in order that the Israelites might be so convinced of their sinfulness and misery as to see their extreme need of embracing the promise, or covenant of grace.” Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*, 61-62.

<sup>184</sup>See Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:234. In similar manner, Song claims, “In Perkins’ federal thought, the Mosaic Law functions not only as the enduring legal covenant, demanding perfect obedience, but equally as an aid to the covenant of grace, exacting willing and voluntary obedience.” Song, *Theology and Piety in the Reformed Federal Thought of William Perkins and John Preston*, 51.

<sup>185</sup>E.g., Brown writes, “For Owen, the Mosaic covenant was a republication of the prelapsarian covenant of works superimposed upon the covenant of grace. . . . he saw the Mosaic covenant as distinct from the covenant of grace. He made it clear that he did not believe the covenant given at Sinai was a mere administration of the covenant of grace, but an altogether separate covenant, subservient to the covenant of grace.” Brown, *Christ and the Condition*, 79. For Beeke’s and Jones’s explanation of John Owen’s view of the Mosaic covenant, see “The Minority Report: John Owen on Sinai,” in Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 293-303. Cf. Sinclair B. Ferguson, *John Owen on Christian Life* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1987), 27-32.

God prescribed for Israelites' lives. However, it pointed them to seek deliverance in the new covenant. Thus, God's law in the Mosaic covenant was never a means of justification.<sup>186</sup> Additionally, Samuel Petto argued that the Mount Sinai covenant "was a covenant of works, as to be fulfilled by Jesus Christ, but not so to Israel. Or, it was the covenant of grace as to its legal condition to be performed by Jesus Christ, represented under a conditional administration of it to Israel."<sup>187</sup> Therefore, even those who regarded the covenant at Sinai as a covenant of works do not refer to it as a covenant given to the Israelites for salvation; it is, instead, a covenant leading them to Christ, who alone would accomplish the conditions of the covenant.

Although the Puritans were not unanimous on the relationship of the Mosaic covenant to the covenant of works, they agreed on the pedagogical<sup>188</sup> and third use of the law. The law was not "given to justify or to give life, but to drive men to Christ in order to be reconciled through faith in the promise of grace, and to continue to instruct them in the understanding of God's will and requirements."<sup>189</sup> The republication of the covenant of works in the Mosaic covenant reiterates the law of nature as represented in the Decalogue. This republication is necessary because humans are naturally corrupted and have sin inscribed in their hearts. Moreover, the law in the Mosaic covenant cannot be a covenant of works because this type of covenant is established between friends, but humans are guilty and, since the fall, are enemies rather than friends of God. Since a

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<sup>186</sup>See Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 48-54.

<sup>187</sup>Petto, *The Great Mystery of the Covenant of Grace*, 113.

<sup>188</sup>Muller claims, "The covenant of works takes on for the fallen Adam the function of the second or pedagogical use of the law—precisely the function of the Mosaic law understood as the legal covenant or covenant of works." Muller, "The Covenant of Works and the Stability of Divine Law," 186.

<sup>189</sup>Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought*, 452.

covenant of works is therefore insufficient, God offers a covenant of grace for the purpose of reconciliation.

### **Law and Gospel in the New Covenant**

While most Puritan divines affirmed the old and new covenants as one covenant and the same in substance, they also agreed that the new covenant is established by the accomplished work of Christ, which does indeed make it *new*. In both quality and quantity, this new covenant differs from and is better than the old.<sup>190</sup> Nevertheless, they argued the gospel in the new covenant is conditional. The gospel demands “strict and precise obedience to God”<sup>191</sup> because Christ’s substitutionary atonement or his imputed righteousness does not release a believer from obedience to the law. Therefore, although Christ fulfills the righteous requirement of God’s law by obeying it and bearing its penalties, his act does not abolish the law. Rather, Christ restores the law to its proper place in a believer’s life in the new covenant. As a “rule of life,” the law connects all of God’s covenants with humanity. Therefore, the covenant of works and the Sinaitic covenant—the former renewed in the latter—now remain in the new covenant, the two fulfilled by the Spirit writing the law in a believer’s heart as a new principle of obedience. In this belief, Puritan orthodox theology differed from its counterparts: “The Antinomians held that the Law was abrogated, the Baxterians, that the Law was modified, and the Puritans, that the Law was established.”<sup>192</sup> For the Puritan divines, liberty and duty, spontaneity and obligation, join together in sanctification. As Turretin

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<sup>190</sup>See Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 1.39.1-13.

<sup>191</sup>Rutherford, *The Spirituall Antichrist*, 2:30, quoted in Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 326-27.

<sup>192</sup>Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 137.

said, “Christ, by freeing us from the curse and rigor of the law, still did not free us from the obligation to obedience, which is indispensable from the creature. Grace demands the same thing.”<sup>193</sup> Rather than begin in legalistic bondage, Christians’ obedience to the law is evangelical since “the more we are bound to obedience, the freer we are because the service of God is not bondage, but perfect liberty.”<sup>194</sup> Concurring with the Reformers’ third use of the law, Perkins said, “It guideth them [the regenerate] to *newe obedience* in the whole course of their life, which obedience is acceptable to God by Christ.”<sup>195</sup> While this new obedience does not merit salvation or cause justification, it guides the believer as he or she walks toward holiness in heaven. Therefore, for the Puritans, the gospel consists of both promises and commands—indicatives and imperatives.

### **Law and Grace in Covenant Theology**

Consistent with Calvin, the Puritans affirmed the harmony between law and grace, spoke of the two within a covenantal scheme. The Westminster Confession states, God’s natural or moral law, first written in humans’ hearts upon creation, has remained as a perpetual rule of righteousness since the fall. On the stability of the law and the covenant of works, Muller argues, “The violation of the covenant of works abrogated the law as a covenant, not as the ultimate ‘rule of life.’ It is both the permanence of the divine promise of fellowship and the stability of the divine law as the standard of holiness and righteousness and, therefore, as the basis for fellowship with the holy and righteous God,

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<sup>193</sup>Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:704.

<sup>194</sup>William Perkins, “Commentary on Galatians 5:1,” in *The Works of William Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015), 2:320.

<sup>195</sup>Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, 1:70, quoted in Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought*, 486.

that relates the covenants to one another.”<sup>196</sup> Moreover, the law “expresses God’s essential attributes of holiness and righteousness, it can only reveal the perfect standard of righteousness that ought to govern the conduct of any moral creature, whether redeemed or unredeemed. Whether in the state of integrity, the state of fallenness, or the state of redemption, the law ever reveals the form of conduct that pleases God and answers to his holiness.”<sup>197</sup> Notably, even in their fallen state, although humans broke the law, they are perpetually bound to the moral dimension of the law, which reveals a permanent manifestation of God’s character to them.

Redemption in Christ does not alter the fact that God’s law should govern the lives of believers. In this governing, they find rules for life: “The law as a rule of life for the believer is directly related to the law given to Adam. It is the revelation of God’s moral law which perpetuates God’s curse upon all sinners, and it is this law which is gospelized by the obedience of Christ, making it a rule of life for the believer.”<sup>198</sup> In this understanding, the law as a rule of life is not antithetical to the gospel in Christ, but rather harmonized. Perkins is understood as one of the many Puritans who synchronized law and grace, unconditional and conditional elements of salvation within a covenantal

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<sup>196</sup>Muller, “The Covenant of Works and the Stability of Divine Law,” 185.

<sup>197</sup>Venema, *Christ and Covenant Theology*, 429.

<sup>198</sup>McWilliams, “The Covenant Theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith and Recent Criticism,” 122. Similarly, Heber Carlos De Campos writes, “The first principle deals with the stability of the perceptive part of the law along with its promise throughout the covenantal dispensations. Seventeenth-century federal theology commonly stated that the law remains constant and that the gospel is not a salvation disconnected from the prelapsarian dispensation. Though the covenant of works was frustrated in us, its requirements still stand, and Christ had to undergo both its requirement as well as its judgment. Thus, the character of the Judge and His law remains immutable, while the glorious character of the second Adam is to have performed what the first Adam did not do.” Heber Carlos De Campos, *Doctrine in Development: Johannes Piscator and Debates over Christ’s Active Obedience* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), 259-60. Cf. Muller writes, “Christ as the antitype of Adam stands as the representative of humanity in the covenant of grace and the ‘surety’ of fulfillment or substitute for mankind before the law of God, in effect, in fulfillment of the demands of the violated covenant of works. After all, the violation of the covenant of works abrogated as a covenant, not as the ultimate ‘rule of life.’” Muller, “The Covenant of Works and the Stability of Divine Law,” 185.

framework: “According to Perkins, law and grace are both fulfilled in Christ, or the covenant of works is fulfilled in the covenant of grace.”<sup>199</sup> Moreover, Song assesses, “But most importantly, Perkins understands that ‘the whole law is fully satisfied and salvation attained’ in the righteousness of Christ, which not only becomes the basis of the covenant of grace, but the ground of the believer’s obedience as well.”<sup>200</sup> Kevan explains John Ball’s views similarly:

The law, as well as point to Christ, has its use for the believer as a rule of life, and he continues under it in this sense, though he is no longer under it as a covenant of works. The stipulation in the covenant of grace is that men ‘(a) *must believe* in Him Who justifies the ungodly and (b) *must walk* before Him in all well-pleasing’ . . . *obedience is required* . . . not as the cause of life, but as the way to life and the fruit of faith. . . . To whom God gives the power to believe in Him, to them He gives the power to obey and do all His commandments.<sup>201</sup>

Puritans believed the purpose of redemption is to redeem sinners from the bondage of sin and into freedom, from slavery to service. Therefore, God “has freed us from the *manner* of our obedience, but not from the *matter* of our obedience.”<sup>202</sup> For the Puritans, the demand of obedience unto the Lord in the covenant of works is not different in the covenant of grace, after redemption had been accomplished by the Redeemer. The purpose of redemption is join law, human obedience, to God’s grace.

While the principles of obedience in the covenant of works were legal and servile, in the covenant of grace, they are filial and evangelical. Indeed, grace is not in conflict with the obedience to the law, for “when works and obedience take their right

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<sup>199</sup>Song, *Theology and Piety in the Reformed Federal Thought of William Perkins and John Preston*, 51.

<sup>200</sup>Song, *Theology and Piety in the Reformed Federal Thought of William Perkins and John Preston*, 51.

<sup>201</sup>Kevan, “The Law and the Covenants—A Study in John Ball,” 54 (emphasis original).

<sup>202</sup>G. C. Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1956), 72.

place, when the law is rightly used, then it is holy, just and good.”<sup>203</sup> From the perspective of a forensic covenant, the law condemns, but this condemnation is abrogated by Christ’s sacrificial works so that the evangelical use of the law guides believers to holy living.<sup>204</sup> Commenting on this guidance, Rutherford wrote, “the obliging rule, and government of the Law” is by no means “contrary to the sweet cords of Gospel-love, by which the Spirit kindly drawth, and gently leadeth the Saints in the way of Sanctification.”<sup>205</sup> The stability of law as the standard of holiness and righteousness remains a rule of life for those in the new covenant. Similarly, Ferguson asserts, “The law as a ‘rule of life’ is therefore a constant factor in the earlier covenants, and remains so under the new covenant, and consequently in the personal experience of the Christian, who is being restored to the image of God through Christ and by the Spirit.”<sup>206</sup> In the new covenant, the law is restored in its right place by the Spirit for God’s people

### **Law and Gospel Distinction**

The Reformed orthodox theologians understood the law and the gospel as redemptive-historical contracts between the old covenant (law) and the new covenant (gospel) [cf. WCF 7.5, LC 33].<sup>207</sup> At other times, the law-gospel distinction is referred to

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<sup>203</sup>Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*, 73.

<sup>204</sup>John Colquhoun (1748-1827) articulated the mainstream Puritan understanding of the Christian’s relationship to the Law of God: “All who are united to Christ, and justified for his righteousness imputed to them, are dead to the law as a covenant: not that they may be without law to God, but that they may be under the law to Christ; not that they may continue in disobedience, but that they may be inclined and enabled to perform sincere obedience in time, and perfect obedience through eternity, to the law as rule of life. One design of their being delivered from the obligations of the law in its Federal form is that they may be brought under the eternal obligation of it as a rule of duty in the hand of the adorable Mediator.” Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*, 260.

<sup>205</sup>Rutherford, *The Spirituall Antichrist*, 2:40.

<sup>206</sup>Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 53.

<sup>207</sup>Beeke and Jones say, “When contrasted this way [redemptive-historical], the law (old

the contrast between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.<sup>208</sup> Nevertheless, the Puritans clearly distinguished the law and the gospel in light of justification, claiming that justification by grace alone is antithetical to justification by works. However, they also believed that the gospel entails more than justification because it requires evangelical obedience and good works. In this distinction, therefore, the law in the covenant of works and as a means of achieving righteousness is antithetical to the gospel, but the law as a “rule of life” is not antithetical to the gospel. The law is abolished as the covenant of works for justification, but it remains as a rule for obedience in the covenant of grace. As Jones remarks, “On this view, regarding justification the law is an enemy, but for those who are justified (through faith in Christ) the law becomes a friend.”<sup>209</sup> Kevan also speaks to the Puritan understanding of the law-grace distinction: “The law separated from grace is opposed to grace, but the law recognised as subservient to grace is itself grace.”<sup>210</sup> Furthermore, Puritans did not limit their understanding of the law-gospel distinction within the doctrine of justification. They understood that the law was abrogated for believers with respect to justification but not to sanctification. In this thinking, believers are those who are dead to the law within a covenant of works, but

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covenant) and the gospel (new covenant) differ ‘only gradually.’” Beeke, and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 330. They quote Anthony Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, 230. In this sense, the Reformed law/gospel contrast is different from the Lutheran view that emphasizes the antithesis between law and gospel: the law is a message of condemnation and the gospel is the message of salvation in Christ.

<sup>208</sup>Generally, the Baptists claim the law/grace antithesis reflects the old/new covenant antithesis and understand the Paedobaptists’ law/grace antithesis as reflecting the covenant of works and covenant of grace antithesis because the former insist on the discontinuity of the substance between old covenant and new covenant against the latter’s insistence on the unity of substance between the two within the covenant of grace. See e.g., Pascal Denault, *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2013); Renihan, *From Shadow to Substance*; Nichols, *Covenant Theology*.

<sup>209</sup>Jones, “The ‘Old’ Covenant,” 193-94.

<sup>210</sup>Kevan, “The Law and the Covenants—A Study in John Ball,” 54.

such is not the case in regard to the moral law as a rule of life (cf. WCF 9.6). For the Puritans, salvation does not deliver sinners from the law; it enables them to be obedient to the law with a willing heart. Speaking of how the law impacts believers' hearts in the covenant of grace, Thomas Boston stated, "The laws of the covenant are in their hearts, namely, the laws of the ten commandments, the eternal rule of righteousness, Heb. viii.10. That law, in all its parts, is a copy of the divine nature, which in regeneration is transcribed into the heart of every one brought into the covenant."<sup>211</sup> Obedience unto the law, the manifestation of God's righteousness and goodness, was the intention of the first covenant. The covenantal obligations Adam failed to uphold are therefore restored to believers by Christ in the covenant of grace. Moreover, although evangelical obedience is yet imperfect obedience, it is acceptable to God because believers who perform it are in covenant with God.<sup>212</sup>

Clearly, the law is not antithetical to the gospel. As the WCF professes: "do sweetly comply with [the law]; the Spirit of Christ subduing and enabling the will of man to do that freely, and cheerfully, which the will of God, revealed in the law, requires to be done" (WCF 19:7). In this requirement, the law and the gospel are harmonious due to the covenant of grace, from which God freely and unilaterally bestows grace and simultaneously calls for obedience. Because of this call, "the Puritans believed that the

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<sup>211</sup>Boston, *A View of the Covenant of Grace*, 203.

<sup>212</sup>Jones sees, for the divines, a distinction between God's benevolent love and his complacent love. The former is understood in terms of God's election and predestination, and the latter refers to God's love of delight or friendship that he rewards his people with according to their holiness. Jones also says the former is the ground for the latter. The former is God's unconditional love, and the latter is his conditional love. In complacency, God loves his people in degree according to their obedience unto him. Therefore, on the one hand, God loves believers unconditionally, and on the other hand, they can displease God by disobedience. With this distinction, Jones claims that Christians can understand why God loves those who keep his commandments and are able to please God by obeying the commandments and enjoying communion with the triune God. Jones, *Antinomianism*, 81-96.

highest spirituality was to be seen in a life that rejoices to be commanded. They held that, far from involving the believer in legalistic bondage, it gave expression to his desire to please God, from which, as a subjective motive such an obedient life sprang.”<sup>213</sup> On the law and the gospel, von Rohr connects the two to covenant conditions, saying: “There is a combination of Gospel and Law in this conditional covenant, the one leading to faith and the other to obedience, both of which are covenant conditions.”<sup>214</sup> This unity and harmony of law and grace in the covenant of grace is closely related to the Puritans’ view of salvation bestowing a covenantal union and communion with the triune God.

### **Union and Communion in Covenant of Grace**

The Reformed Puritans believed the heart of the gospel is believers’ union and communion with the triune God. Packer affirms this point, noting that “the thought of communion with God takes us to the very heart of Puritan theology and religion.”<sup>215</sup> Puritans understood that humanity is created to have fellowship and communion with the triune God, and redemption’s goal is to restore that communion, disrupted by the fall.<sup>216</sup> Thus, humans’ true identity and purpose is to be in communion with God; creation and redemption are the means to that goal—to the covenant of grace bringing sinners into union with Jesus Christ and communion with the triune God.

Like Calvin, the Puritans taught that union with Christ is the foundation to all covenant blessings given in Christ. Perkins summarizes this teaching by stating that “in

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<sup>213</sup>Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 249.

<sup>214</sup>von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought*, 77.

<sup>215</sup>J. I. Packer, “The Spirituality of John Owen,” in *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 201.

<sup>216</sup>See Kelly M. Kopic, *Communion with God: The Divine and the Human in the Theology of John Owen* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 35-66.

the conversion of a sinner, there is a real union, whereby every believer is made one with Christ. And by virtue of this union, the crosse and passion of Christ is as verily made ours, as if we had been crucified in our own persons.”<sup>217</sup> Similarly, Thomas Goodwin claimed, “Being in Christ, and united to him, is the fundamental constitution of a Christian.”<sup>218</sup> Union with Christ is therefore the context or reality in which the believer receives salvific benefits. The Westminster Longer Catechism (WLC) 65-90 also describes salvation as union and communion with Christ.<sup>219</sup> As Letham states, “In fairness to the Westminster Assembly, it considered the entire *ordo salutis* to come under the umbrella of union and communion with Christ in grace and glory (WLC 65-90). In so doing, it recognized that union with Christ is not one aspect of the process of salvation but is the overall context in which all aspects are to be seen.”<sup>220</sup> Thus, union with Christ embraces and integrates all aspects of salvation (*ordo salutis*).<sup>221</sup>

### **Union in Relation to Communion and Covenant of Grace**

God has grounded believers’ communion with him in their personal union with

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<sup>217</sup>Perkins, ‘Galatians’ (1617 edition), 123-24, quoted in Paul R. Schaefer, “Protestant ‘Scholasticism’ at Elizabethan Cambridge,” 161.

<sup>218</sup>Thomas Goodwin, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, 12 vols., ed. Thomas Smith (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1861-1866; reprint, Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), quoted in Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 483.

<sup>219</sup>Robert Letham, *Union with Christ: In Scripture, History, and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2011), 1, 89. Cf. WLC 65, Q: “What special benefits do the members of the invisible church enjoy by Christ?” A: “The members of the invisible church by Christ enjoy union and communion with him in grace and glory.”

<sup>220</sup>Letham, *Union with Christ*, 89.

<sup>221</sup>Ferguson summarizes Owen’s position: “Thus divine election, and the outworking of it through the *ordo salutis* find their meeting place in *union with Christ*. This union, and all aspects of the plan of salvation are, for Owen, the application and fruit of the covenant of grace. To become a Christian is therefore to be taken into covenant with God in Christ, by the Holy Spirit.” Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 36.

Christ. By God's grace, believers are united to Christ, their Savior. From this union flows the blessing of communion and fellowship with God. For the Puritans and especially John Owen, union with Christ is the "greatest" of all graces. Owen claimed, God "communicates nothing that belongs properly to the covenant of grace, as our sanctification and holiness do, unto any, but in and through him. And we receive nothing by him but by virtue of relation unto him, or especial interest in him, or union with him."<sup>222</sup> Therefore, union with Christ can be described as "the sole fountain of our blessedness" because God communicates his blessings to believers only in Christ.<sup>223</sup> Through uniting with Christ, believers also receive the gift of communion with the three persons of the Trinity. Therefore, union with Christ is the basis and foundation of communion with God, and by being united to Christ, believers are enabled and encouraged to commune with God.

Furthermore, Puritan divines closely related union with Christ and the covenant of grace. They understood that sinners are instated personally and mercifully in the covenant of grace by union with Christ.<sup>224</sup> Thomas Boston explained this understanding, asserting "that uniting with Christ the head of the covenant, is a sinner's formal entering into the covenant: the which uniting with him being by faith on him, it is evident that it is by believing on Christ a sinner embraceth, enters into, and is instated in the covenant unto salvation. Wherefore reach Christ by faith, and ye reach the covenant:

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<sup>222</sup>Owen, *Works: Discourse on Holy Spirit*, 3:414.

<sup>223</sup>Owen, *Works: The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance Explained and Confirmed*, 11:336.

<sup>224</sup>Beeke and Jones comment that "union with Christ was typically understood in a threefold manner: immanent/eternal, transient/redemptive-historical, and applicatory/mystical. The redemption purposed by God in eternity and accomplished by Christ in time is incomplete until it is applied in the experience of the believer." Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 488.

if ye miss him, ye miss the covenant, in point of life and salvation.”<sup>225</sup> Like Calvin, Boston maintained that union with Christ is by the Spirit through faith. Through union with Christ, the believer enters the covenant of grace and receives the gift of communion with God. Moreover, the Puritan divines claimed that a believer’s union with Christ not only brings individual communion with God but also with all saints who are collectively united to Jesus Christ (cf. WCF 26.1). Thus, the believer’s union with Christ brings a life of communion, consisting of fellowship with the covenant head and with individual members in the union.<sup>226</sup> For this reason, Puritans were deeply concerned with the doctrine of the covenant of grace because they saw “the end and purpose of the covenant of grace was to bring men into union and communion with God.”<sup>227</sup>

### **Communion Defined**

Mutually, communion is a relationship consisting of communication that both gives and receives. In his definition of communion between God and men, Owen stated,

Our communion . . . with God consisteth in his *communication of himself unto us, with our returnal unto him* of that which he requireth and accepteth, flowing from that *union* which in Jesus Christ we have with him. . . . [a] mutual communication in giving and receiving, after a most holy and spiritual manner, which is between God and the saints while they walk together in a covenant of peace, ratified by the blood of Jesus.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>225</sup>Boston, *A View of the Covenant of Grace*, 209.

<sup>226</sup>Also, through partaking of the Lord’s Supper, believers have union and communion with Christ and with each other in the body of Christ: “to be a bond and pledge of their communion with Him [Christ], and with each other, as members of His mystical body” (WCF 29, Of the Lord’s Supper). Therefore, Lord’s Supper is a means of perpetual “union and communion” with Christ and with other members of the body of Christ.

<sup>227</sup>J. I. Packer, “The Puritan Idea of Communion with God,” in *Puritan Papers, 1960-1962*, ed. J. I. Packer (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2001), 2:104. Cf. Owen, *Works* 21:146-150; 3:516, quoted in Mark Jones, introduction to *The Great Mystery of the Covenant of Grace*, by Samuel Petto, 19.

<sup>228</sup>Owen, *Works: On Communion with God*, 2:8-9 (emphasis original). Owen in his exposition of his treatise *of Communion with God* argued that even though each of the three Persons of the Trinity are identical with respect to the being or essence of God, yet believers enjoy a distinct communion with each person of the Trinity.

Communion with God is a fellowship, a relationship of mutual interchange between the triune God and believers as all parties give and receive.<sup>229</sup> As in all communions, there is a “mutual communication,” in which “God gives Himself to His people, and they give to Him what He requires and accepts—their love, trust, obedience, and faithfulness.”<sup>230</sup> Furthermore, mutual relationship is inherent in this communion, but without participation, there is no communion. When there is participation, however, Thomas Goodwin argued that “mutual communion” is “the soul of all true friendship.”<sup>231</sup> Thus, God gives himself to his people, requiring their filial love in return. Additionally, believers receive all the benefits procured by Christ, and they return loyalty and love to the triune God. Therefore, communion is regarded as a relationship of personal and intimate fellowship with the triune God in Christ. Considering this communion process, Puritans viewed that divine action occurs first, union and communion results, and humans respond in obedience as the desired consequence. This communion understanding demonstrates the Puritans’ understanding that the Christian faith is not simply knowing a

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<sup>229</sup>J. I. Packer summarizes Owen’s idea of communion with God in five propositions: 1. *Communion with God is a relationship of mutual interchange between God and man.* 2. *Communion with God is a relationship in which the initiative and power are with God.* 3. *Communion with God is a relationship in which Christians receive love from, and respond in love to, all three Persons of the Trinity.* 4. *Communion with God is a relation of active, forward-looking friendship between God and man.* 5. *Communion with God in Christ is enjoyed in a special way at the Lord’s Table.* J. I. Packer, “The Spirituality of John Owen,” 203-15.

<sup>230</sup>Ian Hamilton, “Communion with God,” in *Reformed Spirituality: Communing with our Glorious God*, ed. Joseph A. Pipa and J. Andrew Wortman (Taylors, SC: Southern Presbyterian Press, 2003), 65.

<sup>231</sup>Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, 7.193, 197, quoted in Hamilton, “Communion with God,” 71-72. Goodwin regarded the love of Christ, who died to make believers his friends, though “he could have created new ones cheaper.” Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, 7.193, 197. For Goodwin’s four directives for establishing and maintaining a friendship with God, see Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, 7.198-202. Cf. Joel R. Beeke and Terry D. Slachter, *Encouragement for Today’s Pastors: Help from the Puritans* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2013), 29-30.

set of doctrines but is knowing a person, Christ, in fellowship and communion with the triune God.

### **Communion with God: A Covenantal Communion**

Communion with God is understood in the context of covenant; therefore, it is a covenantal communion. More specifically, communion as a divine-human mutual relationship connects to the Puritans' understanding of the covenant as unilateral and bilateral. Although communion is mutual, it "*is a relationship in which the initiative and power is with God.*"<sup>232</sup> In contrast to considering communion with God *subjectively* and *anthropocentrically*, Packer says, "Puritans thought of communion with God *objectively* and *theocentrically*, taking the idea to cover, first, God's approach to us in grace, pardoning, regenerating, and making us alive to Himself; next, all His subsequent self-giving to us; and only then extending it to our own conscious seeking after, and tasting of, His gracious presence."<sup>233</sup> The context of a believer's experiential, "life-giving" communion with God is in his approach in his justifying grace. The former is to be thought of as a consequence of the latter. In addition, as God approaches in grace, he initiates the communion: "The idea of communion with God thus covers the whole of the grace-and-faith-relationship with God in which we stand, a relationship which God initiates and in which at each stage the initiative remains in His hands."<sup>234</sup> Although the power to initiate and maintain the communion is solely on God, the desired consequence

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<sup>232</sup>Packer, "The Spirituality of John Owen," 203 (emphasis original).

<sup>233</sup>Packer, "The Puritan Idea of Communion with God," 108.

<sup>234</sup>Packer, "The Puritan Idea of Communion with God," 108.

is for humans to respond in obedience. In God's initiation and humans' response, a mutual relationship exists that allows reciprocation.

This understanding that the divine action occurs first and human response ensues correlates to the Puritans' understanding of the covenant as unilateral in its initial establishment and bilateral in its administration. Understanding the covenant unilaterally and bilaterally corresponds to Owen's distinction between union and communion as active and passive.<sup>235</sup> Commenting on Owen's distinction, Kapic and Taylor explain that "this union is a unilateral action by God, in which those who were dead are made alive," and "it must be clear that the human person is merely receptive, being the object of God's gracious action."<sup>236</sup> In this union, God is sovereign and active, making sinners alive by uniting them to Christ; in turn, they are entirely passive as they receive Christ. Nevertheless, in the communion process, those who are united to Christ are called to action.<sup>237</sup> Interpreting Owen's stance on this union, Kapic says, "Since union is the 'foundation' communion," "this distinction between union and communion helps prevent many Puritan theologians from formulating a justification by works doctrine, while at the same time allowing them to place a high value upon human responsiveness for those inside the house of faith."<sup>238</sup> As a Puritan theologian, Owen understood union as God's

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<sup>235</sup>Beeke and Jones acknowledge this distinction by saying, "Owen carefully distinguished between union with Christ (the unchangeable relationship of our salvation) and communion with God (the variable experience of that relationship)." Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 103.

<sup>236</sup>Kelly M. Kapic and Justin Taylor, eds., introduction to *Communion with the Triune God*, by John Owen (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 21.

<sup>237</sup>As Matthew Barrett and Michael A. G. Haykin say, "While we are *passive* in being united with Christ through the Spirit's work in effectually calling us to the Son, granting us new life in regeneration, once we have been made alive, we are now *active* as the Spirit's sanctifying grace conforms us more and more into the image of Christ and we pursue godliness." Matthew Barrett and Michael A. G. Haykin, *Owen on the Christian Life: Living for the Glory of God in Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 55 (emphasis original).

<sup>238</sup>Kelly M. Kapic, "Communion with God by John Owen (1616-1683)," in *The Devoted Life:*

unilateral action and communion as the result of this divine movement requiring human responses (or a bilateral relationship). While union with Christ secures a person in the life of faith, communion with God can be affected by his or her response, whether it arises as sin or neglecting to use the means of grace.<sup>239</sup> By its nature, the covenant relies on mutual interaction between the divine and humans, and no matter the response, communion in the covenant is absolute, upheld by God in his sovereignty. Therefore, God initiates union and communion with humans as a fellowship of friendship that requires their response in faith, trust, and obedience and consists of both divine gifts and Christian duties.

### **Union and Communion with God in Restoring the Image of God in Believers**

For the Puritan divines, through communion with God and its bilateral and mutual interchange, believers “receive from and respond to” God, who guides them to conform to the likeness of Jesus Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18). Therefore, human response in communion with God fulfills his purpose of restoring his image in believers: “At its heart, fellowship/communion is participation. The fellowship which believers enjoy with God is a fellowship of union. God’s purpose in bringing us into His fellowship is to conform us and transform us into the likeness of His dear Son, that He might be ‘the first-

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*An Invitation to the Puritan Classics*, ed. Kelly M. Kopic and Randall C. Gleason (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 169. Furthermore, Kopic says, “Owen is making a case found throughout his writings and common to the Reformed tradition: divine movement and grace always precede and provide the basis for human response” (173).

<sup>239</sup>Kopic explains how the believer’s sinful response affects this union: “Once united to Christ, there can be no final falling away; nothing is able to tear apart what God has brought together—clearly the underlying theology for the doctrine of perseverance. However, communion with God can be deeply affected by a believer’s sin, unresponsiveness to God and neglect of God’s ordinary means of grace. Struggling believers are never at risk of losing their union with Christ, but they surely experience times when intimate communion with God feels blocked.” Kopic, “Communion with God by John Owen (1616-1683),” 169; cf. 176.

born among many brethren' (Rom. 8:29)."<sup>240</sup> Like other Puritans, Owen understood that God created humanity in his image to commune with him. The fall defaced the image and disrupted its relational nature. Through Christ alone, the image of God can be restored and communion renewed. Once it is renewed, communion with God is carried on in faith, and as believers respond to Christ's call with faith and love, they become more Christlike.<sup>241</sup> Kopic further comments on Owen's perspective, stating that "union with Christ, allowing renewed communion with God, and expressing itself through obedience, is fundamental to Owen's understanding of the gospel."<sup>242</sup> Therefore, for Owen and many Puritans, communion occurs in the context of the believer's sanctification and throughout the Christian life.

Communion with God is the "experimental or experiential" God-man relationship of the Christian life. Thus, it is also regarded as walking with God, as the source of strength for believers' lives and their growth in the Spirit. Richard Sibbes described communion with God as being near him and as a source from which the soul grows in the Spirit and finds rest and joy.<sup>243</sup> In addition, Puritans stressed the need to cultivate this relationship by engaging in ardent conversation with Christ—delighting to walk with him, meet him, view his beauty, hear his voice, and taste his sweetness. Believers must therefore take all occasions to present themselves before him. In this conversation, God will smile and speak kindly to the believer's heart. Utmost in this

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<sup>240</sup>Hamilton, "Communion with God," 70-71.

<sup>241</sup>Owen, *Works: Of Communion with God*, 2:118-19.

<sup>242</sup>Kopic, "Communion with God by John Owen (1616-1683)," 169.

<sup>243</sup>See Richard Rushing, *Voices from the Past: Puritan Devotional Readings* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 60.

communion, believers should also love him in his person and for the excellencies of his loveliness, rather than for what they can get out of him. Through this process of love and conversation, as believers enjoy God, they are being conformed and transformed into the likeness of Christ, the true image of God. Owen described this transforming experience as of “*a new, gracious, spiritual life, or principle, created, and bestowed on the soul, whereby it is changed in all its faculties and affections, fitted and enabled to go forth in the way of obedience unto every divine object that is proposed unto it, according to the mind of God.*”<sup>244</sup> A new, regenerated life involves the whole person, transformed in the Spirit and engaged so that all natural faculties, mind, will, emotion, and affection are shaped into the image of God. This transformation does not simply restore the believer’s faculties but subjects the whole person to God’s governance.

Like Owen’s, many Puritans’ doctrines of union and communion were closely related to a covenant-centered theology. Union and communion with the triune God is a covenantal relationship based on the spiritual reality and promises offered to believers in the covenant of grace. Moreover, union and communion with the triune God is the heart of the gospel because being in Christ and united to him are fundamental to being a Christian. This theological stance concurs with Calvin’s belief that union with Christ is vital to salvation. Believers can only partake of every salvific benefit through uniting to Christ.

The Puritans notion of union and communion proposes a mutual interchange, bond, and friendship in the covenant of grace. They further believed that the power of God initiates union and communion. This mutual and reciprocal process of union and

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<sup>244</sup>Owen, *Works: Of Communion with God*, 2:200 (emphasis original).

communion corresponds to their understanding of God's covenant with humans as unilateral in establishment and bilateral in administration. As they unite to Christ, sinners enter an unconditional and conditional covenant relationship with God, and as they commune with him, they receive all the benefits Christ merited, including justification and sanctification. Moreover, in union and communion with the triune God, "a relationship of mutual interchange between God and man,"<sup>245</sup> God restores the image of his Son in his elect, who must be obedient to him and his law. Therefore, in a mutual interchange of communion and friendship, believers learn to obey and love the Triune God. Moreover, in the believer's renewal process, the law is not absent but is upheld so that the law and the gospel are not antithetical in this mutual communion.

### **Covenant and *Ordo Salutis*: Justification and Sanctification**

#### **Covenant and *Ordo Salutis***

The development of *ordo salutis* in post-Reformation thought is suggested by some scholars as reintroducing a medieval concept that diminished or replaced Calvin's emphasis on union with Christ.<sup>246</sup> Such scholars contend that Calvin's view of union with Christ is not compatible with the later Reformed development of *ordo salutis*. However, in contrast to this argument, others have argued that Calvin's soteriology also consists of a simple form of the order of salvation in relation to union with Christ.<sup>247</sup> In actuality,

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<sup>245</sup>Packer, *A Quest for Godliness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 203.

<sup>246</sup>Karl Barth and some of his followers held this view. See Karl Barth, *The Theology of the Reformed Confessions 1923* (Louisville, Westminster John Knox, 2002), 135, 139; Thomas F. Torrance, *Scottish Theology: From John Knox to John McLeod Campbell* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), 128.

<sup>247</sup>See Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids, W. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 417; Andrew T. B. McGowan, "Justification and the *ordo salutis*," in *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 148-50.

there is a basic continuity from Calvin's doctrine of union with Christ to the later development of *ordo salutis* in Reformed Orthodoxy.<sup>248</sup> This continuity is found in the increasing use of *ordo salutis* "within the context of the application of the work of Christ to the individual. In its best formulations its intention was to lay bare the internal logical and interrelations of the various aspects of this application, not to delineate a temporal process in which the individual passed from one stage to another."<sup>249</sup> Calvin's doctrine of union did not rely on rigid, chronological stages of redemption (*ordo salutis*) but was integrated into the language of Reformed orthodoxy in its application of salvation.<sup>250</sup> Indeed, although there are "various sequencings of that application found among the Reformed orthodox," most reflect "of the same concerns as appear in the writings of Calvin and his contemporaries—namely, grounding the sequence in calling and union

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<sup>248</sup>See Richard A. Muller, "Union with Christ and the *Ordo Salutis*: Reflections on Developments in Early Modern Reformed Thought," in *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition: On the Work of Christ and the Order of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 202-43; Muller, "The 'Golden Chain' and the Causality of Salvation: Beginnings of the Reformed *Ordo Salutis*," in *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition*, 161-201. Similarly, for Muller's argument against this [the critics'] charge, see Muller, "Perkins' *A Golden Chaine*: Predestination System or Schematized *Ordo Salutis*?" *Sixteenth-Century Journal* 9 (1978): 69-81; for Allen's defense of post-Reformation's union and communion with Christ, see Allen, *Sanctification*, 155-68.

<sup>249</sup>Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance—Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 98. Similarly, Letham argues, "The Assembly was *not* attempting to convey a temporal order, as if one necessarily followed the other in time." *The Westminster Assembly*, 246; also see 2-3, 101-11, 242-92. Cf. Letham, *Union with Christ*, 2.

<sup>250</sup>Richard Gaffin argues the post-Reformation's development of *ordo salutis* is integral to Calvin's union with Christ: "That in the Westminster Standards the heart of the application of salvation, underlying all further consideration of *ordo salutis* questions, is being united to Christ by Spirit-worked faith. This union provides for multiple other confluent benefits, without any one benefit either being confused with or existing separately from the others. This is essentially Calvin's *ordo salutis*, though not as clearly expressed as it could be." Richard Gaffin, "Union with Christ: Some Biblical and Theological Reflections," in *Always Reforming: Explorations in Systematic Theology*, ed. Andrew T. B. McGowan, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 282. Similarly, Gaffin says, "This, in a nutshell, is Calvin's *ordo salutis*: union with Christ by (Spirit-worked) faith; being and continuing to be united with Christ by faith, faith that, through the power of the Spirit, 'embraces Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel' (*Westminster Shorter Catechism*, 31)." Gaffin, "Biblical Theology and the Westminster Standards," *Westminster Theological Journal* 65 (Fall 2003), 172. In this latter article, Gaffin argues for the compatibility between union with Christ and *ordo salutis* and between biblical theology and the Westminster Confession of Faith. While the predominant concern of biblical theology is the once-for-all accomplishment of salvation, the WCF confronts its definitive and ongoing application. These two concerns, accomplished and application, are not mutually exclusive but are complementary with different emphases.

with Christ and identifying the subsequent elements of the sequence as brought about in and through the union, without indicating a temporal sequencing of justification and sanctification except insofar as sanctification is a process.”<sup>251</sup> Therefore, rather than a tension between *ordo salutis* and Calvin’s union with Christ, the further development of the *ordo salutis* by the Reformed orthodox was consistent with Calvin’s doctrine of union with Christ.

Among the early Reformed orthodox theologians, Perkins offered a more detailed sequence of the order of salvation in his *Golden Chaine*. Nevertheless, this golden chain of salvation does not express a “rigid temporal order” but supports an “intimate relationship between his understanding of the order of causes of salvation with union with Christ—indeed, as Perkins’ diagram of the order of causes indicates, all of the links of the chain, from calling to sanctification, are grounded in the love of God to those in Christ and related directly to the work of Christ as it is applied to the believer.”<sup>252</sup> Perkins was not alone in this thinking, for Ames “neither removed union with Christ from its foundational position nor argued a strictly temporal ordering. Variants of these approaches to union with Christ and the application of salvation are attested in the further development of Reformed orthodoxy.”<sup>253</sup> In this affirming of the order of salvation as

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<sup>251</sup>Muller, “Union with Christ and the *Ordo Salutis*,” 240.

<sup>252</sup>Muller, “The ‘Golden Chain’ and the Causality of Salvation,” 197. Cf. See Song’s discussion of Perkins’ covenant notion and *ordo salutis* in his federalism in Song, *Theology and Piety in the Reformed Federal Thought of William Perkins and John Preston*, 34-49.

<sup>253</sup>Muller, “Union with Christ and the *Ordo Salutis*,” 242. Muller concludes, “What needs to be observed is that there were initially, and there remained subsequently, varieties of formulation among the Reformed; that the terminology remained somewhat fluid, often lacking a strict distinction between repentance and sanctification, and frequently incorporating logical and natural or causal as well as temporal orderings; that these varieties of formulation did not lead to extended controversy; and that the later formulations continued to recognize the priority of grace and the foundational significance of union with Christ to the language of the application of salvation” (243).

neither strict nor rigid, Calvin and Reformed Orthodoxy are in agreement in identifying union with Christ as the very basis of the sequence in the application of salvation (*ordo salutis*). In the context of union with Christ, then, *ordo salutis* is understood as the outworking of the sequence from which salvation is applied by the Spirit.

### **Union with Christ and *Ordo Salutis***

According to the Westminster standards, union with Christ is the matrix or source of all benefits applied in redemption. In particular, the standards address the question, “How doth the Spirit apply to us the redemption purchased by Christ?” In response, the Westminster Shorter Catechism 30 answers, “The Spirit applieth to us the redemption purchased by Christ, by working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling.” Benefits applied to believers through uniting to Christ include justification, adoption, sanctification, and others (cf. SC 32; LC 69). Additionally, the Larger Catechism 69 specifically notes that when believers partake of these benefits, they experience the “manifestation of their union with Christ.” Discussing the Larger Catechism and its stance on union with Christ, Letham concludes, “What the Larger Catechism brings to the fore is that all these [*ordo salutis*] are aspects of union and communion with Christ in grace and glory. At no point should they be isolated from union with Christ. The Assembly displayed, not two different views of the way of salvation, but one view seen from complementary vantage points.”<sup>254</sup> Applied in redemption, God’s grace is found in union and communion with Christ, showing that the *ordo salutis* and union with Christ are complementary. In the two catechisms, the *ordo*

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<sup>254</sup>Letham, *The Westminster Assembly*, 246; cf. 111.

*salutis* is integrally related to union and communion with Christ (WLC 65-90; WSC 30-36). Moreover, Letham argues, “far from requiring that we dispense with the *ordo salutis*,” union with Christ, “preserves and enhances it by pointing to its integrating feature. The divines at Westminster knew this in the seventeenth century when they combined a logical or orderly *ordo salutis* in WCF 9-18 with the same topics considered as aspects of union and communion with Christ in grace and glory in WLC 65-90.”<sup>255</sup> Together, therefore, the Westminster standards confirm that salvation is found in union with Christ, and the different salvific benefits of the *ordo salutis* flow from this union.

### **Covenant of Grace and *Ordo Salutis***

By virtue of union with Christ, believers are joined to the covenant head of the covenant of grace. Through this union, believers partake of all salvific benefits of covenant of grace. The Westminster Larger Catechism’s *ordo salutis* stands in relation to the covenant of grace: “For the Larger Catechism, the whole *ordo salutis* is considered part of the person and work of Christ. Christ is the mediator of the covenant of grace, and salvation in union and communion with Christ in grace and glory (WLC 65-90).”<sup>256</sup> As mediator, Christ is central to the covenant of grace, and his life and works must be seen within the covenant framework. The Larger Catechism also expresses that “Christ, by his mediation, hath procured redemption, with all other benefits of the covenant of grace” (WLC 57). Of the salvific benefits, union and communion with Christ are regarded as distinctive benefits that Christ procured for the elect in the covenant of grace (WLC 65). Christ also serves as the Second Adam, the head of the covenant of grace, when he enters

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<sup>255</sup>Letham, *Union with Christ*, 90.

<sup>256</sup>Letham, *The Westminster Assembly*, 224.

a covenantal union with believers, who are brought into a covenant relationship with God through uniting with Christ. Through this union, the different salvific benefits of the *ordo salutis* are given to them in the covenant of grace. These benefits include justification, or the forensic aspect of union with Christ, and sanctification, or the transformative aspect of the union. According to the Westminster divines, the outworking of the *ordo salutis* manifests in union with Christ and within the framework of the covenant of grace. Moreover, they explicitly identified and discussed justification and sanctification within the context of the covenant of grace.<sup>257</sup> Both a believer's status (justification) and life (sanctification) emerge from radical change in their union with Christ.

Agreeing with the Reformers by affirming justification as alien-imputed righteousness in a forensic structure, the Reformed orthodox theologians placed Christ's redemptive work within a federal framework that portrays the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness. Reformed orthodox theologians maintained that, from their very creation, humans have been covenant beings and became covenant breakers in the fall; therefore, God's redemption in Christ is understood covenantally. To this end, the Westminster Confession includes a "chapter on 'Christ the Mediator' [that] follows directly upon the chapter on 'God's Covenant with Man.' The justification of sinners by means of the imputed righteousness of Christ is presented in the confession in federal terms."<sup>258</sup> For the believer, arriving at justification by means of Christ's imputed

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<sup>257</sup>E.g., Witsius clearly places justification and sanctification within the framework of the covenant of grace. See Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man*, 3.8 and 3.12.

<sup>258</sup>McWilliams, "The Covenant Theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith and Recent Criticism," 122. Cf. Robert J. McKelvey, "That Error and Pillar of Antinomianism: Eternal Justification," in Haykin and Jones, *Drawn into Controversie*, 240-41.

righteousness is bound within a covenantal framework.<sup>259</sup> The divine-human covenant relationship was damaged at the fall when humanity lost the power of obedience leading to the promised life. Thereafter, the covenant had to depend on the obedience of another person, Jesus Christ, who is promised in the covenant of grace (cf. WCF 7.3) Because Christ as the mediator perfectly obeyed the law on behalf of his people, his righteousness is imputed to them. The teaching of imputation communicates the representative nature of Christ's satisfying work on behalf of his people. Through uniting with Christ, believers share in the accomplished work of Christ, their covenant head, so that his righteousness is reckoned as theirs. Therefore, like Calvin, Reformed orthodox theologians did not teach that union between Christ and the elect is an ontological, actual union involving direct participation. Instead, it is a federal representation within a covenantal context.

### **Justification and Imputation**

Reformed orthodoxy did not depart from the Reformation doctrine of justification by grace through faith but developed it with a fuller understanding of Christ's satisfactory work. Although the doctrine of imputation of "the active obedience of Christ" was not an undisputed teaching in Reformed orthodoxy, the statement "by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them" (WCF 11.1) satisfied most Westminster divines.<sup>260</sup> Most Reformed divines agreed that justification consists of both

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<sup>259</sup>For instance, works such as James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification: An Outline of its History in the Church and of its Exposition from Scripture* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1867), and John Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith through the Imputation of the Righteousness of Christ, Confirmed, and Vindicated* (1677) demonstrate how atonement and justification need to be understood within the broad contours of covenants and the order of salvation.

<sup>260</sup>Whether WCF maintains that the active and passive obedience of Christ is imputed to the believer is a debated point in recent scholarship. Omitting the word *whole* in chapter eleven of the Westminster Confession leads some to conclude that its position is the "passive obedience only" doctrine of justification. Nevertheless, Jeffrey K. Jue argues that "essentially, the two-Adam Christological structure in the Standards supports a doctrine of justification that includes, in substance, the active obedience of Christ.

the pardon and remission of sins and acceptance unto eternal life. They regarded these two aspects of justification as the “twofold righteousness” of Christ—a righteousness of satisfaction and a righteousness of obedience—given to justify believers.<sup>261</sup> Christ’s twofold righteousness corresponds to believers’ double obligation toward the law, which requires obedience and punishment,<sup>262</sup> or, as Petto stated, righteous performance and penalty: “The covenant of works being broken by us in the first Adam, it was of great concernment to us that satisfaction should be given to it, for unless its righteousness were performed for us, the promised life was unattainable; and unless its penalty were undergone for us, the threatened death (Gen. ii. 17) was unavoidable.”<sup>263</sup> Because the righteousness of Christ’s satisfaction is imputed to believers, their guilt is removed and so is their obligation to penalty. Moreover, justification involves “the imputation of the active righteousness and obedience of Christ, whereby we obtain a right and title, and are accepted, unto eternal life.”<sup>264</sup> Rather than facing the threatened death, therefore, in justification believers are granted “a gracious act of God, whereby, through the

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... Christ’s perfect obedience to the law earned exactly what was lost in Adam’s disobedience to the law” (128). Jeffrey K. Jue, “The Active Obedience of Christ and the Theology of the Westminster Standards: A Historical Investigation,” in *Justified in Christ: God’s Plan for Us in Justification*, ed. K. Scott Oliphant (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor Press, 2007), 99-130. Similarly, Alan D. Strange argues that the Westminster divines directly addressed and affirmed the imputation of the active obedience of Christ (IAOC) with respect to the doctrine of justification. Although the final language of WCF does not reflect the doctrine of the imputation of active obedience, it is implicitly affirmed in a bi-covenant structure and later explicitly stated in the Savoy Declaration. Alan D. Strange, “The Imputation of the Active Obedience of Christ,” in Haykin and Jones, *Drawn into Controversie*, 31-51.

<sup>261</sup>Hopkins, *The Doctrine of the Two Covenants*, 117.

<sup>262</sup>Campos, *Doctrine in Development*, 227-62. Speaking specifically on the twofold righteousness in justification, he argues, “Reformed orthodoxy considered both obedience and punishments as dividends of any fallen human being. Righteousness, in the fallen state, is twofold according to the demands of the law. Hence, Christ’s vicarious righteousness also needs to be twofold. He merits for us both deliverance from punishment and right to eternal life. None can be to Him alone, for He is not liable to the first and entitled to the second due to the hypostatical union. Covenantally, however, Christ assumes the role of representative *viator* in order to obtain the covenant promises for us” (262).

<sup>263</sup>Petto, *The Great Mystery of the Covenant of Grace*, 126.

<sup>264</sup>Hopkins, *The Doctrine of the Two Covenants*, 118.

righteousness of Christ's satisfaction imputed, he freely remits to the believing sinner the guilt and punishment of his sins; and, through the righteousness of Christ's perfect obedience imputed, he accounts him righteous, and accepts him into love and favour, and unto eternal."<sup>265</sup> This acceptance is grounded in Christ's twofold righteousness, which, when imputed to believers, not only satisfies their punishment from sin but also accounts them as righteous and accepted into eternal life.

### **Union with Christ and Covenant of Grace**

Clearly, Reformed orthodox theologians placed imputation in the believer's union with Christ within the covenant of grace. Justification is by faith although faith neither justifies as a meritorious work nor fulfills conditions of the covenant of grace.<sup>266</sup> Nevertheless, "faith makes the righteousness of Christ's satisfaction and obedience to be ours, as it is the bond of that mystical union which there is between Christ and the believing soul."<sup>267</sup> In this mystical union between the believer and Christ, there is a mutual imputation in which "the sins of believers are imputed to Christ, and the righteousness of Christ to them; and both justly, because being united each to other by mutual consent."<sup>268</sup> Reformed orthodox theologians understood that this imputation of believers' sins to Christ and his righteousness to them is the eternal plan between the Father and the Son. Discussing this eternal plan, Thomas Brooks wrote, "It is agreed between the Father and the Son that our sins should be imputed into him, and that his

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<sup>265</sup>Hopkins, *The Doctrine of the Two Covenants*, 120.

<sup>266</sup>Hopkins, *The Doctrine of the Two Covenants*, 129-30.

<sup>267</sup>Hopkins, *The Doctrine of the Two Covenants*, 132.

<sup>268</sup>Hopkins, *The Doctrine of the Two Covenants*, 132.

righteousness should be imputed unto us, and that all the redeemed should believe in him, and so be justified.”<sup>269</sup> Therefore, the Reformed divines understood that this mutual imputation in the covenant of grace was established through a believer’s union with Christ. Since Christ and his work are the foundation and substance of the covenant of grace, it “is absolutely necessarie to salvation: for of necessitie a man must be within the covenant, and receive Christ Iesus the very substance thereof; or perish eternally.”<sup>270</sup> As this very substance, Christ is the head of the covenant of grace, and being united with him allows the believer to enter the covenant of grace.

### **Unconditional Union and Justification**

The Westminster standards further explain that redemption is the effectual communication of God by the Spirit (cf. WLC 59). This communication comes to the elect from God’s work of effectual calling:

whereby (out of his free and special love to his elect, and from nothing in them moving him thereunto) he doth, in his accepted time, invite and draw them to Jesus Christ, by his Word and Spirit; savingly enlightening their minds, renewing and powerfully determining their wills, so as they (although in themselves dead in sin) are hereby made willing and able freely to answer his call, and to accept and embrace the grace offered and conveyed therein (WLC 67).

Being invited and drawn to Jesus brings redemption for the elect from the unilateral and unconditional grace of God. Notably, God’s effectual calling draws sinners into the bond of union with Christ. Defining “our effectual calling,” John Cotton explained that it occurs when “the Spirit of God taking possession in our hearts and working this Faith in

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<sup>269</sup>Brooks, *The Covenant of Redemption Very Clearly and Largely Open*, 243.

<sup>270</sup>Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, 1:73, quoted in Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought*, 472.

us . . . maketh us one with Christ.”<sup>271</sup> Therefore, union with Christ is God’s unilateral act of grace by his effectual calling.

From this unbreakable union flows out God’s irrevocable free grace, justification. The Westminster Confession emphasizes this gracious and unilateral act of God in justification by stating that “God doth continue to forgive the sins of those that are justified; and, although they can never fall from the state of justification, yet they may, by their sins, fall under God’s fatherly displeasure, and not have the light of His countenance restored unto them, until they humble themselves, confess their sins, beg pardon, and renew their faith and repentance” (WCF 11.5). Furthermore, those who are justified are in a relationship with God in which justification is completed at once, without stages or degrees: “Sanctification, growth in moral life, can be by degrees, but not justification as a relationship.”<sup>272</sup> Because justification is God’s absolute and immutable work, the justified will not lose their new status. Von Rohr concurs, noting that “one’s personal assurance of justification may fluctuate, influenced by the changing moods of confidence and doubt, but for God’s elect justification itself remains secure.”<sup>273</sup> Within Reformed orthodoxy, although the justified still have continuing sins for which they need to repent, they are accepted into the covenant because Christ’s righteousness has been imputed to them and God does not see their sins. Thus, justification is God’s sovereign and effectual act apart from any human works.

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<sup>271</sup>John Cotton, *The Covenant of Grace: Discovering the Great Work of a Sinners Reconciliation to God* (1655), 19.

<sup>272</sup>von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought*, 101.

<sup>273</sup>von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought*, 101.

## Sanctification and Covenant

Through union with Christ, believers receive not only justification but also sanctification.<sup>274</sup> Reformed Orthodox theologians understood that sanctification plays a central role in believers' lives and in the covenant of grace. Specifically, God desires that believers have lives characterized by sanctification. Like Calvin, Reformed orthodox theologians distinguished between justification and sanctification. While justification refers to the change of a believer's state (a relational change to God), sanctification results in recognizable, changing qualities within believers. This latter change primarily comes in two forms: negatively in mortification of sin and positively in vivification of the new man.<sup>275</sup> Commenting on sin and the new, renewed person, Owen defined sanctification by saying it

*is an immediate work of the Spirit of God on the souls of believers, purifying and cleansing of their natures from the pollution and uncleanness of sin, renewing in them the image of God, and thereby enabling them from a spiritual and habitual principle of grace, to yield obedience unto God, according unto the tenor and terms of the new covenant, by virtue of the life and death of Jesus Christ. Or more briefly:—It is the universal renovation of our natures by the Holy Spirit into the image of God, through Jesus Christ.*<sup>276</sup>

For Owen, as for the Puritans, a justified person is not a sinless person. Although the dominion of the power of sin has been subdued, remnants of sin continue to abide in

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<sup>274</sup>See WLC, Q. 69. "What is the communion in grace which the members of the invisible church have with Christ?" A. "The communion in grace which the members of the invisible church have with Christ, is their partaking of the virtue of his mediation, in their justification, adoption, sanctification, and whatever else, in this life, manifests their union with him."

<sup>275</sup>See Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 1.29 (167-71).

<sup>276</sup>Owen, *Works: Discourse on the Holy Spirit*, 3:386 (emphasis original). Elsewhere Owen describes sanctification as "the immediate work of God by his Spirit upon our whole nature, proceeding from the peace made for us by Jesus Christ, whereby, being changed into his likeness, we are kept entirely in peace with God, and are preserved unblamable, or in a state of gracious acceptance with him, according to the terms of the covenant, unto the end." Owen, *Works: Discourse on the Holy Spirit*, 3:369 (emphasis original).

believers. Therefore, believers are free from the condemning power of sin, yet they must face the daily work of mortifying their indwelling sin.<sup>277</sup> This sanctification process consists of purifying themselves from the pollution of sin to be transformed according to the image of God.

Within the covenant of grace, restoring the image of God by renewing human nature is the essence of the sanctification process. Furthermore, as Thomas Boston stated, the covenant of grace exists for: “(1.) the bringing of sinners into the covenant; (2.) the management of them therein, according to it, in this world; and, (3.) the completing of their happiness, according to it, in the other world.”<sup>278</sup> He also described the central significance and purpose of sanctification in the covenant of grace:

The covenant was erected on purpose to destroy the works of the devil: it was a confederacy entered into by the Father and the Son, for rooting sin out of the hearts and lives of the children of Adam; for restoring the divine image in them; and for bringing them again to a perfect conformity to the moral law of the ten commandments, from which they fall in Adam. For this end was the condition of it performed, the promises of it made, and the administration therefore committed to the holy Jesus.<sup>279</sup>

Additionally, Owens stated that the goal of sanctification is to enable believers “to yield

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<sup>277</sup>E.g., John Owen’s teaching in *Overcoming Sin and Temptation: Three Classic Works of John Owen (Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers; Of Temptation: The Nature and Power of It; The Nature, Power, Deceit, and Prevalency of Indwelling Sin)*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006).

<sup>278</sup>Boston, *A View of the Covenant of Grace*, 155.

<sup>279</sup>Boston, *A View of the Covenant of Grace*, 199-200. Similarly, he spoke of sanctification as the penultimate purpose of the covenant of grace: “And this promise, the promise of sanctification, is indeed the chief promise of the covenant made to Christ for them: among the rest of that kind, it shines like the moon among the lesser stars. Sanctification is the very chief subordinate end of the covenant of grace, standing therein next to the glory of God, which is the chief and ultimate end thereof. The promise of it, is the centre of all the rest of these promises. All the foregoing promises, the promise of preservation, the Spirit, the first regeneration or quickening of the dead soul, faith, justification, the new saving relation to God, recompilation, adoption, and enjoyment of God as our God, do tend unto it as heir common centre, and stand related to it as means to their end. They are all accomplished on sinners, on design to make them holy” (115).

*obedience unto God,*” which is “*according to the terms of the covenant of grace.*”<sup>280</sup>

Thus, the covenant of grace does not simply reconcile sinners to God; it renews them to willingly obey him. Similarly, writing about sanctification restoring God’s image in believers, à Brakel claimed that it is “causing them to live according to His will as expressed in the law of the ten commandments.”<sup>281</sup> Obedience unto God is obedience unto his revealed will in Scripture. The Puritan divines taught that obedience occurs within communion with God, which renews the believer after the image of God. Moreover, the degree of a believer’s communion with God is proportionately related to his or her sin and the renewal of God’s image in sanctification.

### **Justification and Sanctification in Union with Christ**

The Reformed Puritan theologians, like Calvin, claimed that justification and sanctification in union with Christ are distinct and yet inseparable. In addition, the Westminster Standards clearly distinguish between justification and sanctification. In the former, God imputes the righteousness of Christ and pardons sin, and in the latter, his Spirit infuses grace that subdues sin (cf. WLC 77). Whereas the former involves believers’ relationships to God, the latter involves believers’ moral lives (the inner-workings of the Spirit).<sup>282</sup> Moreover, while both are from God’s “saving grace” (cf. WLC

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<sup>280</sup>Owen, *Works: Discourse on the Holy Spirit*, 3:386 (emphasis original).

<sup>281</sup>Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 1992), 3:4. He wrote, “Sanctification is the efficacious operation of God in elect, called, regenerated, and justified sinners, purifying them by means of the Word from the pollution of sin, transforming them according to the image of God, and – by virtue of his internal principle of spiritual life – causing them to live according to His will as expressed in the law of the ten commandments.”

<sup>282</sup>Kevan puts it this way: “Justification is understood, forensically, to indicate the act of God in declaring the sinner to be free from all legal charge, on account of the satisfaction made by Christ on his behalf; and sanctification is that act of God by which the believer’s life is transformed more and more after a godly pattern.” Kevan, *The Grace of Law*, 95.

72, 76), justification is achieved by “justifying faith” (cf. WLC 72) and sanctification by “repentance unto life” (cf. WLC 76). Despite their distinct elements, they are inseparably connected. For instance, like the Reformers, Turretin understood that justification is forensic and does not include moral transformation.<sup>283</sup> He also defended justification as distinct and inseparable from sanctification: “As Christ was made to us of God righteousness and sanctification (1 Cor. 1.30)—not dividedly, but conjointly; not confusedly, but distinctly—so the benefit of sanctification immediately follows justification as inseparably connected with it, but yet really distinct from it.”<sup>284</sup> The two are inseparable because both are benefits of a believer’s union with Christ. As Packer argues, Puritans “emphasized that justifying faith is given by God through *effectual calling*, which includes *regeneration*—that is, vitalizing union with the risen Christ through the sovereign work of the Spirit, from which, as a work of new creation, flows the sinner’s response to the gospel.”<sup>285</sup> In the union with the risen Christ, justification occurs in the believer and simultaneously commences the process of sanctification, wherein true faith cannot but produce good works.

The Puritan divines also supported the inseparability of justification and sanctification in a covenantal context. Thomas Boston, like Calvin, spoke of union with Christ as the means by which the Spirit communicates the promises and saving graces of God to believers.<sup>286</sup> Also similar to Calvin, Boston saw a distinct and inseparable

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<sup>283</sup>Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 16.1.

<sup>284</sup>Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 17.1.1.

<sup>285</sup>J. I. Packer, “The Doctrine of Justification among the Puritans,” in *Puritan Papers, 1968-1969*, ed. J. I. Packer (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2005), 5:153-54.

<sup>286</sup>Boston, *A View of the Covenant of Grace*, 109-38.

relationship between justification and sanctification in a covenantal context. He understood that justification is the legal application of the surety's payment of the debt for the prisoner, whereby he or she is set free. Furthermore, justification has an immediate effect on the sinner's conformity to Christ (sanctification): "The Spirit doth really apply the same death and resurrection to him, conforming him personally thereto, through the communication of grace to him, out of the fulness of grace in Christ the head; without which there cannot be any such conformation, according to the stated method of grace revealed in the scripture. And thus they have a mediate effect on him, constituting him really and personally holy, in sanctification."<sup>287</sup> For the sinner, sanctification consists of two chief elements: repentance, and grace and strength for holy obedience. Boston expressed these as provisions in the covenant: "And thus such a sufficient provision and allowance of grace is made in the covenant for believers, as that it is possible for them, even in this life, to perform obedience to the law of Christ, the ten commandments, the eternal rule of righteousness, in all the parts thereof, acceptably: so that there is no corruption so strong, but one may get it acceptably mortified."<sup>288</sup> In agreement with other Puritan divines, Boston believed that those who are justified are also sanctified in their obedience "and brought to true and evangelical repentance, according to his [God's] promise."<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>287</sup>Boston, *A View of the Covenant of Grace*, 122. He further added, "There was a double sprinkling of the blood of the sacrifices, called the blood covenant, Exod. xxiv. First, it was sprinkled on the altar, for atonement and reconciliation with God for Israel, ver. 6. And next, it was sprinkled on the people, for their purification, ver. 8; its purifying virtue flowing from its atoning virtue. Accordingly there is a double application or sprinkling of the blood of Christ, thereby signified: one for our justification and reconciliation with God...and then another, for our sanctification" (122).

<sup>288</sup>Boston, *A View of the Covenant of Grace*, 126.

<sup>289</sup>Boston, *A View of the Covenant of Grace*, 124.

Samuel Bolton also maintained the distinction and inseparability of justification and sanctification. He contended that the Papists “preach obedience as a means to justification,” and the Reformed Puritans “preach justification as a means to obedience.”<sup>290</sup> Additionally, the latter “cry down works in opposition to grace in justification” and “cry up obedience as the fruits of grace in sanctification.”<sup>291</sup> Bolton also asserted that “just as the Papists set up the law for justification, so the Antinomians decry the law for sanctification.”<sup>292</sup> Speaking more on the law, he noted that “we cry down the law in respect of justification, but we set it up as a rule of sanctification. The law sends us to the Gospel that we may be justified; and the Gospel sends us the law again to inquire what is our duty as those who are justified.”<sup>293</sup> Therefore, he defended justification for the believer without performing the law, yet the believer must also be obedient to the law to frame his or her Christian life. Grace and obedience in grace harmonize in this life because of union with Christ. Through union with Christ, Bolton further stated that believers “have fellowship with the strength of Christ.”<sup>294</sup> This strength is essential, as “He tells us that He works all our works in us and for us (Isa. 26.12), the required works of grace in us, and of duty for us.”<sup>295</sup> Furthermore, walking “in the law as a rule of sanctification” is “to live upon Christ and the promises in respect of

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<sup>290</sup>Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*, 69.

<sup>291</sup>Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*, 69.

<sup>292</sup>Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*, 71.

<sup>293</sup>Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*, 71.

<sup>294</sup>Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*, 73.

<sup>295</sup>Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*, 73.

justification.”<sup>296</sup> Therefore, for Bolton, union with Christ consists of not only a fellowship of righteousness, but also of strengthen in fulfilling covenant duties.

Similarly, Richard Sibbes (1577-1635) asserted that justification leads to sanctification because Christ is not only the believer’s righteousness but also his or her sanctification. The foundation of believers’ comfort is Christ, the Savior who offered himself as a sacrifice and, by the effectual power of the Spirit, freed them from the dominion of sin. Christ is also the believers’ Sanctifier by the same Spirit, given to govern and guide them.<sup>297</sup> In a covenantal context, Sibbes also understood that Christ’s obedience applies to believers’ sins (justification), and they are then obedient to the Father after their sins are pardoned (sanctification). Believers receive these two benefits, justification and sanctification, in God’s covenant with them.<sup>298</sup> Moreover, Sibbes stated, “in the covenant of grace he [God] requireth no more than he giveth, but giveth what he requireth, and accepteth what he giveth.”<sup>299</sup> Exploring the substance and essence of Richard Sibbes’s theology, Mark Dever notes that the covenant was central to it and that “Sibbes called the covenant the ground of the entirety of the Christian life ‘both in justification and sanctification.’”<sup>300</sup> Christ’s work by his Spirit not only changes the fundamental laws of the first Adam for believers, but it also establishes a new government, wherein “the purpose of Christ’s coming was to destroy the works of the

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<sup>296</sup>Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*, 219-20.

<sup>297</sup>Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed* (London: Banner of Truth, 1998), 80-81.

<sup>298</sup>Dever, *Richard Sibbes*, 114-15.

<sup>299</sup>Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed*, 36 (“The Bruised Reed and Smoking Flax,” in *Works*, 1:58).

<sup>300</sup>Dever, *Richard Sibbes*, 2. He quotes “The Rich Poverty; or, The Poor Man’s Riches,” in *Works*, 6:245.

devil, both for us and in us.”<sup>301</sup> Like other Puritan theologian, Sibbes believed in the gospel of Christ believers are imputed righteous and made righteous in obedience to God.

Moreover, regarding a covenantal understanding of sanctification, Reformed orthodox theologians argued that the covenant of grace necessitates believers’ good works and obedience for salvation. These theologians claimed, “Though we are not justified by works, yet good works are necessary to our justification, so that we cannot possibly be justified without them.”<sup>302</sup> Good works are not “required in the covenant of grace as a condition of justification” because “we are not justified by works.”<sup>303</sup> Nevertheless, believers cannot be justified without them “because they are indispensably required in the person justified.”<sup>304</sup> Indeed, good works are a significant difference between the covenant of works and covenant of grace: “Good works are now as necessary under the covenant of grace, as ever they were under the covenant of works; but only to other ends and purposes. The covenant of works required them, that we might be justified by them; but the covenant of grace requires them, that we might be justified by faith.”<sup>305</sup> Good works or obedience is required in both covenants but serves different purpose. Good works are not necessary “as the procuring or meritorious cause of our salvation” in the covenant of grace, nevertheless, they are “the disposing cause of the

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<sup>301</sup>Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed*, 93.

<sup>302</sup>Hopkins, *The Doctrine of the Two Covenants*, 142.

<sup>303</sup>Hopkins, *The Doctrine of the Two Covenants*, 143.

<sup>304</sup>Hopkins, *The Doctrine of the Two Covenants*, 143. For his studies of the three reformers, William Tyndale, John Frith, and Robert Barnes, under Henry VIII, Carl Trueman concludes that although there is diversity among the three men, they “are united in their attempt to maintain two basic principles: the doctrine of justification by faith, and the need for the believer to perform good works. Each has a different approach to relating faith to works.” Carl Trueman, *Luther’s Legacy: Salvation and English Reformers, 1525-1556* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 200.

<sup>305</sup>Hopkins, *The Doctrine of the Two Covenants*, 143.

subject; for these are they which do dispose and prepare us for salvation.”<sup>306</sup> Commenting on the Puritans’ understanding of good works, von Rohr claims, “It is true that good works were in no way contributory to justification, and it is true also that good works were looked upon as one of the many available evidences of one’s justification, but there was nothing quiet nor meek nor covert about the Puritan endorsement of them for the Christian’s life. Christian experience is simply truncated, even inauthentic, without a vigorous and dedicated moral expression.”<sup>307</sup> Furthermore, “like Calvin the Puritans maintained that though one is not justified by good works, neither is one justified without them.”<sup>308</sup> In their necessity and believers’ dedication to them, good works become expressions of the intertwined relationship between justification and sanctification.

Therefore, for the Puritans, the gospel consists of not only reconciliation with God through the imputation of Christ’s righteousness, but also sanctification, a moral transformation by the power of the Spirit. In particular, Owen understood that through unity with Christ, the Mediator, believers are forgiven of sin and also emulate Christ in his holiness through communion with him. Thus, Christ’s headship is not simply of “power and rule, but of life and influence.”<sup>309</sup> In Owen’s words,

Unto these ends, indeed, is he firstly and principally proposed unto us in the gospel, and with respect unto them are we exhorted to receive him and believe in him; but this is not all that is required of us. Christ in the gospel is proposed unto us as our pattern and example of holiness; and as it is a cursed imagination that this was the whole end of his life and death,—namely, to exemplify and confirm the doctrine of holiness which he taught,—so to neglect his so being our example, in considering

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<sup>306</sup>Hopkins, *The Doctrine of the Two Covenants*, 134-35.

<sup>307</sup>von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought*, 103.

<sup>308</sup>von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought*, 104.

<sup>309</sup>Owen, *Works: Discourse on the Holy Spirit*, 3:414.

him by faith to that end, and labouring after conformity to him, is evil and pernicious.<sup>310</sup>

Christ is not only given to believers as the means of reconciling to God, but also as an example to grow in the godly pattern of life. As Thomas Goodwin contended, “The object of faith is Christ as he is presented to us in the gospel. Now he is presented not as justification only, but as sanctification also; therefore he that takes Christ as he is given, takes Christ for both.”<sup>311</sup> Concurring on the need for justification and sanctification, Thomas Watson stated, “It is absurd to image that God should justify a people and not sanctify them, He should justify a people whom He could not glorify.”<sup>312</sup> The Puritans clearly supported the “double grace of God,” emitting from the gracious union with Christ. In this union, one who is justified by grace alone is inexorably called to pursue sanctification, growing gratefully in godliness. Therefore, Puritan theology distinguishes between justification and sanctification while recognizing their inseparability in a person of true faith.<sup>313</sup>

The good news in Jesus Christ is not simply that believers are justified by grace alone because they are also called to grow in grace. In the covenant of grace, believers find the gospel and, within it, God’s free gift of forgiveness of sin; yet they also find the demand of obedience or justifying grace and sanctifying grace. Beeke and Jones describe God’s purpose of sanctification in the covenant of grace:

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<sup>310</sup>Owen, *Works: Discourse on the Holy Spirit*, 3:513.

<sup>311</sup>Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, 8:476, 478, 479.

<sup>312</sup>I. D. E. Thomas, compiled, *The Golden Treasury of Puritan Quotations*, (Chicago: Moody, 1975), 141.

<sup>313</sup>Schaefer, *The Spiritual Brotherhood*, 8-9.

Sanctification is rooted in God's covenant with believers in Christ. Thus, according to the promise of the covenant, the believer is the object of God's sanctifying work in Christ, through the Holy Spirit. Our covenantal relationship with God includes both promises made to the believer and obligation imposed on the believer. It is the work of the Spirit to regenerate us, but it is our calling to bring forth the fruits of regeneration in our lives. We must be conformed into Christ's image within the context of the covenant of grace that God makes with His people.<sup>314</sup>

In the covenant of grace, God's gospel not only consists of his promise to reconcile sinners to himself but also of his gracious work to sanctify and renew them according to his image. This judicial grace and transformative grace are interrelated in the gospel and undergirded by a covenantal relationship between God and his people. Furthermore, he initiates and upholds this relationship by his absolute power and allows for mutual interchange within it. In the moment that believers are united to Christ, they are granted a new status and a new state. Those in the new state cannot ultimately fall away because they are united to Christ by God's absolute power. Moreover, as believers continue to show faith and obedience to God's sovereign initiative "and as that unbreakable Christ-initiated mutual embrace continues, sanctification and perseverance continue infallibly toward glorification."<sup>315</sup> The covenantal relationship between God and man is therefore secured through Christ, who is the basis for the restoration of sinners in salvation. In the covenantal scheme, justification in believers displays God's sovereign grace as he declares them righteous based on the work of Christ as the head of the covenant of grace, a grace that extends to sanctification in which he communes with them to transform their moral lives.

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<sup>314</sup>Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 530-31.

<sup>315</sup>Richard Gaffin, "The Work of Christ Applied," in Allen and Swain, *Christian Dogmatics*, 286.

## **Conclusion**

Reformed orthodox theologians understood God's covenant with man is both absolute and conditional. Its absoluteness is fulfilled by Christ unilaterally and requires no further performance by humans. Its conditionality is not centered on the covenant conditions but on the inherent duties attached to the covenant for those who are united to Christ. Like Calvin, the Puritan divines used conditional language to describe human activities and responses in the covenant. They did not see privileges in the covenant as conflicting with its duties. Moreover, they regarded justification and sanctification as covenantal benefits received in union and communion with the triune God; believers passively receive God's justifying grace in union with Christ and are also called to action in communion with God as they exercise sanctifying grace. The Puritan divines also maintained a balance between receiving undeserved grace in Christ and producing fruit of the Spirit as evidence of new life in Christ.

For the Puritans, the entirety of the Christian life is under covenant with God. They believed God's grace is primarily expressed in a covenant relationship; thus, they covenanted themselves with faith and obedience as a response to his free grace, offered to them in the covenant of grace. The emphasis on God's sovereignty and believers' assurance of salvation does not decrease the demands of obedience and moral transformation. Furthermore, justification is God's unilateral act, and sanctification is from a mutual divine-human communion. In this bilateral communion and fellowship with the Triune God, he accomplishes his purpose of redemption—conformity to his son through obedience. In this understanding, the Reformed Puritan theologians and Calvin

were united doctrinally and practically.<sup>316</sup> The former clarified that Reformed orthodoxy is an experiential Christianity that holds doctrines of life, godliness, sovereign grace, and human obedience in their covenant theology.<sup>317</sup> This experiential piety is grounded in union with Christ, which is not only a reality for believers but also an experience, a relationship to be cultivated.

Therefore, Calvin and the Reformed orthodox theologians concur in their reading of “biblical history as the story of God’s covenant relationship with a chosen people,” and they “further saw that relationship as one in which there is a mutual binding. God’s mercy is a committed mercy and calls for a committed response.”<sup>318</sup> God’s bestowal of undeserved grace is also a call for obedience. The unilateral and bilateral aspects of the covenant are abundantly evident in the biblical covenants that God made with men in Scripture—God’s progressive revelation of his redemption.

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<sup>316</sup>Beeke and Jones write, “At its heart, Reformed and Puritan theology is pietistic; the concern of Reformation theology is as practical as it is doctrinal. . . .For Calvin and the Puritans, reformation of the church involved the reform of piety, or spirituality, as much as a reform of theology. . . .The genius of genuine Reformed piety is that it marries theology and piety so that head, heart, and hand motivate one another to live for God’s glory and our neighbor’s well-being.” Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 849.

<sup>317</sup>William Ames, particularly in his *The Marrow of Theology*, is seen as of the first in making covenant as the overarching framework of theology in which he “seamlessly weaving theology and ethics together into a program of obedient, covenant living.” Joel R. Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2004), 129. Cf. Vliet, *The Rise of Reformed System*.

<sup>318</sup>von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought*, 19.

## CHAPTER 5

### BIBLICAL COVENANTS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT: UNCONDITIONALITY AND CONDITIONALITY

The previous two chapters have demonstrated that the historical Reformed understanding of justification and sanctification as double-grace and in union with Christ purports a covenant of grace that is both unilateral and bilateral or unconditional and conditional in nature. This historical affirmation of the covenant can also be substantiated by biblical teaching. Therefore, this chapter first argues for the unity of Scripture in a covenantal structure. It goes on to demonstrate that God's covenants with his people are organic, imbued with divine benevolence and human responsibility, which are compatible within the covenants.

#### **The Unity of Scripture: A Covenantal Framework**

The Scripture describes history moving progressively and purposefully toward a consummate goal. As many scholars have claimed, what undergirds the unity of the Bible is God's redemptive revelation in history (redemptive history): "All biblical texts are related to one another by the redemptive purposes that underlie the canon as a whole. The canon in its entirety gives the meaning of those redemptive purposes."<sup>1</sup> In lieu of this redemptive-historical approach of interpreting the Bible, Reformed theology typically expresses God's work of redemption in history through the form of covenants, meaning

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<sup>1</sup>Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 274; also see 259-89, for his understanding on "The Theological Nature of the Bible." Cf. Willem VanGemeren, *The Progress of Redemption: The Story of Salvation from Creation to the New Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996); Richard Gaffin, "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," *Westminster Theological Journal* 38 (1976): 293-94, 297-98.

that in history God progressively reveals his plan of redemption in covenantal form. Geerhardus Vos stands on this Reformed tradition in affirming the centrality of the covenant and explains “The importance of this aspect of revelation has found its clearest expression in the idea of the covenant as the form of God’s progressive self-communication to Israel. God has not revealed Himself in a school, but in the covenant; and the covenant as a communion of life is all-comprehensive, embracing all the conditions and interests of those contracting it.”<sup>2</sup> In this tradition, covenant is God’s method of communicating his plan of salvation throughout history.

Covenant is not only understood as a theme or a central dogma but also as an “architectonic structure” that brings together the diverse themes of Scripture. In this respect, covenant is the “backbone” that undergirds the various threads of God’s revelation in Scripture.<sup>3</sup> As Trueman states, “The covenant provides the historical revelation, thread, and structure to God’s gracious dealings.”<sup>4</sup> It can also be called “the narrative plot structure of the Bible.”<sup>5</sup> The unity of redemptive history is recognized in this narrative, covenantal structure.<sup>6</sup> God uses it to unfold history through his self-

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<sup>2</sup>Geerhardus Vos, “The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline,” in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1980), 10.

<sup>3</sup>J. I. Packer, “On Covenant Theology,” in *Celebrating the Saving Work of God: The Collected Shorter Writings of J. I. Packer* (Carlisle, England: Paternoster, 1998), 1:13. Cf. David VanDrunen, “A System of Theology? The Centrality of Covenant for Westminster Systematics,” in *The Pattern of Sound Doctrine: Systematic Theology at the Westminster Seminaries*, ed. David VanDrunen (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2004), 209. Similarly, Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum assert that “the covenants form the backbone of the metanarrative of Scripture.” Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 21.

<sup>4</sup>Carl R. Trueman, *Grace Alone-Salvation as a Gift of God: What the Reformers Taught and Why It Still Matters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 26.

<sup>5</sup>Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 21.

<sup>6</sup>Though Bible-believing interpreters believe in the unity of Scripture and are bound by its authority, they can come to different conclusions on how the Bible should be “put together.” See e.g., Graeme Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles*

revelation in covenantal form (covenant history).<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, through the covenantal dealings of God in history, believers can recognize the unity of Scripture within its diversity.<sup>8</sup> Through organic continuity, the different covenants connect sequentially and coherently as God's redemption plan unfolds to reveal the salvation of the world. This progressive redemptive revelation is also covenant revelation, showing God's progressive, historical development of his purposes through his covenants. Meredith Kline concurs, arguing that "biblical canon is covenantal canon."<sup>9</sup> Biblical canonicity in its very nature is covenantal. The biblical covenants provide the unity of God's metanarrative in Scripture.

## Goal of Creation and Redemption

The covenantal character of God's revelation entails that God has always dealt

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(Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012); Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002); Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003); Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*; Edward W. Klink III and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012); Stanley N. Gundry and Gary T. Meadors, eds., *Four Views on Moving Beyond the Bible to Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009).

<sup>7</sup>Richard B. Gaffin, *By Faith, Not by Sight: Paul and the Order of Salvation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013), 6-10, esp. 6-7.

<sup>8</sup>Michael Horton put it this way: "What unites them [all the themes of Scripture] is not itself a central dogma but an architectonic structure of biblical faith and practice. That particular architectural structure that we believe the Scriptures themselves to yield is the covenant. It is not simply the concept of the covenant, but the concrete existence of God's covenantal dealings in our history that provides the context within which we recognize the unity of Scripture amid its remarkable variety." Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 13. Moreover, Horton sees "Scripture is an unfolding divine drama, and even the covenantal motif is just that: a motif that provides the context or setting for the plot, although it is not itself the center. The pride of place is reserved for Christ. Nevertheless, his identity in the drama is constituted by the covenant of which he is the mediator." Horton, *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 6. See Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), for a more extensive development of his covenant theology or theology of participation.

<sup>9</sup>Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1997), 75. Cf. In applying covenant as an organizing principle for biblical theology, Meredith G. Kline in "Kingdom Prologue engages in a biblico-theological analysis of the foundational revelation contained in the book of Genesis. Taking the kingdom of God as our central, organizing theme, we inevitably find ourselves fully involved with the subject of the divine covenants of Scripture; for to follow the course of the kingdom is to trace of covenants by which the Lord administers his kingdom." Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 1.

with his human creatures through covenants.<sup>10</sup> This character also demonstrates that his goal of creation and redemption is to possess a people in a communion relationship with himself. Summarizing the purpose of creation and recreation, Donald Fairbairn states:

God initially created this world for humanity and gave the first human beings a share in the communion of the Trinity in this world. After the Fall, God gave his promise that in this world he would act to bring about redemption. That redemptive action began as the Son personally came down to this world to live, die and be raised so as to give us a share in his own relationship to his Father. When the Son turned to the Father, he sent the Spirit to this world to dwell personally within believers, thus uniting us to the Trinity.<sup>11</sup>

The central importance of covenants is God's eternally established purpose in redeeming a people for himself through Christ to restore that covenant fellowship with himself that was broken by Adam. God created human beings in his image because he has chosen to share his intratrinitarian fellowship (the communion and fellowship with the triune God) with them. When Adam and Eve failed, they did not annul God's original plan because through his Son, the second Person of the Trinity, and by his incarnation, death, and resurrection, God reconciles that disrupted relationship, thus establishing the covenantal relationship in Christ. Covenant relationship is integrally related to covenant revelation because "human beings know God in covenantal relationship by means of covenantal revelation."<sup>12</sup> God's Word should be viewed within its covenantal structure so that, as it

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<sup>10</sup>Cornelis P. Venema summarizes God's dealing with his people in covenants in this way; "The doctrine of the covenant . . . the way of the triune God grants and administers his gracious purpose to enjoy covenant fellowship with human beings. Whether in the context of the prefall covenant of works or the postfall covenant of grace, the doctrine of the covenant provides a comprehensive and synthetic account of how the divine-human relationship is effected throughout history, from the original relationship in Adam in the state of integrity until the restored relationship in Christ in the consummation of God's redemptive purposes." Cornelis P. Venema, *Christ and Covenant Theology: Essays on Election, Republication, and the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2017), 420.

<sup>11</sup>Donald Fairbairn, *Life in the Trinity: An Introduction to Theology with the Help of the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 225.

<sup>12</sup>VanDrunen, "A System of Theology? The Centrality of Covenant for Westminster Systematics," 215.

unfolds his purpose in time and space, his people would understand that they are his own and he relates to them covenantally, thus fulfilling that purpose. Therefore, revelation in covenantal form is not simply a mechanism of God's self-communication but also his personal and relational communion to his people.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Nature of the Covenant**

In Scripture, God reveals himself in a covenant form and also through a personal divine-human covenant relationship to redeem a people to himself. Therefore, the doctrine of covenant is not simply a theological systematic, but it is also a means for humans to relate to God in a personal way.<sup>14</sup> Throughout history, scholars have attempted to define the term *covenant* in Scripture. While there are many variations on exactly what covenant entails and means for mankind, scholars generally agree that the heart of covenant is “relationship,”<sup>15</sup> a personal relationship into which two or more parties enter

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<sup>13</sup>John H. Walton identifies his view as the “revelatory view” and distinguishes himself from the classic covenant theology. He proposes that “covenant as God’s program of revelation: “*God has a plan in history that he is sovereignly executing. The goal of that plan is for him to be in relationship with the people whom he has created. It would be difficult for people to enter into a relationship with a God whom they do not know. If his nature were concealed, obscured, or distorted, an honest relationship would be impossible. In order to clear the way for this relationship, then, God has undertaken as a primary objective a program of self-revelation. He wants people to know him. The mechanism that drives this program is the covenant, and the instrument is Israel. The purpose of the covenant is to reveal God.*” John H. Walton, *Covenant: God’s Purpose, God’s Plan* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 24 (emphasis original). For Walton, the covenant is not the relationship. Covenant serves primarily as a mechanism for God’s self-revelation, but not the relationship itself.

<sup>14</sup>As John Frame says, “The covenant form, however, presents us with a model of revelation which is both highly personal and highly propositional. God reveals his name, which is virtually equivalent to himself. He authors the entire treaty, revealing himself throughout its pages. He communicates love, by revealing his past blessings and by promising future ones to those who are faithful. He speaks intimately to his people. He promises that he will be personally involved with his people to bless, to punish and to chastize.” He adds, “At the same time, the covenant is propositional. It is a document containing words and sentences. It functions as a legal constitution for God’s people. It is to be kept, passed on, from generation to generation (Deut. 6:4ff, Jude 3). It contains information as to God’s name, his mighty deeds, his will for our lives, his sanctions and his established institutions.” John Frame, “Covenant and the Unity of Scripture,” Frame-Poythress.org, June 4, 2012. <https://frame-poythress.org/covenant-and-the-unity-of-scripture/>

<sup>15</sup>See John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray, Select Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982), 2:216.

voluntarily. Typically, covenants are compacts or agreements between equal parties with stipulation of their mutual privileges and duties.<sup>16</sup> However, the biblical covenants denote God's relationship to his people, qualifying it as a divine-human covenant relationship.<sup>17</sup> Because it is both divine and human, this covenant relationship is not an agreement or contract between two equal parties.

A distinct characteristic of this divine covenant is divine benevolence.

Covenant, according to Nehemiah Coxe, "implies a free and sovereign act of the divine will exerted in condescending love and goodness. It is not from any necessity of nature that God enters into covenant with men but of his own good pleasure."<sup>18</sup> Biblical covenants, or divine covenants that God makes with humans, are bonds between the Creator and his creatures, similar to a great king and a lesser king (the suzerainty treaty).<sup>19</sup> They express divine sovereignty, or the will of the King for his people. Thus,

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<sup>16</sup>See Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 264; Cf. Dempster writes that a covenant "refers to an agreement made between two parties," in Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 73.

<sup>17</sup>Peter Gentry views the term *covenant* in Scripture as referring to "diversity of oath-bound commitments in various relationships." Peter Gentry, "Kingdom Through Covenant: Humanity as the Divine Image," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 16. O. Palmer Robertson defines covenant as "a bond-in-blood sovereignly administered." O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1980), 15. Paul R. Williamson defines covenant as "a solemn commitment, guaranteeing promises or obligations undertaken by one or both parties, sealed with an oath." Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 43. By this definition, Williamson distinguishes between divine-human relationship and covenant. He maintains there is a divine-human relationship by creation, but there is no covenant, as it lacks covenant ratification because "a covenant ratifies an already forged or existing elective relationship. The ratification involves the making of solemn promises by means of a verbal and/or enacted oath." By his definition, he argues Robertson's definition of covenant, "a divine-human bond or relationship sovereignly administered," is too broad to match the making of a covenant both elsewhere in the Old Testament and in ancient Near Eastern texts. Moreover, he argues the first biblical covenant is the post-diluvian covenant established between God and all living creatures (Gen 9) that ratifies by a promissory oath. The mention of covenant prior to this point is simply proleptical—anticipating the covenant ratified in Genesis 9 (59).

<sup>18</sup>Nehemiah Coxe, *Covenant Theology: From Adam to Christ* (Palmdale, CA: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2005), 36.

<sup>19</sup>See John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013), 17-20. See Meredith Kline's analysis of the relationship between God and Israel as a "suzerainty treaty" in Meredith Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*.

God's covenants with humans are bred from the condescension of the Most High God, the covenant-making Lord who revealed himself by stooping down into human history to bestow grace upon humanity. John Murray defines divine covenant as "oath-bound, oath-certified assurance of irrevocable grace and promise," "oath-bound promise," and "a sovereign administration of grace and promise."<sup>20</sup> He views the fundamental notion of a biblical covenant as "sovereign dispensation, divine in its origin, establishment, confirmation, and fulfillment."<sup>21</sup> Moreover, all biblical covenants are not agreements between two equals, but, as Berkhof states, the "dispensation or arrangement imposed by a superior party on one that is inferior and accepted by the latter."<sup>22</sup> Therefore, these covenants are always divine in origin and unilateral in nature. God did not take counsel from humans nor negotiate terms and conditions of his covenants with them because they are his sovereign dispensation, unilaterally prescribed by him, the great king. Notably, they are also immutable and inviolable in their provisions and validity, for they are all divine in initiation, administration, and fulfillment.

This divine oath-bound nature of the covenant is related to scholars' interpretation of the word *covenant* used in Scripture. Some scholars recognize that the Septuagint does not use the Greek term *sunthēkē* as the translation of the Hebrew *berith*, because the former means mutual agreement and the latter refers to a promissory obligation resulting from one person's initiative (or a monopleuristic arrangement). Therefore, the term *sunthēkē* might imply that the covenants are conditional, yet *berith*

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<sup>20</sup>John Murray, *The Covenant of Grace: A Biblico-Theological Study* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1988), 25, 28, 29.

<sup>21</sup>Murray, *The Covenant of Grace*, 22.

<sup>22</sup>Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 264.

means a promise that is unconditional. Consequentially, the New Testament, as the Septuagint, uses the word *diathēkē*, commonly used to refer to a last will or testament, with respect to covenant.<sup>23</sup> This use of the Greek and Hebrew words for *covenant* demonstrates that God’s covenantal engagements with humans are unlike human negotiated contracts; they come from divine initiative and are irrevocable in nature.

Another feature of covenant is relationship. Stephen Dempster argues that “the covenant was not simply a legal, contractual matter, but one that was intensely personal, alive with love, in which the relationship was primary.”<sup>24</sup> Robertson also claims that divine covenant establishes a personal relationship, a bond between God and his people. He goes on to note that this relationship is sovereignly administered.<sup>25</sup> In making this covenant, the sovereign God initiates a personal relationship with his people out of his holy desire for intimate community: “Covenants create relationships, and God’s plan throughout his covenant-making has been to set apart a people for relationship with himself.”<sup>26</sup> Therefore, the covenant is God’s way of relating to his people in a uniquely interpersonal relationship.

In addition, covenant is God’s instrument of administering his kingdom in order to fellowship and commune with his human creatures. The covenant relationship finds its fullest expression in the covenant formula given several times throughout

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<sup>23</sup>See Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 262-63. For a more detailed discussion on the use of *berit* in the Old Testament and *diatheke* in the New Testament, see David N. J. Poole, *Stages of Religious Faith in the Classical Reformation Tradition: The Covenant Approach to the Ordo Salutis* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1995), 9-48.

<sup>24</sup>Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 162.

<sup>25</sup>Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 4-15.

<sup>26</sup>B. N. Howard, *The Book of the Covenant: The Bible’s Unfolding Story of Relationship with God* (Purcellville, VA: Good Book, 2013), 20.

Scripture: “I shall be your God, and you shall be my people.”<sup>27</sup> Throughout God’s establishment of covenants in Scripture, this single phrase recurs as the summation of the biblical covenant relationship. This covenant formula signifies God’s benevolence in binding himself voluntarily and unilaterally as the God of his chosen people. All other blessings and privileges spring from the covenant. Moreover, the covenant closely connects the pre-fall and post-fall communities. Every time God announces this covenant formula, he reiterates his promise and reminds his people that he is faithful despite their sin. Thus, redemption’s goal is organically connected to creation and recreation, to a first perfect relationship and to an eventual restoration of perfect union and communion with the triune God.

Nevertheless, because covenant creates a relationship, it necessitates mutuality or mutual commitments. The covenant formula clearly shows there are two sides to the relationship. Biblical covenants are solemn agreements, unilaterally imposed by God, that bind the parties in a permanent relationship and require both to keep promises and obligations. Michael Williams describes covenant as “a relationship between persons, begun by the sovereign determination of the greater party, in which the greater commits himself to the lesser in the context of mutual loyalty, and in which mutual obligations serve as illustrations of that loyalty.”<sup>28</sup> As Murray claims, a common element of divine covenants and human covenants is “sworn fidelity.” He also states, “It is the promise of unreserved fidelity, of whole-souled commitment that appears to constitute the essence of

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<sup>27</sup>E.g, Gen 17:7-8; Exod 6:7, 29:45-46; Lev 26:12-13; Jer 30:22, 32:38; Ezek 11:20, 37:23, 27; 2 Cor 6:16; Rev 21:3.

<sup>28</sup>Michael D. Williams, *Far as the Curse Is Found: The Covenant Story of Redemption* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2005), 45-46.

the covenant.”<sup>29</sup> By entering into a covenant with humans, God commits himself to the promises he has made and simultaneously commands his people to uphold the terms of the covenant. The intrinsic nature of God’s covenant relationship with his people entails both divine commitment and human obligation.<sup>30</sup> Because it is based on promise and responsibility,<sup>31</sup> establishing a biblical covenant imposes obligations on both sides of the covenant. As Berkhof says,

It is perfectly true that both the covenant of works and the covenant of grace are monopoleuric in origin, that they are of the nature of arrangements ordained and instituted by God, and that God has the priority in both; but they are nevertheless covenants. God graciously condescended to come down to the level of man, and to honor him by dealing with him more or less on the footing of equality. He stipulates His demands and vouchsafes His promises, and man assumes the duties thus imposed upon him voluntarily and thus inherits the blessings.<sup>32</sup>

A covenant relationship does not exist if one side makes a commitment without the reciprocal fidelity of the other party.<sup>33</sup> As a result, human responses and obligations are necessary conditions in a covenantal relationship. Duncan concurs, stating that “a covenant is not just a relationship in general but a very specific type of relationship which always entails promises and obligations.”<sup>34</sup> When God’s people respond to the covenant and fulfill duties imposed on them by it, they fulfill necessary trust in a relationship.

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<sup>29</sup>Murray, *The Covenant of Grace*, 10.

<sup>30</sup>See David Noel Freedman, “Divine Commitment and Human Obligation *The Covenant Theme*,” *Interpretation* 18, no. 4 (1964), 430.

<sup>31</sup>See Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 73.

<sup>32</sup>Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 264.

<sup>33</sup>Cf. Murray: “Fellowship is always mutual and when mutuality ceases fellowship ceases. Hence the reciprocal response of faith and obedience arises from the nature of the relationship which the covenant contemplates (cf. Gn xviii. 17-19; xxii. 16-18).” Murray, *The Covenant of Grace*, 18-19.

<sup>34</sup>Ligon Duncan, “Recent Objections to Covenant Theology: A Description, Evaluation and Response,” in *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century: Essays in Remembrance of the 350th Anniversary of the Westminster Assembly*, ed. Ligon Duncan (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2009), 3:496.

These duties are thus indispensable in bringing humans into personal fellowship with God. In other words, total obedience in fulfilling covenant duties is necessary because without obedience, no covenant exists. Thus, the common element, human fidelity, is always present in biblical covenants.

### **Covenant Categorization: Unilateral or Bilateral**

Continuous debates among scholars focus on how each covenant relates to the others and on how they should be categorized. Some scholars categorize biblical covenants as Royal-Land-Grant or Suzerain-Vassal Treaty.<sup>35</sup> Respectively, other scholars categorize biblical covenants into Promissory and Administrative.<sup>36</sup> While the Royal-Land-Grant or Promissory covenant is understood as absolute upon God's grace (unconditional-unilateral), Suzerain-Vassal treaty or Administrative covenant is conditional upon human obedience (conditional-bilateral). However, Ligon Duncan rightly asserts that "a covenant by definition has conditions. There is no such thing as a wholly unconditional covenant."<sup>37</sup> Since a covenant is two-sided, there are requirements or obligations from both parties. As discussed above, divine covenants are sovereignly

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<sup>35</sup>E.g., Michael Horton and J. V. Fesko follow Meredith Kline in classifying biblical covenants as two types: Royal-Land-Grant or suzerainty treaty, or, respectively, a covenant of promise or covenant of law (unilateral or bilateral). With this categorization, the Abrahamic covenant is seen as royal-grant covenant (unconditional) and the Mosaic covenant as suzerainty treaty (conditional.) See J. V. Fesko, *Justification: Understanding the Classic Reformed Doctrine* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2008), 110-11; Michael Horton, *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 12-18. Progressive Dispensationalism classifies covenant with Abrahamic as royal-grant, covenant with Moses as conditional, covenant with David as both unconditional and conditional, New Covenant is royal-grant. See Craig A Blaising and Darrell L Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton, IL: BridgePoint, 1993), 128-73.

<sup>36</sup>E.g., Thomas Edward McComiskey, *The Covenants of Promise: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985). He views the Abrahamic covenant as a promissory covenant and the Mosaic covenant as an administrative covenant. He assigns priority to the promissory covenant with Abraham; thus, he views the administrative covenants as simply regulating the life of the faithful who have become recipients of the Covenant of Promise.

<sup>37</sup>J. Ligon Duncan, "Covenant Theology: Introduction," *IIM Magazine Online* 15, no. 28 (2013), 27.

administered relationships between God and his people in the bonds of mutual faithfulness and love. In this understanding, divine covenants are both unilateral and bilateral with unconditional and conditional elements. This understanding of covenant represents its distinctive feature in Reformed theology: covenant is unconditional in its essence or inception and is conditional or bilateral in its administration. Richard Muller explains that biblical covenants are initially one-sided or unilateral:

as bestowed by God and exhibiting his will toward humanity. Since the foundation of all divine covenants is the eternal will of God, and the purpose of all divine covenants is ultimately the fulfillment of God's will to the glory of God alone, God's covenant—both the *foedus operum* (q.v.) and the *foedus gratiae* (q.v.)—are declarations of the divine will toward human beings and thus one-sided, *monopleuron*, rather than being covenants arranged by the mutual consent of parties for their mutual benefit.<sup>38</sup>

He continues by explaining the two-sided or bilateral nature of these covenants:

at the point at which a human being enters into God's covenant, receives the terms established by God, and in effect becomes a partner in covenant with God, the *foedus operum* (q.v.) and the *foedus gratiae* can be termed bilateral covenants. *Foedus dipleuron* therefore indicates not the covenant in itself or in its underlying requirements but rather the further relationship of God and man together in covenant, and particularly the individual's free acceptance of God's promise and of the obedience required by the covenant. When people are faithful and obedient under covenant, they in effect bind God to the promises, according to God's own ordination.<sup>39</sup>

In a similar manner, Wayne Grudem defines covenant as “*an unchangeable, divinely imposed legal agreement between God and men that stipulates the conditions of their relationship.*”<sup>40</sup> The covenant is therefore a binding relationship between two parties, one of which, humans, cannot negotiate, but can only accept the terms of the covenant.

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<sup>38</sup>Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 129.

<sup>39</sup>Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 127.

<sup>40</sup>Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 515 (emphasis original).

Humans do not cooperate with God in carrying out the provisions of the covenant; rather, human cooperation is simply the response the covenant demands and constrains.

Furthermore, divine covenants are indeed unilateral in foundation but are “destined to become bilateral, to be consciously and voluntarily accepted and kept by humans in the power of God.”<sup>41</sup> Virtually all biblical covenants have conditions. Walton maintains a similar understanding: “In each phase of the covenant there is an emphasis on the necessity for obedience. In different phases disobedience represents different types of jeopardy.”<sup>42</sup> By divine design, obedience is the condition in the covenants God sovereignly makes with men.

Fundamentally, because a covenant denotes relationship necessitating reciprocal faithfulness and commitment, categorizing biblical covenants as unilateral or bilateral (Royal-Land-Grant or Suzerain-Vassal Treaty; Promissory or Administrative) is insufficient. As previously stated, however, the covenants are unified for God’s teleological purpose to redeem a people for himself.<sup>43</sup> Each covenant is linked to those before and after it in the progression of redemptive history, yet each has made different contributions to this one redemptive purpose. These differences stem from their beginnings, when God established each covenant to address the particular issues that his people were facing: e.g., Adamic is on creation, Noahic is on the promise of nature preservation, Abrahamic is on the promise of seed and land, Mosaic is on law as regulation for covenant life, Davidic is on promise of kingship, and New Covenant is on

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<sup>41</sup>Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Sin and Salvation in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 3:230.

<sup>42</sup>Walton, *Covenant*, 113.

<sup>43</sup>Tom Wells and Fred G. Zaspel, *New Covenant Theology: Description, Definition, Defense* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 2002), 279.

fulfillment and consummation by Christ as the covenant mediator. Each added covenant redefines and renews previous arrangements so that God's kingdom advances when he initiates new eras through establishing covenants. Selectively categorizing them separately from one another is, therefore, a mistake because divorcing a single covenant from the unified whole will lead to inadequate reconstruction.

As previously asserted, all biblical covenants constitute divine commitment (a promise) and human obligation (a precept or condition). The biblical covenants also consist of a third element: penal sanction, or the threat of death due disloyalty (consequence for disloyalty).<sup>44</sup> While obedience leads to blessing, disobedience leads to punishment or judgment. Defining biblical covenant, Robertson implies this third element: "A covenant is a *bond in blood sovereignly administered*. When God enters into a covenantal relationship with men, he sovereignly institutes a life-and-death bond. A covenant is a bond in blood, or a bond of life and death, sovereignly administered."<sup>45</sup> Because covenant relationship is an oath-bound commitment, a "bond in blood," it is a relationship with life and death consequences. The element of human obligation cannot be overlooked. The covenant sanctions of blessings and curses are conditional to humans' obedience, to their responses to the covenants.

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<sup>44</sup>See Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man: Comprehending A Complete Body of Divinity* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 1:46. Richard Muller similarly states, "As instituted by God, covenant has three aspects—a promise, a condition, and a sanction. The promise offers 'ultimate blessedness in life eternal'; the condition indicates what must be performed for human beings to inherit the promise; and the sanction is to be leveled against those who do not fulfill the condition." Richard Muller, "The Covenant of Works and the Stability of Divine Law in Seventeenth-Century Reformed Theology," in *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 180. Also see John Colquhoun's discussion of these three elements in the covenant of works (are not only presented in the covenant of works) in John Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Law and Gospel*, ed. Don Kistler (Grand Rapids: Soli Deo Gloria, 2009), 10-25.

<sup>45</sup>Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 4.

Given the unilateral nature of the divine covenant, its conditionality may be misunderstood because its provisions are contingent. Elaborating on the teachings of “the Covenant of Grace,”<sup>46</sup> Murray understands the covenant as a fundamental, sovereign dispensation of God’s grace. Thus, a covenant is not contingent upon humanity fulfilling its stipulations, but these stipulations do presuppose an existing relationship. While enjoying this covenant relationship depends on human obedience, sustaining it necessitates reciprocal, obedient response. Consequentially, human obedience is not required to establish a covenant but is, instead, the means by which to enjoy a covenantal relationship and communion with God. Walton “conclude[s] that the expectation of obedience makes the enjoyment of the benefits of the covenant conditional, but does not make the covenant itself condition.”<sup>47</sup> Moreover, Blaising and Bock point out that God’s intention to bless is not contingent on human obligation, but humans can “condition the *how* and the *when* of the blessing.”<sup>48</sup> In this understanding, covenant conditionality derives from its relational nature because within a mutual relationship, the conditions “are simply the reciprocal responses of faith, love and obedience, apart from which the enjoyment of the covenant blessing and of the covenant relation are inconceivable.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>I think the theological term “covenant of grace” has its values and need not be discarded. Although it is not found in Scripture, as in other theological formulation, terms are coined for the purpose of theological convention. The overarching conception of the term *covenant of grace* stresses the unity of the covenants and emphasizes the undergirding grace of God in each covenant. Specifically, Greg Nichols, a Baptist, understands the “LCF affirms the unity and indispensability of the covenant of grace.” With regard to some Reformed Baptists who have recently rejected a covenant of grace, he says, “This has not helped the credibility of Reformed Baptists. It tends to confirm preconceived notions. It fosters division. If we challenge the existence of a covenant of grace, we will be perceived as rejecting one gospel message and way of salvation. Confessing one way of salvation doesn’t inevitably lead to Paedobaptism.” Greg Nichols, *Covenant Theology: A Reformed and Baptist Perspective on God’s Covenants* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books), 15.

<sup>47</sup>Walton, *Covenant*, 118.

<sup>48</sup>Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 133-34.

<sup>49</sup>Murray, *The Covenant of Grace*, 19. Cf. Peter Golding writes, “The covenant relationship does not wait for the fulfillment of certain conditions on the part of man. It is not in contradiction to this

Therefore, yes and no answers remain for questions such as “Are the covenant promises contingent on human responses?” and “Do the covenant promises guarantee unconditional fulfillment?” In the same vein, Gentry and Wellum comment that “the Old Testament covenants consist of unconditional (unilateral) and conditional (bilateral) elements blended together.”<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, Murray stipulates that human responsibility does not make biblical covenants bilateral nor interfere with their monergistic nature.<sup>51</sup> Biblical covenants, essentially, are “unilateral in initiation, and bilateral in administration.”<sup>52</sup> Consequentially, humans’ pledge of devotion to God is their response to a pre-existing, divine commitment. While conditionality is not eliminated in the administration of the covenants, human response should not be understood as meritorious but as a necessary means of obtaining covenant blessings. Since God’s covenants are unilateral and bilateral with accompanying unconditional and conditional elements, his sovereign and undeserved goodness to his human creatures and his demand for their obedience are evident in all of these covenants.

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principle to admit—even to insist—that the relation established implies mutuality. But the conditional element is not one that determines and decides the actual dispensing and bestowing of the covenant. It is simply the reciprocal response on the part of the recipient, without which the experience of covenant relationship is inconceivable.” Peter Golding, *Covenant Theology: The Key of Theology in Reformed Thought and Tradition* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2004), 88. Frame says it this way: “God’s covenants are unconditional in the sense that God will always carry out the purpose for which he made the covenants. In the covenant of grace, God the Father will certainly save all those he has given to belong to his Son. But they are conditional in that those who would receive those blessings must respond to God with a living and active faith.” Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 67.

<sup>50</sup>Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 609.

<sup>51</sup>Murray, *The Covenant of Grace*, 18. Cf. Golding: “The covenant is a divine commitment to man, a sovereign enactment of grace and promise, the gratuitous and unconditional character of which does not in any way prejudice the demand for faith, love and obedience in response.” Golding, *Covenant Theology*, 89.

<sup>52</sup>John Halsey Wood claims, “The covenant is monopleric, or unilateral, in establishment by God alone, but it is dipleric, or bilateral, in administration which included the stipulations to which humanity must adhere in order to acquire friendship with God.” John Halsey Wood, “Merit in the Midst of Grace: The Covenant with Adam Reconsidered in View of the Two Powers of God.” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 10, no. 2 (April 2008), 147.

## Biblical Covenants: Unconditionality and Conditionality

Scholars largely agree that six primary, divine covenants span redemptive history. They observe God's covenants with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David, as well as the New Covenant in Christ.<sup>53</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, historical Reformed theology recognizes the Adamic covenant before the fall as the covenant of works. The term *covenant of grace* applies to the other five historical covenants after the fall, describes God's relationship to his people after the fall, and highlights his gracious redemption as humanity is in sin. Through these five historical covenants, God has progressively unfolded his plan of redemption so that each has its own specific emphasis yet supplements any covenants preceding it. Thus, the covenants are related "organically to one another. They do not replace one another chronologically. Instead each successive covenant expands on previous administrations."<sup>54</sup> For instance, the covenant of creation or Adamic covenant is fully realized in the new covenant in Christ, who fulfills God's redemptive purposes. Additionally, each covenant carries forward God's plan of redemption. Because God's covenantal design is relational, which is an essential element in all his dealings with humans, their obedience is expected.<sup>55</sup> As VanDrunen states, "At

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<sup>53</sup>See Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*; Gentry and Wellum, *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants*; Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 55-85. However, B. N. Howard in *The Book of the Covenant*, 25-145, argues for seven covenants. The additional covenant came from his distinguishing of "creational covenant" and covenant with Adam. Some other interpreters would add to the list of the six covenants, such as a covenant with the Levites (Num 25:12-13; cf. Malachi 2:1-9). The covenantal promise was to Phinehas, a son of Eleazar, a son of Aaron the priest (25:11, 17), concerning the permanence of the priesthood in his line. Others, such as Morton Smith, also distinguish between the pre-diluvian Noahic covenant and the post-diluvian Noahic covenant of common grace. See Morton Smith, *Systematic Theology*, 2 vols. (Greenville, SC: Greenville Seminary Press, 1994), 1:333. Other scholars, such as Herman Witsius, maintain the covenant of grace was first revealed in Genesis 3:15 and then progressively unfolded in five redemptive-historical epochs: Adam to Noah; Noah to Abraham; Abraham to Moses; Moses to Christ; and the New Testament. See Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man: Comprehending a Complete Body of Divinity* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 1:313-16.

<sup>54</sup>Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 63.

<sup>55</sup>For R. Fowler White and E. Calvin Beisner's discussion of two principles of inheritance,

every point of redemptive history, God has delivered his word to his people and demanded the proper response—through his covenant.”<sup>56</sup> God in history through his covenants proclaims his word and commands obedient response. In this manner, human history witnesses human obedience and disobedience to God’s word because his covenants are by his grace and consist of obligations to his word.

### **Adamic Covenant**

Some scholars reject the notion of an Adamic covenant because the term *covenant* is not presented in Genesis 1-3.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, others have argued that essential elements for a covenant—blessings for obedience and cursing for disobedience—are present.<sup>58</sup> For instance, Venema argues God relates to Adam in a covenantal relationship

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personal merit and representational merit in relation to obedience in the covenant, see R. Fowler White and E. Calvin Beisner, “Covenant, Inheritance, and Typology: Understanding the Principles at Work in God’s Covenants” in *By Faith Alone: Answering the Challenges to the Doctrine of Justification*, ed. Gary L. W. Johnson and Guy P. Waters (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 147-70. They argue that these “two contrasting but compatible principles of inheritance” “are at work in each of these covenants [the covenants of redemption, works, and grace with the Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants] and that these principles of inheritance have existed side-by-side through all of history (pre-fall and post-fall) until Christ, with the former always subserving the latter” (148-49).

<sup>56</sup>VanDrunen, “A System of Theology? The Centrality of Covenant for Westminster Systematics,” 219.

<sup>57</sup>John H. Walton views the Genesis 1 creation account as revealing the functional origins rather than the material origins of humanity. He writes, “Genesis 1 has been presented as an account of *functional origins* (specifically functioning for people) rather than an account of *material origins* (as we have been generally inclined to read it). As an account of *functional origins*, it offers no clear information about *material origins*.” John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 163; emphasis added.

<sup>58</sup>Cf. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 14-21. Venema argues for a covenant with Adam in this way: “Several arguments cumulatively support the language of ‘covenant’ to describe this relationship: (1) the use of the covenant name of God in the Genesis account of God’s relationship with the human race in Adam; (2) a number of elements that belong to a covenant relationship in the biblical presentation of the fellowship between God and the human race in Adam—e.g., the special providence of God described in Genesis 2, which includes a divinely revealed stipulation of obedience that tests Adam’s devotion to God and obedience to his holy law; the explicit sanction of eternal death and separation from God that would follow upon Adam’s failure to obey the stipulated obedience; the implicit promise of eternal life in the event of Adam’s continued obedience to God’s revealed will; (3) the parallels in language descriptive of the prefall relationship between God and the human race in Adam and the postfall relationship between God as Redeemer and his people in Christ; (4) and the apparent allusion in Hosea 6:7 to the parallel between the covenant disobedience of Adam before the fall and the covenant disobedience of Israel after the fall.” Venema, *Christ and Covenant Theology*, 421-22.

which is supported by four elements: 1) the use of the covenant name in Genesis account; 2) Adam was put in a probation with God's stipulation of obedience for blessings and disobedience for cursing; 3) parallel description of the prefall and postfall relationship between God and his people; 4) the explicit allusion in Hosea 6:7. Moreover, Gentry argues a divine-human relationship was initiated by God at creation in creating humankind as his image and according to his likeness.<sup>59</sup> As image of God, humans are the sons of God and given the role of servant king to rule over the earth. In this manner, humankind's relationship to God "is covenantal, requiring loyal love, obedience, and trust."<sup>60</sup> Therefore, a covenantal relationship between God and Adam existed in the Garden of Eden.<sup>61</sup> This prelapsarian or Adamic covenant is often called the "covenant of works." Scholars have also called it a "covenant of nature," a "covenant of life," a "covenant of creation," a "covenant of favor," or the "Edenic covenant." These terms express different aspects of the prelapsarian covenant relationship.

Various views on the covenant of works relate to the covenant of grace.<sup>62</sup> As

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<sup>59</sup>Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 177-221, esp. 181, 200, 217.

<sup>60</sup>Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 217.

<sup>61</sup>See Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 25. Nevertheless, scholars such as William J. Dumbrell argue God's creation itself is a divine-human relationship, but not a covenant. He says, the Old Testament covenants are "divine direction of the progressive development of a biblical eschatology which runs from creation to the new creation, or from Eden to the new Eden in the final presentation of the new creation account in Revelation 22:1-5." Divine covenants in the Bible are never bilateral. Although they are normally directed to a human audience, they are never negotiated. They are all unilateral and initiated by God as he backs the promise he makes by binding himself to it. William Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenant Theology*, rev. ed. (Carlisle, England: Paternoster, 2013), xiii.

<sup>62</sup>Historically, in the Reformed tradition "the Covenant of Grace" is designated as one covenant from the Old Testament, starting from God's declaration of his plan of redemption in Genesis 3:15 to the New Testament. Covenants God made with different covenant heads are simply different stages/dispensations of this covenant. Robertson uses the term *the Covenant of Redemption for the Covenant of Grace*. Thus, by this term, he is not referring to the historical connotation of "the Covenant of Redemption" in the Reformed tradition, which refers to the intertrinitarian covenant and especially the covenant between the Father and the Son before the foundation of the world, with the Son as the redeemer for the elect. See John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray: Studies in Theology* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1982), 4:234-38.

discussed in the previous chapter, Karl Barth and some of his followers reject the Adamic covenant as a covenant of works, claiming it introduces a theology of “oppressive legalism.” God’s covenant with humanity cannot be founded on a work principle, on Adam’s good works. Similarly, although John Murray aligns with the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF), he also rejects the idea of covenant of works, preferring the term “Adamic administration” due to a historical understanding of the covenant of works as a legal arraignment rather than God’s gracious disposition.<sup>63</sup> In response, Cornelis P. Venema conjectures that “because Murray wants to emphasize the gracious and sovereign disposition of the Adamic arrangement, as well as the essential graciousness of the biblical covenant of grace, he does not want to admit the legal requirement of obedience to be as integral to this arrangement or the post-fall covenant of grace, as was typically the case in the history of covenant theology.”<sup>64</sup> What this concern fails to note is that the WCF also speaks specifically of God’s “voluntary condescension” in the covenant of works (7.1). However, Venema goes on to explain, “By employing the language of *voluntary condescension*, the WCF makes it clear that the original covenant relationship was a sovereignly administered bestowal of God’s favor upon the creature. In this covenant relationship, it is God who takes the initiative and condescends to the creature.”<sup>65</sup> Although in the original, Adamic covenant, Adam was obligated to its terms

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<sup>63</sup>Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, 4:217-22. For the limitations on the term *covenant of works*, some prefer *covenant of creation* or *covenant of life*. Both Kline and Robertson prefer to call the covenant with Adam before the fall *the covenant of creation*. Cf. Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 57.

<sup>64</sup>Cornelis P. Venema. “Recent Criticisms of the ‘Covenant of Works’ in the Westminster Confession of Faith,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 9, no. 2 (1993): 184; Cf. David B. McWilliams, “The Covenant Theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith and Recent Criticism,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 53 (1991), 118.

<sup>65</sup>Venema. “Recent Criticisms of the ‘Covenant of Works’ in the Westminster Confession of Faith,” 190.

through his obedience, similar obligation is not the foundation of the covenant relationship. Also supporting the WCF, Herman Bavinck understands that the covenant of works is God's undeserved grace bestowed unilaterally to men. Bavinck claims, "This covenant is rooted in a free, special, and gracious dispensation of God. It proceeds from God and he decrees all the parts of it: condition and fulfillment, compliance and reward, transgression and punishment. It is monopoleuric (unilateral) in origin, and it is added to the creation in God's image."<sup>66</sup> Bavinck also denies any human merit in the original state, reiterating that everything originates solely from God's grace.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, despite debate within the Reformed camp on how to term and describe the Adamic covenant as well as critics who claim the covenant is a legal contract, the general consensus is that it is gracious yet distinct from redemptive grace, as are God's other covenants with humanity.<sup>68</sup>

To initiate and establish a covenantal relationship with his human creatures, God makes them in his image and likeness (Gen 1:26).<sup>69</sup> In other words, when God

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<sup>66</sup>Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 2:572.

<sup>67</sup>Bavinck says, "There is no such thing as merit in the existence of a creature before God, nor can there be since the relation between the Creator and a creature radically and once-and-for-all eliminates any notion of merit. . . . All this is possible solely because God in his condescending goodness gives rights to his creature. Every creaturely right is a given benefit, a gift of grace, undeserved and nonobligatory. All reward from the side of God originates in grace; no merit, either of condignity or of congruity, is possible." *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:570.

<sup>68</sup>See Rowland S. Ward, *God and Adam: Reformed Theology and The Creation Covenant* (Melbourne: New Melbourne Press, 2003), 117-23, where he lists five different ways in which to regard grace in the Adamic covenant.

<sup>69</sup>John Halsey Wood uses the two perspectives of God's power—absolute power of God, or *potentia absoluta*, and the ordained power of God, or *potentia ordinate*—which is the distinction formulated by Medieval theologians, as an analogy to argue that God's grace and human merit need not necessarily be opposed in the original Adamic situation. Thus, there is presence of human merit in the midst of God's undeserved grace: "We understand *de potentia absoluta* that God did not have to create humanity, and therefore humanity had no prior claim on God. God's undeserved kindness, his grace, toward humanity is revealed in his decree to create a people and in his decree that this people should be a people for himself. Out of his love for humanity, God in his radical freedom bound himself to covenant with Adam. . . . Both perspectives on God's power, what he can do *de potentia absoluta* and what he has

created man in his image, a natural relationship emerged that subjected the creature, man, to God. In this subjection, Adam's relationship with God was not conditioned by obedience, which is seen when Adam and Eve fail to obey the terms of the covenant of works, and, rather than destroying the first couple, God inaugurates his covenant of grace by promising a savior (Gen 3:15). However, God's divine act of creation simultaneously covenanted the humans to obey him.<sup>70</sup> God the Creator entered into a covenantal relationship with his creatures unilaterally and voluntarily. This relationship is not essential to God, but the creatures owe their very existence to him. Therefore, the creatures' obedience to their Creator is essential to this creator-creature relationship.<sup>71</sup> This obedience would come about, in part, in the task of ruling over creation, a twofold calling of "multiplication and dominion."<sup>72</sup> Since a covenant creates a relationship, is legally binding, and involves a bilateral commitment between two parties, the legal element requiring obedience from Adam is clearly evident in the stipulated conditions of

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determined to do *de potentia ordinata* are complementary perspectives. The presence of divine grace and the presence of human merit apparent through these perspectives are likewise complementary." John Halsey Wood, "Merit in the Midst of Grace: The Covenant with Adam Reconsidered in View of the Two Powers of God." *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 10, no. 2 (April 2008), 145-46.

<sup>70</sup>Cornelius Van Til argues that covenant is, in a sense, a subset of creation. By creation, Adam was given the covenant-consciousness of obedience or disobedience. This covenant-consciousness was part of his creature-consciousness. "In paradise Adam knew that it was natural and proper that he as a creature of God should keep the covenant that God had made with him. In this way it appears that man's proper self-consciousness depended, even in paradise, upon his being in contact with both supernatural and natural revelation. God's natural revelation was within man as well as about him. Man's very constitution as a rational and moral being is itself revelational to man as the ethically responsible reactor to revelation. And natural revelation is itself incomplete. It needed from the outset to be supplemented with supernatural revelation about man's future. Thus the very idea of supernatural revelation is correctively embodied in the idea of man's proper self-consciousness." *Christian Apologetics*, ed. William Edgar (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003), 115-16.

<sup>71</sup>This is similar to what John Frame says about creator-creature distinction, in which the former is independent and the latter is necessarily dependent on the former. Specifically, Frame says lordship describes the creator-creature relationship, in which creatures as covenant servants of God are necessarily obedient to their covenant-creator-Lord. See John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002), 30, 219, 221, 301, 544.

<sup>72</sup>Richard L. Pratt, *Designed for Dignity: What God Has Made it Possible for You to Be* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1993), 20-35. Cf. See Dempster's use of the terms *genealogy* and *geography* in his Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*.

the Adamic covenant. The distinctive feature of this covenant is “the promise of an unbroken communion of life in fellowship with God demands that the human race in Adam offer God a personal and perfect obedience to his holy law.”<sup>73</sup> Without this level of obedience and, thus, failing to meet the terms of the covenant, Adam would experience consequences.

Adam and Eve faced consequences stemming from both their loyalty and their disloyalty. Adam was explicitly commanded not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:16-17). By implication, if the first parents had upheld their portion of the covenant, they would have entered into a permanent state of enjoying the blessing of communion with the triune God. If not, the consequence was that “when you eat of it you will surely die” (Gen 2:17). As the covenant head representing his posterity, Adam broke the covenant by his disobedience and, thus, all humanity has sinned in him to face God’s judgment. Undeniably, human loyalty was required under the Adamic covenant; life in the garden depended on faithfulness to God. Since the fall, covenant relationship with God has continued to involve consequences for loyalty and disloyalty even though all descendants of Adam are born into sin.

### **Noahic Covenant**

The Noahic covenant is considered the first officially established covenant God makes with man in his progressive plan of restoring their fellowship (Gen 9:8-17). It is often called a “covenant of nature”<sup>74</sup> or “covenant of preservation”<sup>75</sup> because it confers

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<sup>73</sup>Venema, *Christ and Covenant Theology*, 423.

<sup>74</sup>Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 14-21.

<sup>75</sup>See Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 109-25.

natural blessings and assures stability in the creation order (8:21-22; 9:15-17). This covenant is also regarded as universal because God has not only offered it to Noah and his family but also to the fallen world as a whole. In Genesis 6-9, God judges humanity's wickedness by sending a flood but graciously delivers Noah and his family. In so doing, God establishes his covenant with Noah and with "all flesh," promising that he will never again destroy the earth in a flood but will preserve nature until accomplishing redemption. In this sense, "the covenant made with Noah creates a firm stage of history where God can work out his plan for rescuing his fallen world."<sup>76</sup> Thus, the Noahic covenant restores and preserves the Adamic covenant, signifying a new beginning for human beings and God's plan of redemption.

Murray explains that the Noahic Covenant consists of five features: (1) "it is conceived, devised, determined, established, confirmed, and dispensed by God Himself"; (2) it is universal, with all flesh; (3) it is unconditional; (4) it is "intensely and pervasively monergistic"; and (5) it is everlasting.<sup>77</sup> He concludes that "here we have covenant in the purity of its conception, as a dispensation of grace to men, wholly divine in its origin, fulfillment, and confirmation."<sup>78</sup> Certainly, the Noahic covenant is universal in that it pertains to all creation, which God controls and rules over, and it "is intensely and pervasively monergistic. . . . which God alone has control and in connection with which there is rigid exclusion of human co-operation."<sup>79</sup> Moreover, the promise of this covenant

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<sup>76</sup>Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 169.

<sup>77</sup>Murray, *The Covenant of Grace*, 12-14.

<sup>78</sup>Murray, *The Covenant of Grace*, 15.

<sup>79</sup>Murray, *The Covenant of Grace*, 13.

“is based on the unconditional commitment of God to human and non-human creation.”<sup>80</sup>

The Noahic covenant is not a mutual compact resulting from negotiation between God and Noah. It is established by divine initiation and without any human cooperation or response to grace for its provisions. Therefore, the covenant between God and Noah is brought into existence by God alone.

God’s undeserved grace and mercy lavished on Noah saves him and his family from being destroyed with the rest of humanity in the flood. Nevertheless, God requires Noah’s loyalty. Even though Noah does not cooperate with God to establish this covenant, it constrains and demands cooperation in response. Prior to the flood, God commands Noah to build an ark and to gather animals (Gen 6:18-19), and his obedience secures his family’s protection (Heb 11:7). After the flood, God reiterates Noah’s responsibility for multiplication and dominion, the same command given to Adam (Gen 9:1, 7; cf. Gen 1:28). In this similarity, God renews his cultural mandate. Gentry argues the Noahic covenant upholds the divine image established in the creation covenant. Because the divine image entails a covenant relationship between God and humans, Gentry also claims, “The human community must express obedient sonship in faithful loyal love to the Creator God and rule over the creation with humble servanthood and responsible stewardship.”<sup>81</sup> The demand of responsibility and obedience evident the conditional character of the Noahic covenant.

Otherwise, God has made it clear that rebellion against him results in severe consequences. For example, God pronounces a curse against murderers by stating,

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<sup>80</sup>Aaron Chalmers, “The Importance of the Noahic Covenant to Biblical Theology,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 60, no. 2 (2009), 210.

<sup>81</sup>Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 174.

“Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed” (Gen 9:6). Robertson views this verse as a provision of the covenant, involving both life and death: “Death shall come to the covenant-breaker who takes the life of man, while preservation will be the result of proper observance of these stipulations.”<sup>82</sup> God’s emphasis on his promise for nature’s stability does not release Noah and his offspring from loyalty to God and his mandate. Even Canaan receives a curse when his father, Ham, disrespects Noah (Gen 9:20-7). Although Murray attempts to avoid any notion of compact or agreement in the Noahic covenant, he affirms, “Even in this case . . . obedience to commandments is the means through which the grace of the covenant is to be realized and enjoyed.”<sup>83</sup> Therefore, a conditional character is present in the unconditional Noahic covenant.

### **Abrahamic Covenant**

Like the Noahic covenant, the Abrahamic covenant advances God’s covenant purpose. Specifically, this covenant commences God’s plan of redemption by choosing Abraham, through whom God called out a people as a holy nation to himself. Also crucial to the Abrahamic covenant, the promised seed would come forth from Abraham and his lineage, serving as the covenant mediator of the covenant of grace to fulfill God’s purpose of redemption in his person and work. The Abrahamic covenant is sometimes called the “covenant of promise” because God promised Abraham a multitude of descendants (Gen 15:5) and land (Gen 12:7; 15:18; 17:8).<sup>84</sup> In an exhibition of divine

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<sup>82</sup>Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 124.

<sup>83</sup>Murray, *The Covenant of Grace*, 15.

<sup>84</sup>Some Baptists argue that the Abrahamic covenant consists of two distinct covenants—spiritual and physical—because it is comprised of both physical (natural) and spiritual seeds. The covenant of grace was only materially *revealed* or promised to Abraham and was not formally *established* and fulfilled until in Christ, the spiritual seed, wherein the nature of the New Covenant is only spiritual. See

benevolence, God gives the most striking feature of this covenant: the ceremony in Genesis 15. Interpreted as self-malediction, God walks between the halves of a sacrificed animal, announcing a curse of dismemberment upon himself should he fail to carry out his promise.<sup>85</sup> This curse is his expression of faithfulness to Abraham. This unique feature and others have led scholars to classify this covenant as “unconditional” or a “Royal-Land-Grant”<sup>86</sup> as opposed to “conditional” or a “Suzerain-Vassal Treaty.”

This classification is based on the comparison between biblical covenants and these two types of agreements as seen in ancient Near Eastern texts. Richard Pratt explains, “Royal Land Grants were legal declarations in which kings granted properties, usually to priests and other high-ranking officials, as rewards for faithful service.”<sup>87</sup> He argues that more recent research has indicated that land grants were by no means unconditional or unconditionally guaranteed. Recipients of these royal gifts were obligated to faithfully serve their benefactors, although this obligation does not seem to have been explicit in the ancient Near East. There is no evidence that a king renounced his right to punish those who were disloyal by confiscating their lands.<sup>88</sup> Therefore, parallels between the Royal Land Grants and the Abrahamic covenant should be made in

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Samuel Renihan, *From Shadow to Substance: The Federal Theology of the English Particular Baptists (1642-1704)* (Oxford: Centre for Baptist History and Heritage, 2018); Nehemiah Coxe, *Covenant Theology: From Adam to Christ* (Palmdale, CA: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2005); Jeffrey D. Johnson, *The Kingdom of God: A Baptist Expression of Covenant & Biblical Theology* (Conway, AR: Free Grace Press, 2014); Pascal Denault, *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2013).

<sup>85</sup>See Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 295-98.

<sup>86</sup>See Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 132; Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 12-18.

<sup>87</sup>Richard L. Pratt, “God of Covenant,” *Reformed Perspectives Magazine* 10, no. 5 (January 27 to February 2, 2008), 2.

<sup>88</sup>Pratt, “God of Covenant,” 3-6.

the context of God's imperial reign. Because Abraham was a citizen of God's kingdom, he was obligated to remain loyal to the divine king, whether or not these obligations were explicitly stated.<sup>89</sup> As Herman Bavinck states:

When in Genesis 15:8f. God makes a covenant with Abraham, it is not really a compact but a pledge. God gives his promise: he obligates himself to fulfill it and passes between the pieces of the sacrificial animal. . . . This unilateral character had to come out with ever-increasing clarity in the course of history. True, the covenant of God imposed obligations also on those with whom it was made—obligations, not as conditions for entering into the covenant (for the covenant was made and based only on God's compassion), but as the way the people who had by grace been incorporated into the covenant henceforth had to conduct themselves.<sup>90</sup>

While the unilateral character of God's promise in Genesis 15 is explicit, the conditional character of the Abrahamic covenant is not explicit and yet is not absent. Covenant obligations are inherently imposed by God in all covenants he makes with his people.

Comparably, Calvin understands that the Abrahamic covenant is not strictly "unconditional" but consists of two parts: "The first was a declaration of gratuitous love; to which was annexed the promise of a happy life. But the other was an exhortation to the sincere endeavour to cultivate uprightness, since God had given, in a single word only, a slight taste of his grace; and then immediately had descended to the design of his calling; namely, that Abram should be upright."<sup>91</sup> Thus, Abraham is required to "walk before him in uprightness and innocence of heart"<sup>92</sup> because God "condescend[s] graciously to

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<sup>89</sup>Pratt, "God of Covenant," 4.

<sup>90</sup>Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:204.

<sup>91</sup>Calvin, Genesis 17:2, vol. XXIII, i, 444; *Johannis Calvini Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*, I, 235, quoted in Lillback, *The Binding of God: Calvin's Role in the Development of Covenant Theology*, 163.

<sup>92</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.16.3. Similar to what he expressed above, in the context of his discussion on circumcision, Calvin reiterated the two aspects of God's covenant with Abraham in saying, "But the first access to God, the first entry into immortal life, is the forgiveness of sins. Accordingly, this corresponds to the promise of baptism that we shall be cleansed. Afterward, the Lord covenants with Abraham that he should walk before him in uprightness and innocence of heart [Gen. 17.1]" (4.16.3).

engage in a mutual covenant.”<sup>93</sup> Similarly, Bierma argues that, like Olevianus, Calvin maintains the covenant of grace as a bilateral commitment between God and his people that consists of condition. Specifically, he asserts Calvin’s view that “in the establishment of the covenant with Abraham,” “the covenant of grace has not one but two parts: not merely God’s *promissio* to be the God of Abraham and his seed, but that promise *on the condition* of Abraham’s (and our) *repromissio* to walk before him and be perfect.”<sup>94</sup> This condition of obedience was not the means by which Abraham earned his salvation, which would have compromised grace. By contrast, the New Testament clarifies that Abraham was counted as righteous because of his faith (Rom 4; cf. Gen 15:6). Therefore, the bilateral and mutual nature of the covenant binds those admitted to it with stipulations of faith and obedience.

Similarly, Pratt claims the Abrahamic covenant is not simply “unconditional.” Arguing from a literary perspective, he notes that the narrative of the Abrahamic covenant appears from the lens of the Mosaic covenant. Moses wrote on a selective basis for the didactic purpose of speaking “to issues that were important for Israel living in the time of *his* covenant.”<sup>95</sup> Using the narratives of Genesis 15-17, Pratt parallels Abraham’s and Moses’ audiences. He denies two covenants with Abraham—one in chapter 15 and another in chapter 17.<sup>96</sup> Instead, he claims one covenant with two facets, the incidents in latter chapter confirming and enhancing the former. In Genesis 15, Moses explains

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<sup>93</sup>Calvin, Genesis 17:2, vol. I, i, 444; *Johannis Calvini Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*, I, 235, quoted in Lillback, *The Binding of God*, 163.

<sup>94</sup>Lyle D. Bierma, “Federal Theology in the Sixteenth Century: Two Traditions?” *Westminster Theological Journal* 45 (1983), 319.

<sup>95</sup>Pratt, “God of Covenant,” 8.

<sup>96</sup>Williamson holds to two covenants that God made with Abraham: Genesis 15 is unilateral, and Genesis 17 is bilateral. See Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 84-91.

Abraham's experience by emphasizing God's divine grace without explicitly mentioning Abraham's responsibility. Pratt argues that Moses wanted to communicate to his audience that God's promise to Abraham was being fulfilled in their exodus since it was an act of his unilateral mercy. In this way, Israel's deliverance from Egypt parallels the presentation of Abraham's covenant in Genesis 15: "Yet, as the Israelites moved forward in the wilderness they turned from the promise of God like Abraham had in Genesis 16. For this reason, Moses stressed explicitly in Genesis 17 that Abraham's covenant included obligations. Loyalty had been required of him as it was of his descendants who had come out of Egypt."<sup>97</sup> In referencing Genesis 17, Pratt also argues that God specifies covenantal requirements because Abraham has not trusted God but instead sought a child through Hagar (cf. Gen 16). Clearly, God then requires Abraham's circumcision in his commitment to their covenant. Specifying the covenant's terms and explaining consequences resulting from disobedience imply that required covenant fidelity is indeed present in chapter 15.<sup>98</sup> In examining the larger literary structure of chapters 15-17, the reader can understand Moses' didactic strategy of speaking directly to Israel's situation as they followed him. Their leader presents them with both sides of the Abrahamic covenant: divine mercy and human obligations.

Together, this mercy and obligation reinforce the notion that Abraham's covenant relationship with God is not entirely unconditional or promissory. Abraham's covenant joins both divine benevolence and the requirement of human loyalty.<sup>99</sup> In this

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<sup>97</sup>Pratt, "God of Covenant," 10-11.

<sup>98</sup>Pratt, "God of Covenant," 11-13.

<sup>99</sup>See Norman Shepherd, *The Call of Grace: How the Covenant Illuminates Salvation and Evangelism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2000), 13-20.

covenant, God unconditionally promised offspring and land to Abraham, yet participation in Abraham's promised blessing was conditional, dependent on individuals and families fulfilling certain obligations. Moreover, covenant disloyalty would result in severe curses, as seen through God's explicit command for circumcision upon Abraham and his descendants (Gen 17:10-14).<sup>100</sup> God required circumcision in commitment to his covenant so that anyone who was not circumcised among the men of Israel would suffer the curse of being cut off from his people, excluded from the blessings of covenant life.<sup>101</sup>

Like other covenants, the Abrahamic covenant is unconditional in that God is using it to accomplish his purpose of blessing the nations through Abraham. However, it is also conditional in that those who receive that blessing must trust and obey. As the sovereign Lord and Lord of grace, God demands obedience of his covenantal partners yet sanctions consequences for disobedience. This understanding of the Abrahamic covenant is consistent with Murray's stance on conditionality: establishing a covenantal relationship is not conditional on human loyalty but enjoying covenant blessings is. Therefore, while actual wording in the Abrahamic covenant focuses on God's promises to Abraham, God also required Abraham's loyalty, which is clear in both the reiteration of the covenant in Genesis 17 and the physical sign of circumcision.

### **Mosaic Covenant**

Since its development in the seventeenth century and until today, the Mosaic

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<sup>100</sup>Pratt, "God of Covenant," 10-11.

<sup>101</sup>See Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 275.

covenant in the Reformed tradition has been considered from diverse angles.<sup>102</sup> Many scholars hold the Mosaic law of the Old Testament as a conditional covenant or republication of the covenant of works because of its legal features.<sup>103</sup> As previously discussed, however, even the covenant made before Adam's fall was founded on the basis of God's unilateral grace, apart from human merit. Therefore, arguing that the Mosaic covenant is simply a conditional covenant is unjustified.<sup>104</sup> Because God designed his covenants to administer his one immutable kingdom purpose, he would not have created covenants conditional upon human merit and others unconditional through his grace. More reasonably, the Mosaic covenant is bilateral in its administration of the law but remains a covenant of grace.<sup>105</sup> Indeed, as a covenant of grace, the Mosaic covenant anticipates Christ to fulfill its legal conditions.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup>As discussed under the Post-Reformation section, opinion on the Sinaitic Covenant can be classified into three groups: (1) those who regard the Mosaic Covenant as a republication of the Covenant of Works; (2) those who regard it as a dispensation or administration of the Covenant of Grace; (3) and those who take a middle view or regard it as a subservient covenant to the covenant of grace.

<sup>103</sup>See contemporary scholarly discussion on the Mosaic covenant in works, such as Bryan D Estelle, J. V Fesko, and David VanDrunen, eds., *The Law is not of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2009).

<sup>104</sup>See Cornelis P. Venema, "The Mosaic Covenant: A 'Republication' of the Covenant of Works? A Review Article: The Law is not of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 21 (2010): 35-101, for his summary of various contemporary versions of the thesis that the Mosaic Covenant is a republication of the covenant of works and his critical evaluation.

<sup>105</sup>Calvin states, "The Mosaic covenant was the legal and outward administration of the covenant of grace, which had a works-principle that none could fulfill except Christ" (51). On this view, "the works principle in Sinai pertained only to the outward, legal administration and 'accidents' of the covenant of grace as expressed in the Mosaic economy" (84). Therefore, the Mosaic covenant was not a covenant of works in substance but a covenant of grace. Michael Brown, *Christ and the Condition: The Covenant Theology of Samuel Petto (1624-1711)* (Grand Rapids, Reformation Heritage Books, 2012).

<sup>106</sup>E.g., Robert Rollock views, "Sinai, as a republication of the covenant of works, was a 'schoolmaster unto Christ. for those in the covenant of grace'" (56). The republication of the legal covenant did not disrupt the substance of the covenant of grace. Similarly, Michael Brown interprets Samuel Petto's understanding of the relationship between the Mosaic covenant and the Covenant of grace as, "Sinai was 'a Covenant of Works, as to be fulfilled by Jesus Christ,' but not a covenant of works for Israel. God's intention in the Mosaic covenant 'was not that Israel should, by their own obedience, obtain eternal life and salvation.' Sinners can never fulfill the demands of the law due to their guilt and corruption" (95). The Mosaic covenant anticipates Christ to fulfill all its legal conditions in the covenant of grace. Thus, Petto views the Mosaic covenant as a republication of the covenant of works, yet Christ fulfilled its condition as the covenant of grace. Brown, *Christ and the Condition*.

Contemporary scholarship commonly acknowledges that the literary and legal forms of the Mosaic covenant resemble the pattern of the Suzerain-Vassal treaties of ancient Near East in the second millennium B.C.<sup>107</sup> This treaty-like structure is especially evident in the book of Deuteronomy, a covenant renewal document.<sup>108</sup> Such treaties were bilateral, established between a king or greater king (suzerain) and his subjects or lesser kings (vassals), and bound both parties to observe their respective sanctioned duties. Additionally, these treaties blessings were conditioned by fulfillment of their stipulations. In this respect, the Mosaic covenant has been characterized as bilateral, with its blessings dependent on Israel's obedience to its covenantal law of this covenant.<sup>109</sup> However, as discussed earlier, distinguishing the covenants as “unconditional” or “conditional” is misleading. Therefore, while the Mosaic covenant structure can be seen as Suzerain-Vassal in its form, this structure does not necessarily imply that the covenant is strictly conditional.

A distinct feature of the Mosaic covenant is its stress on the law and Israel's obligation to obey it, both of which correspond to sanctions of blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience (Deut 27-28; cf. Lev 26). Despite this emphasis on legal obedience, God never intended for the Israelites to earn eternal life through absolute adherence. Indeed, salvation through perfect obedience is inconceivable, for even Adam—created without sin—failed in his obligations. Since the fall, all humans have

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<sup>107</sup>Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, 132.

<sup>108</sup>Five similar elements can be identified on the parallelism of the structure between the ancient Hittite suzerainty treaty and the book of Deuteronomy: (1) Preamble (1:1-5); (2) Historical Prologue (1:6-4:49); (3) Stipulations (5-26); (4) Sanctions: Curses and Blessings or Covenant Ratification (27-30); (5) Succession Arrangements or Covenant Continuity (31-34). Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, 133. Cf. Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 358-59.

<sup>109</sup>See Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 142-51.

been born into sin, so only Christ perfectly fulfills the covenantal stipulations. Furthermore, Paul's teachings in the New Testament clearly show that the Mosaic covenant was not established on the works/merit principle (e.g., Gal 3:3, 15-18; Phil 3:9). Because he knew humans would be unable to obey the law after the fall and any obedience to the law would not emit from the Israelites' righteousness or meritorious achievements, God did not establish his covenant based on Israel's ability to perfectly keep the law. Instead, the institution of the law in the Mosaic covenant formally established the theocracy of Israel, making the covenant law a body of regulations for governing the daily and corporate life of God's people and presenting rituals and traditions for worship. Thus, God gave divine covenantal instructions in the Mosaic Law so the Israelites' obedience would be an external expression of an inward disposition of reverence and faith. The law also serves as a distinctive marker to set Israel apart from other nations as a people of God.<sup>110</sup> Thus, while the structure of law in the Mosaic covenant is distinct, the covenant itself is not independent or different from those that precede or follow it in redemptive history.<sup>111</sup>

Another notable feature of the Mosaic covenant is that it both fulfills and continues the covenant God made with Abraham.<sup>112</sup> God established the Mosaic covenant for Israel after his promise to Abraham. Even though the Mosaic covenant is externally presented in a legal/conditional form, it builds on the Abrahamic promises:

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<sup>110</sup>See Shepherd, *The Call of Grace*, 32-36.

<sup>111</sup>E.g., Robertson views (1) The law in the Mosaic covenant relates *organically* and *progressively* to the totality of God's redemptive purposes, and (2) consummates in Jesus Christ. Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 175-99.

<sup>112</sup>See Shepherd, *The Call of Grace*, 26-32.

Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations the Lord your God is driving them out from before you, and that he may confirm the word that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob (Deut 9:5).

Clearly, the Sinai covenant is based on God's faithfulness to fulfill the promise he made to the patriarchs, and especially to Abraham (Exod 2:24; cf. 6:4-5). Thus, the Mosaic covenant was not conditional on Israel's righteousness or uprightness of heart but on God fulfilling the covenant promise to Abraham to possess the land of Canaan. As Colquhoun states, "God promised freely the land of Canaan to Abraham and his seed as an inheritance; and therefore the promise of it was not a conditional promise, but an absolute promise."<sup>113</sup> Because the promise to inherit Canaan was not conditional, given to Abraham and his seed on a legal basis, it was God's absolute promise. As Paul says in Galatians 3:17: "The law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void." Therefore, giving the law at Sinai did not set aside promises made to Abraham. The heart of these promises is the Redeemer, coming to those who, like Abraham, are justified by faith. As most Puritans maintained, the Mosaic covenant is one in substance with the Abrahamic covenant, as other dispensations of one unified covenant of grace.

God has uttered other words to evidence his divine bestowal of grace. Indeed, his sovereign grace is the basis of Israel's election rather than their quality: "It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples" (Deut 7:7; cf. 4:37-38; 10:15). Moreover, God's first expression in the Mosaic covenant points to keeping the covenant:

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<sup>113</sup>Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Law and Gospel*, 67.

“If you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod 19:5-6). For the Israelites, obeying God’s voice and keeping his covenant presupposed its existence. Furthermore, God gave the law to a people he had already redeemed and claimed: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery” (Exod 20:2; cf. 19:4). It was in the context that God’s delivered the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt that he demanded their obedience to his law. Consequentially, the covenant with Moses was not a covenant of works but was based on the gracious acts of the Lord, the suzerain who delivered his people from bondage. Sovereign over all things, the Lord is the same in his covenant with Adam and his covenant with Israel. He commands obedience from Adam in his creation; he demands obedience from Israelites in their redemption.

This condition of legal obedience from covenant people is explicit in the Mosaic covenant more so than in others. Obedience was crucial because the Mosaic Law formed the basis for the nation’s moral evaluations. Historically, pervasive curses and blessings announced by the prophets corresponded to the Mosaic covenant. Even the threat of exile and hope of restoration to the land stemmed from the Mosaic covenant. Passages like Exodus 19-24 (the Book of the Covenant), Leviticus 26, and Deuteronomy 28-29 provide instructions for obedience and ritual sacrifice as the basis for blessings and curses in the Land. For example, Leviticus 26:1-13 promises that if Israel was faithful in following the ways of the Lord, they would enjoy long and abundant life. However, if they were unfaithful, curses such as defeat by enemies, poverty, and exile would come upon them (Lev 26:14-39). Moreover, their persistent unfaithfulness would result in

sevenfold discipline (26:21). If they repented of their sins and returned to the Lord, however, he would remember his covenant with Abraham and restore his people (Lev 26:40-46). Thus, while curses and blessings are present in the Mosaic covenant, they are interspersed among its stipulations.

In the wilderness, Moses reiterated to the second generation that keeping God's commandments was a life and death issue, as seen in Deuteronomy 27-30. Because they are part of a covenant, failure to keep these commandments would lead to severe consequences. This tension is evident in Joshua's covenant renewal with the Israelites before his death. Joshua exhorted the Israelites to keep all that was written in the Book of the Law of Moses and "cling to the Lord their God" so the blessings that God had promised would come upon them. However, if they transgressed the covenant, he would bring evil upon them, and they would perish from the land he had given to them (Josh 23:15-16).

God never intended the law as an end to itself. Rather, it was as a means of submitting to, loving, and serving him single-mindedly. The Ten Commandments make this faithful loyalty to God alone very clear, as shown in the first and second commandments: "You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol . . . You shall not bow down to them or worship them" (Exod 20:3-5). The heart of the law is the commandment of faithfulness to the Lord. Being unfaithful by worshipping any idol other than Yahweh is committing idolatry. In fact, the "Book of the Covenant" is replete with warnings on the dangers of being unfaithful to God. For instance, when the Israelites forgot Yahweh who brought them out of Egypt, turning to worship idols in the incidence of the golden calf in Exodus 32, their unfaithful act

provoked God's anger to annihilate the entire nation. Israel's exile in the later period of its history is also God's judgment when they again forgot and did not trust him, worshipping other gods instead. In God's covenantal relationship, loyalty is essential, or else his people face his wrath and the threatened consequences of curses. Thus, the heart of covenant obedience is loyalty to the covenant maker by worshipping him *alone*. In addition, covenant partners are ultimately responsible to the covenant maker and are further faithful by being submissive to his way as they keep his commandments. This line of thought shows that covenant-breaking should not be merely understood as failure to meet the covenant's terms or God's law but, fundamentally, as being unfaithful to a firmly established relationship.<sup>114</sup>

In principle, the stress in the Mosaic covenant to obey the law does not differ from other covenants that require obedience to God's voice. For example, the Abrahamic covenant requires obedience. The Mosaic covenant differs in its externalized will of God in the form of the law. Thus, the law is a manifestation of Abraham's expected obedience. Similarly, Golding understands that "the difference between the Sinaitic covenant and the Abrahamic covenant is not one of kind, but of degree. It is not that of 'law' in contrast to 'grace', for both are clearly present in each of the two covenants. The difference, rather, is one of emphasis."<sup>115</sup> In this emphasis, promise and obligation are not incompatible, and divine grace does not contrast human loyalty. Pratt expounds on the compatibility of law and grace by noting that "life in covenant with God has always

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<sup>114</sup>Golding, *Covenant Theology*, 88.

<sup>115</sup>Golding, *Covenant Theology*, 94.

entailed the condition of loyalty as the demonstration of saving faith.”<sup>116</sup> As a condition, obedience as not “the cause of the thing promised” but is a requirement for those who receive the promised blessings.<sup>117</sup> Thus, the Mosaic covenant does not differ from other covenants requiring obedience even though its form of obedience may be different.<sup>118</sup>

The Mosaic covenant anticipates Christ to fulfill its legal conditions of the covenant of works. As the Puritans affirmed, the republication of the legal elements in the Mosaic covenant does not imply that the Israelites could obtain salvation and eternal life by their obedience; ultimately, these elements point to Jesus Christ.<sup>119</sup> However, although the human obedience required in the Mosaic covenant does not merit acceptance, such obedience is a moral obligation in all covenants. In the Mosaic covenant, therefore, the law and the gospel are not antithetical but are in harmony. The law was never given without the gospel or the gospel without the law. As such, the law in the Mosaic covenant is grounded in God’s act of grace and in promises from the Abrahamic covenant.

## **Davidic Covenant**

The Davidic covenant focuses on kingship and stresses that God promised to

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<sup>116</sup>Pratt, “God of Covenant,” 27.

<sup>117</sup>Colquhoun, as many Puritans, distinguishes between antecedent and consequent condition. He regards the legal obedience to the Israelites in the Mosaic covenant as consequent condition. He writes, “but conditions are of two sorts; antecedent or consequent—antecedent, when the condition is the cause of the thing promised, or is that which gives a contractual title to it; consequent, when the condition is annexed to the promise as an adjunct to the thing promised, or as a qualification in the party to whom the promise is made.” Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Law and Gospel*, 67-68.

<sup>118</sup>As Frame asserts, “All covenants require obedient faith. This is not a condition of one covenant or another; it is essential to all human dealings with God, simply by virtue of who God is. It is a requirement of what I have called the universal covenant. Individual covenants require specific forms of obedience, but obedience itself, springing from faith, is simply a requirement of all relations between God and human beings.” Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 70.

<sup>119</sup>See chapter 4 discussion in “The Law Given to Moses” under “Unity of Law and Grace in the Covenants”.

build a ‘house,’ a ‘dynasty’ for David so that his descendants perpetually reigned on his throne to rule over Israel (2 Sam 7:11-16). This gift of kingship to David and his descendants is built on God’s divine goodness: “I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant, ‘I will establish your line forever and make your throne firm through all generations’” (Ps 89:3-4; cf. 1 Chron 17:12-14). Regarding God’s goodness, some theologians have argued that his divine covenant with David reflects the unconditional character of a Royal Land grant as in the Abrahamic covenant.<sup>120</sup> However, the Davidic covenant is not entirely promissory or unconditional because it includes conditional elements.

In the Davidic covenant, God requires loyalty and threatens punishment as a consequence of disloyalty. In particular, the psalmist writes, “If his sons forsake my law and do not follow my statutes . . . I will punish their sin with the rod, their iniquity with flogging” (Ps 89:30-32). This note of punishment echoes 2 Samuel 7:14, which states that if David’s sons forsake God’s laws they would be punished severely. Such conditional language is also present in Psalm 133:12: “If your sons keep my covenant and my testimonies that I shall teach them, their sons also forever shall sit on your throne.” In his last days, David continued to use conditional language as he exhorted his son Solomon to be obedient, charging him to keep the commandments written in the Law of Moses so the Lord would bless him: “If your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel” (1 Kgs 2:4). The first word in David’s appeal implies the possibility of

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<sup>120</sup>Progressive Dispensationalism holds God’s covenant with David is unconditional. However, when the covenant is transferred to Solomon, it is placed in a conditional form. See Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism*, 163.

unfaithfulness from his sons. Unfortunately, his descendants' unfaithfulness later resulted in Jerusalem's destruction and the exiles of Israel and Judah, all of which were punishments from the Lord, consequences of breaching his covenants with them.

The Davidic covenant was unconditional in its dynastic guarantees but conditional upon David and his sons' keeping the covenant. According to John Walton, "David is promised unconditionally that his son will succeed him to the throne, but for the succession after Solomon, Scripture makes it eminently clear that there is a condition of obedience attached."<sup>121</sup> Walton also distinguishes between the essence and the benefit of the covenant. The former is God's promise of the throne to the line of David, and the latter is the succession to the throne, conditioned by obedience: "Therefore, even though David's line may fail to the point of not having a representative on the throne, Yahweh's *hesed* (covenant loyalty) will not be granted to another line. So, as God's program of revelation was previously bound inextricably to the people of Israel, here it is bound to the line of David. It is the essence of the covenant."<sup>122</sup> Unconditionally, God's promise to David in establishing his throne forever is fulfilled by his seed, Christ.<sup>123</sup> However, the Davidic covenant also carries conditions. Only those who are faithful to the covenant should expect to participate in its promised blessings. God will keep his promises, but in response, individuals must keep his covenant, which determines whether they obtain his

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<sup>121</sup>Walton, *Covenant*, 115.

<sup>122</sup>Walton, *Covenant*, 115.

<sup>123</sup>Apparently the promise that the line of David would sit on the throne of Israel forever was failed. Robertson views that "it is not enough to suggest that perpetuity of throne-occupancy was not a part of the promise. . . . The breaking off of Davidic throne-succession in the Old Testament history may be evaluated in terms of the anticipative role of Israel's monarchy. David's line anticipated in shadow-form the eternal character of the reign of Jesus Christ." Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 249. Similarly, Murray sees that the certainty in the messianic fulfillment, "in Christ that David's seed is established for ever and his throne built up to all generations." Murray, *The Covenant of Grace*, 23

promised covenant blessings. Therefore, just as Saul disqualified himself as a representative of God's kingship, David's descendants disqualified themselves from participating in the covenantal benefit of succeeding to the throne by their disobedience.

Clearly, the Davidic covenant carries conditional and unconditional elements. Despite its conditional elements, the Davidic covenant is ultimately unconditional because God promised a king from the line of David to rule over the world. This was finally fulfilled in Jesus Christ, a Son of David and an obedient king who now reigns at God's right hand and will come again to consummate his reign.

Undeniably, some elements of biblical covenants are unconditional;<sup>124</sup> they are not contingent on humans fulfilling their obligations. By contrast, other elements are conditional, dependent on the obedience of human participants. All biblical covenants contain promise and obligation, but promise is more explicit in some covenants than others (e.g., the Noahic covenant, the Abrahamic Covenant of Genesis 15, the Davidic and New Covenants). Within the context of biblical covenant, every promise from God at least implicitly entails some obligations. In turn, obligation is more explicit in some covenants than others (e.g., the Abrahamic Covenant of Genesis 17 and the Mosaic Covenant), but every regulation is at least implicitly based on the promise of grace. Additionally, although God's grace undergirds every aspect of covenant life, this life necessitates fidelity in demonstration of commitment to a relationship. The emphasis on one does not cancel the other or make it recede into the background. Moreover, qualifying individual biblical covenants as either unconditional or conditional

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<sup>124</sup>Robertson suggests that the certainty of realization of all biblical covenants must be seen in the perspective of God's ultimate purpose of redeeming a people to himself. Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 246-47.

mischaracterizes them. This sharp distinction between the two kinds of covenants, it does not account for all differences existing between the covenants.

### **Divine and Human Agency in Covenant Obedience**

Even though divine covenants are ultimately absolute by God's immutable decree, human agency plays a significant role in these covenants. Human agency rests on the level of covenant continuation or keeping, yet God works through humans' responses to fulfill covenant obligations. Throughout history, God has concurrently worked out his eternal plan with human activities. Even with its emphasis on the transcendence of God, the Reformed tradition has affirmed his immanent historical interaction with creation. Calvin held this understanding, as seen in his teachings in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. In the *Institutes*, Calvin speaks not only of God's transcendence but also acknowledges God's immanence through his providence.<sup>125</sup> God does not create an eternal plan, fixed in all events. He also actively participates in history's progression, working through "an intermediary, sometimes without an intermediary, sometimes contrary to every intermediary."<sup>126</sup> According to Calvin, God engages in historical processes by employing secondary causes to work out his immutable plan. However, Calvin also notes that "God's providence does not relieve us from responsibility."<sup>127</sup> God's participation in history does not destroy human agency.

Similarly, the WCF also acknowledges God's use of secondary causes in his divine providence. The fifth chapter speaks of these causes:

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<sup>125</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1.16-17 (197-228).

<sup>126</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.17.1 (210).

<sup>127</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.17.3 (214).

Although in relation to the decree of God, the first cause, all things come to pass immutably and infallibly, yet by the same providence he often orders them to fall out, according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently. God, in his ordinary providence, maketh use of means, yet is free to work without, above, and against them, at his pleasure (5.2-3).

WCF here “acknowledges that all events are fixed by eternal decrees, but secondary causes play a vital role in the providential outworking of those decrees.”<sup>128</sup> God is sovereign over all things, and he engages with human agency to work out his eternal plan. In this understanding: “Belief in God’s immutability does not negate the importance of historical contingencies, especially human choice. Under the sovereign control of God, the choices people make determine the directions history will take.”<sup>129</sup> Considering these acknowledgments, secondary causes are based on human choice and are one of the ordinary ways in which God participates in history to work out his eternal decrees. Given this understanding of divine immanence, covenant fulfillment is contingent on human choice or response.

On the same basis, principles proposed by Pratt can be applied to the understanding of conditionality in biblical covenants. Standing on the Reformed tradition, Pratt asserts that God does not change in his character (Ps 102:26-28), counsel (Eph 1:11), and covenants (Ps 105:8).<sup>130</sup> From surveying the Old Testament prophecies, he categorizes and delineates three kinds of prophetic predictions: (1) those qualified by conditions, (2) those qualified by assurances, and (3) those without qualifications. Predictions qualified by conditions are predictions that “explicitly made fulfillments

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<sup>128</sup>Richard L. Pratt, “Historical Contingencies and Biblical Predictions,” in *The Way of Wisdom: Essays in Honor of Bruce K. Waltke*, ed. J. I. Packer and Sven Soderlund (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 182.

<sup>129</sup>Pratt, “Historical Contingencies and Biblical Predictions,” 183.

<sup>130</sup>Pratt, “Historical Contingencies and Biblical Predictions,” 181, 191, 195.

dependent on the responses of those who listened.”<sup>131</sup> Conditional predictions are demonstrated through prophecies that pronounced obedience would lead to blessings and disobedience to curses. Under this category, prophets were not proclaiming what would definitely happen but were offering warnings and motivating listeners to take appropriate actions. By contrast, predictions qualified by assurances are prophecies that predicted events were inevitable to realize, for “Yahweh would not listen to prayers, turn back, relent, or violate his oaths.”<sup>132</sup> However, Pratt points out that such predictions are rare in Scripture and often are not accompanied by specific descriptions of future realizations. These predictions only assure that events will take place but are uncertain of the “*how, to what extent, when.*” Therefore, details in predictions qualified by assurances are subject to historical contingencies.

In further divergence, prophets declaring predictions without qualifications do so without expressing conditions or assurances. However, Pratt argues that unqualified predictions have implied conditions. As support, he notes that the Old Testament abounds with examples of unqualified predictions for events that did not take place: “Jonah announced, ‘Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned’ (Jonah 3:4), but God spared the city (Jonah 3:10). Shemiah told Rehoboam, ‘You have abandoned me; so, I now abandon you to Shishak’ (2 Chr 12:5), but the attack was mollified (2 Chr 12:7-8).”<sup>133</sup> The predicted events did not happen because they were changed by human response since the Ninevites repented (Jon 3:6) and Judah’s leaders were humbled by

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<sup>131</sup>Pratt, “Historical Contingencies and Biblical Predictions,” 183.

<sup>132</sup>Pratt, “Historical Contingencies and Biblical Predictions,” 187.

<sup>133</sup>Pratt, “Historical Contingencies and Biblical Predictions,” 187-88.

prophetic words (2 Chr 12:6). Thus, Pratt concurs with Calvin's understanding that "the fulfillment of at least some unqualified predictions were subject to the contingency of human response. Conditions did not have to be stated explicitly to be operative."<sup>134</sup> At their essence, unqualified predictions were subject to modification as God reacted to human response.

In addition, Pratt sees that intervening historical contingencies have affected events stemming from all three prophetic predictions. Conditional predictions are contingent on human response, and conditions qualified by assurance remain open until the moment God reacts to human response. Furthermore, unqualified predictions carry implicit conditions because human response has the potential to affect the future.<sup>135</sup> Pratt goes on to summarize four ways God reacts to human response: "He completely reversed (Am 7:1-9), postponed (1 Kgs 21:28-29; 2 Kgs 22:18-20), mollified (e.g. 2 Chr 12:1-12) and carried through (2 Sam 12:22-23) with predictions."<sup>136</sup> They are related to how the prophetic predictions are fulfilled.

The Old Testament contains numerous stories serving as proof that God works through human response. For instance, Hezekiah's life shows that God reacts to human response. Three events in his life recorded in Scripture—Jerusalem under Sennacherib's attack, his sickness, and his alliance with Babylonians—demonstrate that trusting the Lord can change circumstance.<sup>137</sup> Hezekiah's life also demonstrates that prayer has the

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<sup>134</sup>Pratt, "Historical Contingencies and Biblical Predictions," 188; Cf. Calvin writes, "Even though [the prophets] make a simple affirmation, it is to be understood from the outcome that these nonetheless contain a tacit condition." Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.17.14 (227).

<sup>135</sup>Pratt, "Historical Contingencies and Biblical Predictions," 190.

<sup>136</sup>Pratt, "Historical Contingencies and Biblical Predictions," 190.

<sup>137</sup>As the Assyrian king, Sennacherib came to attack Jerusalem and King Hezekiah was

potential to effect the Lord's response in unqualified predictions. However, refusal to trust the Lord leads to judgment. For instance, Jeremiah's prophecy of Israel's seventy-year exile demonstrates that all unqualified predictions were subject to implicit conditions. Despite Jeremiah's prophecy that Israel would be restored from exile to Judah within seventy years (Jer 25:11-12), the Israelites failed to physically return because they failed to return to the Lord spiritually, remaining in continuous rebellion (cf. Deut 4:25-31). Without Israel's repentance, the prophesized seventy years of exile extended to 490 years (Dan 9:24).<sup>138</sup> Israel's history throughout its exile thus demonstrates that deliberate disobedience has the potential to reverse every unqualified prophecy.

Nevertheless, Pratt does not see divine covenants as declarations subject to revision.<sup>139</sup> While he acknowledges historical contingencies as historical realities, he also says, "We must approach prophetic predictions with full assurance that historical contingencies have never interrupted the immutable decrees of God."<sup>140</sup> In this assurance, he specifies that prophets understood in their convictions that God would keep his covenants. Prophets were emissaries of God, operating within the structure of his covenants. From past revelation, they understood the parameters to which God had bound

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threatened by his scolding words (2 Kgs 19:8-13), Hezekiah went to the temple and prayed to the Lord for help (19:14-19). The Lord heard his prayer and delivered Jerusalem by defeating King Sennacherib by his angels (19:20-35). The second incident occurred when Hezekiah was sick and the prophet Isaiah came and said to him, "Set your house in order, for you shall die; you shall not recover" (2 Kgs 20:1). However, after Hezekiah prayed to the Lord in humility (cf. 2 Chron 32:26), the Lord said through Isaiah again, "Behold, I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD, and I will add fifteen years to your life. I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and I will defend this city for my own sake and for my servant David's sake" (2 Kgs 20:5-6). Here, God postponed Hezekiah's death to later days by giving him extra years of life. The third incident occurred not too long after God healed Hezekiah (2 Kgs 20:12-19; cf. Isa 39). This time, he was lifted up in pride (cf. 2 Chron 32:31), turned away from trusting God, and tried to make alliance with the Babylonians for future protection. As a result of these actions, Isaiah said to Hezekiah that God would send the Babylonians to take away everything he had.

<sup>138</sup>Pratt, "Historical Contingencies and Biblical Predictions," 194.

<sup>139</sup>Pratt, "Historical Contingencies and Biblical Predictions," 191.

<sup>140</sup>Pratt, "Historical Contingencies and Biblical Predictions," 182.

himself.<sup>141</sup> Therefore, although human response could affect how God directed history after a prediction, prophets did not believe future history was uncertain to God. Although how God would react to human response to unqualified predictions remained uncertain to them, prophets were assured from the covenants' structures. Thus, Pratt says that intervening historical contingencies should not surprise because God "often spoke through his prophets, watched the reactions of people, and then determined how to carry through with his declarations."<sup>142</sup> He concludes, "It may be affirmed that each of God's covenants has a conditional aspect. The purpose of God to redeem a people to himself makes it certain that these conditions shall be met. But this certainty cannot relieve the individual from his obligation before the stipulations of the covenant."<sup>143</sup> Therefore, God is sovereign but humans also have responsibilities to covenants because their responses affect how the covenants will progress and conclude.

### **Conclusion**

Covenant is God's means of self-revelation in Scripture and also a means by which he relates to his people—the divine-human relationship. By divine design, the biblical covenants are unilateral in establishment and bilateral in administration. Thus, all biblical covenants contain a demand of obedience. The above survey of Old Testament covenants demonstrates the Reformed historical understanding that grace and law are in harmony in the covenants. As Anthony Hoekema claims:

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<sup>141</sup>Pratt, "Historical Contingencies and Biblical Predictions," 191.

<sup>142</sup>Pratt, "Historical Contingencies and Biblical Predictions," 183.

<sup>143</sup>Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, 247.

One of the outstanding aspects of the covenant relationship is its mutuality. Though the covenant is established by God's free grace, once it has been established, it involves mutual obligations on the part of both God and man. Divine sovereignty and human responsibility therefore are not opposed to each other in the covenant; they are complementary to each other. The very fact that God graciously makes a covenant with us implies and involves that we are answerable to Him; our responsibility flows out of His sovereignty.<sup>144</sup>

God's sovereignty sustains the divine covenants and secures their fulfillment, and the common element of human responsibility is present in all covenants that God has made with human in redemptive history. Furthermore, because historical covenants are conditional and mutual, they involve obedience through human response. Indeed, human obedience is inherent to the Adamic covenant, to all other covenants in the Old Testament, and to the New Covenant—which also boasts the Mediator of the covenant of grace, come to fulfill all conditions of the covenant of works. In other words, human obedience is required in all historical covenants despite human deficiency in perfect obedience. Human deficiency anticipates Christ, the perfect antitype of Adam, to fulfill the requirements of the covenant of works with his perfect obedience.

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<sup>144</sup>Anthony A. Hoekema, "The Covenant of Grace in Calvin's Teaching," *Calvin Theological Journal* 3 (1967), 145.

## CHAPTER 6

### NEW COVENANT: COVENANT OBEDIENCE

#### **The Newness of the New Covenant**

The historical unfolding of God’s redemptive plan reaches a climax in the new covenant, established in the person and work of Christ (Heb 9:15). The new covenant is often called the covenant of fulfillment because it completes God’s goal, formed through Abraham and furthered through the nation of Israel, to redeem a people to himself. Additionally, the new covenant is known as an eternal and better covenant, for it was established on better promises (Heb 8:6; cf. Jer 31; Ezk 36),<sup>1</sup> based on a better sacrifice (Heb 9:23), and offered by a better high priest in a better sanctuary (Heb 7:26-8:13, 9:11-14). Specifically, it is a better covenant because of the “newness” that Christ, the covenant Mediator brings (Heb 9:15).<sup>2</sup> The old covenant is the shadow and type, and the new is the reality and the antitype. While the old is the prophecy and promises, the new is

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<sup>1</sup>John Colquhoun views the new covenant as a better covenant because of its full extent and spiritual efficacy. Quoting the Westminster Confession of Faith 7.6, he says, “Now the apostle, in stating the difference between the old and new dispensations of the covenant of grace, affirms that the new dispensation or testament is better than the old, and that the promises of the new are better than those of the old. They are comparatively better than the spiritual promises of the old dispensation or testament since in them the grace of God is held forth in more fullness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy to all nations (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, 7:6) than in those of the old; and they are absolutely better than the temporal promises of that national covenant which the Lord made with Israel as a political body.” John Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Soli Deo Gloria, 2009), 70.

<sup>2</sup>Summarizing Samuel Petto’s understanding of the new covenant, Mark Jones identifies four reasons it is better than the old: “First, the law is inscribed on the hearts of men in the new (Heb. 8:10), whereas in the old it was infrequent due to the powerful external obligations. Second, in the new covenant, God communes more intimately with his people. Third, whereas in the old the Israelites had ‘some dark, typical shadowy representations of God and Jesus Christ; under the new, they shall have those that are more clear . . .’ Fourth, forgiveness in the old was typical, but in the new it is real.” Samuel Petto, *The Great Mystery of the Covenant of Grace: Or, the Difference between the Old and New Covenant Explained* (United Kingdom: Tentmaker, 2007), 20.

the confirmation and fulfillment (Heb 8-9). Therefore, by coming “at the end of the ages” (Heb 9:26), Christ fulfilled God’s plan of redemption in history, and by his death and resurrection, he procured all benefits and blessings of salvation for his people. In his person and work, Christ definitively dealt with sin and fulfilled God’s promises to circumcise human hearts by giving them the Spirit and new life.

### **The Demand of Covenant Obedience in the New Covenant**

The arrival of Christ has brought massive change, ushering in a new redemptive-historical age. Inaugurated by Christ, the new covenant is eternal and does not need further expansion and enrichment, but all the superiority and advancement resulting from the new covenant does not release humans from covenant obedience. Scholars continuously debate the “newness” of the new covenant, dispute obligations of the law for new covenant believers, and disagree with Reformed theologians that the person and work of Christ fulfilled the demands of the covenant of works.<sup>3</sup> However, scholars commonly agree that obedience is required in the new covenant.<sup>4</sup> For instance, John Walton claims the Old Testament (Mosaic) law is no longer binding for new

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<sup>3</sup>Covenant theology (represented in the WCF) divides the Old Testament law into three categories: moral, ceremonial, and civil. In this covenant theology understanding, new covenant believers are no longer bound by the ceremonial and civil law because they are abolished (fulfilled) with the coming of Christ but are still bound by the moral law as summarized in the Ten Commandments (the Decalogue). In contrast, new covenant theology views the old covenant law as a unit and disagrees with covenant theology’s tripartite division of the law. New covenant theology also maintains the old covenant was temporary by divine design and that new testament/covenant believers are no longer under the law of Moses. Nevertheless, they are not free from God’s law but are under the law of Christ. Therefore, although new covenant theology emphasizes the radical newness of the new covenant, it does not eradicate the need for the believer’s obedience. See A. Blake White, *What is New Covenant Theology? An Introduction* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 2012), 19-38.

<sup>4</sup>See Bradley G. Green, *Covenant and Commandment: Works, Obedience and Faithfulness in the Christian Life* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014).

covenant believers.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, he insists on the necessity for obedience in the new covenant.

From the initial proclamation of the new covenant phase it was clear that the law would still be important (it would be in their hearts) and that obedience to the law would be expected. When the new covenant is implemented in the teachings of Christ, obedience is still very much an emphasis. Christ's admonitions to his disciples (John 14:15-15:17), Peter's descriptions of believers (1 Peter 1:2) and Paul's advice to the churches (Rom. 16:25-26) consistently demonstrate that obedience is expected of those who are the elect of the new covenant.<sup>6</sup>

Through Jesus in the new covenant, God calls his people to obey his commandments.

Moreover, the duty of believers to answer this call by obeying God's commandments is stressed throughout the new covenant found in the New Testament (e.g., Matt 7:21, John 12:47, 14:14, 21, 23, 15:10, 14, 1 John 2:3-5).

The new covenant does not undermine the moral imperatives of the Christian life but, rather, heightens believers' moral obligations. As Richard C. Barcellos points out,

Both *The Westminster Confession of Faith* and *The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689* acknowledge that Christ demands more of His people in light of His coming. Both confessions read as follows in 19:5. The moral law doth for ever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof, and that not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator, who gave it; neither doth Christ in the Gospel any way dissolve, but much *strengthen this obligation*.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>John Walton's rationale is that "Christ is the new Torah within the new covenant" because he "as the new Torah fulfills the covenant Torah in the sense that he carries out all that the former was ever meant to be." John Walton, *Covenant: God's Purpose, God's Plan* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 163. The Mosaic law has not superseded, but the law of Christ has been superimposed on it (164). Walton also states, "The covenant law that has carried over as interpreted by Christ has validity to us as interpreted by Christ. It is the law of Christ to which we are obliged. Law cannot and must not be treated independently of its covenant context" (171).

<sup>6</sup>Walton, *Covenant*, 117.

<sup>7</sup>Richard Barcellos, *In Defense of the Decalogue: A Critique of New Covenant Theology* (Enumclaw, WA: Winepress Publishing, 2001), 89-90 (emphasis original).

Similarly, speaking on the WCF 19:5, Mark Jones understands that “the moral law perpetually binds even those who have been justified.”<sup>8</sup> Since Christ’s gospel in the new covenant does not mitigate a believer’s moral obligation but intensifies it, “there is a heightened indicative in the new covenant and therefore a heightened obligation to love and obey God.”<sup>9</sup> This heightened indicative comes from the fulfilled promise within Christ’s incarnation:

Christ’s humiliation and sacrifice point to a new way in which believers are to love one another. And this model of love is a greater model of love than what is found in the Old Testament, since it was ontologically impossible for God to act in sacrificial love toward his people. In other words, it was the incarnation that made a suffering love possible, and therefore it was only after the incarnation that this heightened form of love could be required on the basis of Christ’s own example.<sup>10</sup>

Due to the new covenant’s greater indicatives, covenantal imperatives are strengthened rather than absolved. In the new covenant, believers are saved by grace rather than works, but they are also saved to fulfill moral imperatives by performing good works. Paul confirms these obligations when he says “we are his [God’s] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10). Likewise, James claims that saving faith is active and produces good works (James 2:14-26).

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<sup>8</sup>Mark Jones, *Antinomianism: Reformed Theology’s Unwelcome Guest?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013), 36.

<sup>9</sup>Jones, *Antinomianism*, 93.

<sup>10</sup>Jones, *Antinomianism*, 37-38. Similarly, Sinclair Ferguson says, “The law, therefore, and obedience to it must never be abstracted from the character of the Person who gave it. What was true in the old covenant of Sinai is just as true in the new covenant in Christ. For at Calvary God’s covenant commitment and its implications are spelled out in large letters: ‘I have loved you like this; trust and love me in return, for this is my *commandment*, that you love one another as I have loved you.’ Thus love for the brethren in the New Testament, while motivated by the love of Christ for us, remains simultaneously obedience to the commandment. For love does not ignore the law; rather, it fulfills it.” Sinclair Ferguson, *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance—Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 118-19.

## **The Spirit and Law Written in the Hearts and Minds**

The new covenant also does not undermine believers' obedience because the Spirit fulfills God's promise of writing the law in their hearts and minds (Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 36:23-28).<sup>11</sup> Sinclair Ferguson explores the Spirit's role in writing the law in believers' hearts, saying: "The anticipation of the new covenant experience viewed from within the old covenant setting is that the new age will bring the fulfillment of what was commanded, namely 'law in the heart'. This is seen as a distinct element in the gift and ministry of the Spirit. Law in the heart and the indwelling of the Spirit are two aspects of the one new covenant reality."<sup>12</sup> In the new covenant, the Spirit is not simply poured out with more intensity than in the old covenant (Acts 2:33-36); rather, in the new covenant, the presence of the Spirit simultaneously removes disobedient hearts and creates new hearts that desire to obey the law. Speaking on Paul's soteriology, Max Turner examines the importance of the Spirit in the new covenant: "The essence of the promised new covenant was that God would put his Spirit in men and women and thereby create in them a new heart and a new obedience, and Paul claims Ezekiel's promise to be fulfilled to believers. This means that for him reception of the Spirit is receiving the indwelling Spirit who 'regenerates' the inner person, bringing 'life', new covenant relationship and obedience."<sup>13</sup> The obedience resulting from the new covenant reveals that the law is inherent to this covenant. God requires believers to keep the law, and his promise of "writing the law in minds and hearts" does not imply a fulfilled law that Christians no

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<sup>11</sup>See Max Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts: In the New Testament Church and Today* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 114-15.

<sup>12</sup>Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 166.

<sup>13</sup>See Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts*, 117.

longer need to keep but that he will enable them to obey his law willingly and joyfully by the Spirit (e.g., Ezek 11:20; 36:27). As Cornelius Venema notes, “God not only upholds his own law in the obedience and sacrifice of Christ for his people, but he also upholds his law through the work of Christ’s Spirit, who writes the law upon the hearts of his redeemed people and begins to renew them in the way of obedience to the law’s obligations (Heb. 10:16).”<sup>14</sup> Of the many roles of the Spirit, enabling believers to obey the law in the new covenant is a principal role (Rom 8:3-4).

New covenant believers participate in a right relationship with God through Christ and, by the power of the Spirit, are led to obedience. Although the new covenant is under the ministration of the Spirit as the giver of life (2 Cor 3:6, 8) and God’s instruction is internalized in believers’ hearts (2 Cor 3:1-4:6), he still requires their loyalty. Thus, the Spirit is not simply present in their hearts but empowers their lives.<sup>15</sup> Due to the life-giving ministry of the Spirit, the new covenant is indeed a better covenant, characterized by Spirit-enabled obedience to God’s law.

### **Union with Christ and the New Covenant**

Other than in passages referring to the Old Testament, the term *covenant* does not appear in the New Testament (e.g., Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Lk 22:20; Eph 2:12; Heb 8-10). Nevertheless, Ferguson notes that “God’s covenant with his people is not only *found* in Jesus Christ; it is Jesus Christ.”<sup>16</sup> Closely related to the idea of covenant in

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<sup>14</sup>Cornelis P. Venema, *Christ and Covenant Theology: Essays on Election, Republication, and the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2017), 431-32.

<sup>15</sup>See Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 812-13.

<sup>16</sup>Sinclair Ferguson, foreword to *Christ and Covenant Theology: Essays on Election, Republication, and the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2017), by Cornelius P. Venema, xi (emphasis

Christ is union with Christ. Union with Christ is a central theme in the New Testament.<sup>17</sup>

For instance, John Murray claims union with Christ is not only a central truth of soteriology but also a comprehensive subject in the New Testament. On this, Murray says,

Union with Christ is a very inclusive subject. It embraces the wide span of salvation from the ultimate source in the eternal election of God to its final fruition in the glorification of the elect. It is not simply a phase of the application of redemption; it underlies every aspect of redemption both in its accomplishment and in its application. Union with Christ binds all together and insures that to all for whom Christ has purchased redemption he effectively applies and communicates the same.<sup>18</sup>

Murray describes union with Christ as embrative and extending from eternity past to eternity future. From its origin in eternity and its historical accomplishment and application, union with Christ denotes the whole process of salvation.

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original).

<sup>17</sup>The significance and centrality of union with Christ has been affirmed by some modern theologians. For instance, B. B. Warfield says, “The appeal is clearly to the Christian’s union with Christ and its abiding effects. He is a new creation; with a new life in him; and should live in the power of this new and deathless life. . . . The pregnancy of the implication is extreme, but it is all involved in the one fact that if we died with Christ, if we are His and share His death on Calvary, we shall live with Him; live with Him in a redeemed life here, cast in another mould from the old life of the flesh, and live with Him hereafter for ever. This great appeal to their union and communion with Christ lays the basis for all that follows. It puts the reader on the plane . . . of ‘in Christ Jesus.’” B. B. Warfield *Faith and Life* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1916), 422-23; Ferguson claims, “The dominant motif and architectonic principle of the order of salvation should therefore be union with Christ in the Spirit. This lies at the heart of evangelical theology.” Ferguson *The Holy Spirit*, 100; Robert L. Reymond asserts, “Union with Christ is the fountainhead from which flows the Christian’s every spiritual blessing—repentance and faith, pardon, justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, and glorification.” Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 2nd rev. & enlarged edition (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 739; John Murray claims, “Nothing is more central or basic than union and communion with Christ. . . . Union with Christ is really the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation not only in its application but also in its once-for-all accomplishment in the finished work of Christ. Indeed the whole process of salvation has its origin in one phase of union with Christ and salvation has in view the realization of other phases of union with Christ.” John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1955), 161. Similarly, he says, “Union with Christ is the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation. All to which the people of God have been predestined in the eternal election of God, all that has been secured and procured for them in the once-for-all accomplishment of redemption, all of which they become actual partakers in the application of salvation, and all that by God’s grace they will become in the state of consummated bliss is embraced within the compass of union and communion with Christ” (170).

<sup>18</sup>Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 165.

Scholars understanding union with Christ in a broad sense often contend that its eternal basis is in divine election, its objective realization is in the incarnation of Christ, and its subjective realization is in the lives of the elect by application of salvation by the Holy Spirit. As discussed in chapter 2, Richard Gaffin agrees with John Murray's classifications of union with Christ: the *predestinarian* union, the *redemptive-historical* union, and the *existential* or *applicatory* union.<sup>19</sup> This categorization corresponds to the three phases of union in its eternal origin, objective historical realization by the work of Christ, and subjective actualization by the Spirit. Similarly, considering union with Christ as all-encompassing, Louis Berkhof describes it in four phases: (1) the federal union of Christ with those whom the Father has given him, in the counsel of redemption; (2) the union of life ideally established in the counsel of redemption; (3) the union of life objectively realized in Christ; and (4) the union of life subjectively realized by the operation of the Holy Spirit.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, Marcus Johnson identifies four generalized phases regarding union with Christ: (1) in election; (2) in the incarnation; (3) in actual

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<sup>19</sup>Richard Gaffin, "Union with Christ: Some Biblical and Theological Reflections," in *Always Reforming: Explorations in Systematic Theology*, ed. Andrew T. B. McGowan (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 275. A similar threefold categorical distinction is in Gaffin, *By Faith, Not by Sight: Paul and the Order of Salvation*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013), 42; Gaffin, "The Work of Christ Applied," in *Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Church Catholic*, ed. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 281. Cf. Ferguson in *The Holy Spirit*, 106-11, distinguishes these three 'moments' of union as "the eternal, the incarnational, and the existential." In addition, Beeke and Jones state that Puritans understand union with Christ "in a threefold manner: immanent/eternal, transient/redemptive-historical, and applicatory/mystical. The redemption purposed by God in eternity and accomplished by Christ in time is incomplete until it is applied in the experience of the believer." Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 488; Robert Letham speaks of the three stages of Christ's union with believers: (1) in creation; (2) in incarnation; (3) by the Holy Spirit, in Robert Letham, *Union with Christ: In Scripture, History, and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2011), 19-55, especially 54-55; Anthony A. Hoekema in *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 56-64, also highlights three phases: "union with Christ as having its roots in divine election, its basis in the redemptive work of Christ, and its actual establishment with God's people in time" (55).

<sup>20</sup>Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 448-49.

experience; (4) in consummation.<sup>21</sup> Although these threefold or fourfold distinctions of union with Christ vary in terminology and descriptions, they are different aspects or dimensions of the single union.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, union with Christ is not simply a step in the *ordo salutis*; it underlies every aspect of redemption. Whether union with Christ is described in three or four phases, it is a comprehensive union that undergirds all of redemption—from its eternal origin to its consummation. As Brannon Ellis emphasizes, union with Christ is not an aspect of *ordo salutis* or a moment in the application of salvation but a *covenantal relationship* encompassing the whole of salvation, from beginning to end.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Geerhardus Vos maintains, “The entire *ordo salutis* [order of salvation] . . . is bound to the mystical union with Christ. . . . *Now the basis for this order lies in none other than in the covenant of salvation with Christ. In this covenant those chosen by the Father are given to Christ. In it he became the guarantor so that they would be planted into his body in the thought-world of grace through faith.*”<sup>24</sup> Union with Christ is all-embracing and inextricably connected to the covenant of salvation with Christ.

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<sup>21</sup>Marcus Peter Johnson, *One with Christ: An Evangelical Theology of Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 35-40.

<sup>22</sup>Gaffin, *By Faith, Not by Sight*, 42. He says, “These distinctions, it should be not be missed, point not to different unions, but to different aspects or dimensions of a single union” (42).

<sup>23</sup>Brannon Ellis, “Covenantal Union and Communion: Union with Christ as the Covenant of Grace,” in *Sanctification: Explorations in Theology and Practice*, ed. Kelly M. Kopic (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 79-102. He argues, “Union with Christ should not be thought of as something *within* the application of redemption—whether as a discrete stage in the *ordo* or as the ground from which other benefits flow. Being in Christ is a description of the *whole* of redemption applied individually and corporately by the Spirit who indwells the head as well as the body” (82). Moreover, he contends in particular that being “in Christ” or that belonging to the new covenant community is not the grounding of believers’ participation in it; rather, union is a *covenantal relationship* within which is the fruit of redemption from beginning to end.

<sup>24</sup>Geerhardus Vos, *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1980), 248 (emphasis added).

The trajectory of redemptive-historical revelation from the Old Testament to the New Testament is through covenants that culminate in the historical union with Christ. As covenantal lines progressed historically, God's revelation progressed along with them, and in the new covenant God speaks definitively and specifically in the person of Jesus Christ. Therefore, Jesus Christ's life and ministry must be seen within this covenantal framework. In addition, covenant is the foundation for union with Christ. Within the terms of the covenant, Christ offered himself to God to fulfill the condition of his covenant with Adam. Because Christ did indeed fulfill this condition, union with Christ in the new covenant is the climactic realization of the covenant of grace in the history of redemption. Christ came in a covenantal framework to objectively fulfill covenantal promises and apply salvation existentially/subjectively by the Holy Spirit in time-space and in actual people.

### **Christ: Appointed Covenant Mediator in Covenant of Redemption**

Christ not only fulfills the covenant of grace but also acts as covenant Lord. Frame identifies Christ as covenant Lord because "*New covenant* is the name for the new relationship that we have with God through Christ. Remarkably, in the Gospels Jesus comes as the Lord of the covenant, taking the place of Yahweh as the head of the covenant. Only God can take this role, as Jesus identified himself clearly as God in the flesh, the Lord of the covenant come to deliver his people from their sins."<sup>25</sup> This covenantal character of Christ's identity is grounded in the covenant of redemption, the eternal counsel or pretemporal agreement between the Father and the Son, in which

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<sup>25</sup>John Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013), 79.

Christ was appointed as the Lord of the covenant or the covenant mediator.<sup>26</sup> Stephen Wellum comments on Christ's appointment, saying: "The covenant of redemption provides for our covenantal union with Christ as our mediator and representative substitute. The work of Christ as God the Son incarnate, then, is the specific covenantal work designed by the Father, Son, and Spirit to accomplish our eternal redemption."<sup>27</sup> Christ is appointed as head and surety in the covenant of redemption, in which he assumes the legal obligations of his people. As surety, Christ atones for the sins of his people by meeting the demands of the law for them, thereby fulfilling what humans left unfulfilled in the covenant of works and revealing the historical covenant of grace in time.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, as covenant Lord, Christ is placed in a central place in God's covenant story. Packer says it is

momentously significant that when the writer to the Hebrews explains the uniqueness and finality of Jesus Christ as the only source of salvation for sinners he does so by focusing on Jesus as the mediator of the new covenant and depicts him as establishing the prophesied relationship between God and his people by superseding

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<sup>26</sup>Packer says from eternity there is a specific agreement between the three persons of the Trinity (covenant of redemption) which is the basis of the covenant of grace: "The Father would honour the Son by sending him to save lost sinners through a penal self-sacrifice leading to a cosmic reign in which the central activity would be the imparting to sinners through the Holy Spirit of the redemption he won for them; and the Son would honour the Father by becoming the Father's love-gift to sinners and by leading them through the Spirit to trust, love and glorify the Father on the model of his own obedience to the Father's will." J. I. Packer, "On Covenant Theology," in *Celebrating the Saving Work of God: The Collected Shorter Writings of J. I. Packer* (Carlisle, England: Paternoster Press, 1998), 1:15. This covenant of redemption in Reformed theology is not without biblical evidence. Packer writes that Jesus' words in the gospel of John reference his purpose of doing his Father's will in the world (e.g., 4:32-34; 5:30; 6:38-40; 7:16-18; 8:28f.; 12:49f.; 14:31; 15:10; 17:4; 19:30). They also reference his words and works as obedience to his Father's command (e.g., 3:17, 34; 5:23, 30, 36, 38; 6:29, 57; 7:28, 29, 33; 8:16, 18, 26; 9:4; 10:36; 11:42; 12:44; 13:20; 14:24; 15:21; 16:5; 17:3, 8, 21, 25; 20:21; cf. 18:37). Moreover, the Father has given him a group of people to save by dying for them (6:37-44; 10:14-16, 27-30; 17:2, 6, 9, 19, 22, 24). Jesus' words therefore testify "to the reality of the covenant of redemption" (21). For other scriptural data for the Covenant of Redemption, see Berkhof's *Systematic Theology*, 266-67.

<sup>27</sup>Stephen Wellum, *Christ Alone: The Uniqueness of Jesus as Savior: What the Reformers Taught . . . and Why It Still Matters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 39. For Christ's atonement in relation to the covenant of grace, see Hugh Martin, *The Atonement: In Its Relations to The Covenant, The Priesthood, The Intercession Of Our Lord* (Edinburgh: Windham Press, 1882), especially 9-48.

<sup>28</sup>E.g., Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 267-68.

(transcending and thereby cancelling) the inadequate old covenant institutions for dealing with sins and giving access to God.<sup>29</sup>

As the unique covenant mediator, Christ has established the new covenant in his blood, which is reflected in his words in the Lord's Supper when he says the cup is "my blood of the covenant" (Matt 26:28). Christ's blood of the covenant ratifies the new covenant and fulfills what is prefigured in the old covenant—the covenant Lord will cleanse the sins of his people (Exod 24:8). Solidifying this perspective, Ferguson claims that speaking of "Christ and the covenant" is the same as speaking of the "Christ who *is* the covenant."<sup>30</sup> He further argues, "Now to be in covenant with God is to be 'in Christ' who is himself the covenant of God."<sup>31</sup> The significant of Christ to the covenant is that he is the appointed covenant Lord from a pre-temporal covenant of redemption.

Therefore, through uniting with Christ who is the covenant head of the covenant of grace, believers enter a covenantal relationship with God. Notably, this covenantal bond between God and his people existed previously: "Through faith in Christ the sinner who was chosen 'in Christ' from all eternity is actually united to Christ."<sup>32</sup> In union with Christ in the new covenant, this fellowship reaches its climatic, eschatological form.<sup>33</sup> Union with Christ is the actualization of the covenantal bond between the triune God and the elect. This union is subjectively applied by the Holy Spirit, who fulfills God's purpose of redemption to commune with his people. Additionally, to be united to

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<sup>29</sup>Packer, "On Covenant Theology," 20.

<sup>30</sup>Ferguson, foreword to *Christ and Covenant Theology*, xi (emphasis original).

<sup>31</sup>Ferguson, foreword to *Christ and Covenant Theology*, xi.

<sup>32</sup>Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 736.

<sup>33</sup>See Gaffin, "The Work of Christ Applied," 288.

Christ is to be in the covenant of grace and under his federal headship in covenant of grace. Therefore, the gospel must be viewed within a covenantal frame.<sup>34</sup> Explaining this frame, Packer states, “The gospel promises, offering Christ and his benefits to sinner, are therefore invitations to enter and enjoy a covenant relationship with God. Faith in Jesus Christ is accordingly the embracing of the covenant, and the Christian life of glorifying God by one’s words and works for the greatness of his goodness and grace has at its heart covenant communion between the Saviour and the sinner.”<sup>35</sup> Through their faith and belief in Christ, Christians are in Christ, in a covenantal union with him.<sup>36</sup>

God’s redemptive history unfolds through covenants and culminates in the new covenant in the person and work of Jesus Christ, the covenant mediator of the covenant of grace. Therefore, union with Christ is a covenantal union because Christ relates to his people is a covenant bond. As Horton claims, “Union with Christ and the covenant of grace are not simply related themes, but are different ways of talking about one and the same reality.”<sup>37</sup> Although the phrase “union with Christ” is not found in Scripture, it is most prominent in the New Testament expression “in Christ” (ἐν Χριστῷ).<sup>38</sup> “In Christ”

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<sup>34</sup>Packer, “On Covenant Theology,” 12.

<sup>35</sup>Packer, “On Covenant Theology,” 12.

<sup>36</sup>See Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 319-21.

<sup>37</sup>Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 181, 29-52.

<sup>38</sup>“In Christ” is generally regarded as the language most closely related to the theme of union with Christ. Nevertheless, many scholars point out that “in Christ” and related expressions in the NT do not connote a single idea but embrace a wide range of meanings. Demarest identifies seven biblical uses of “in Christ”: (1) a synonym for Christians; (2) dative of instrument or agency; (3) dative denoting locale; (4) to connote authoritative basis; (5) in the sense of “on behalf of Christ”; (6) dative signifying sphere of reference; (7) incorporative union or identification with Christ. Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 326. Similarly, Constantine R. Campbell thinks “in Christ” is capable of multifarious functions. By surveying historical views, he claims it consists of at least five primary conceptions: local, relational, eschatological, Trinitarian fellowship, and existential. Moreover, he says “in Christ” and similar idioms convey a broad range of expressions. “These idioms can express instrumentality, close association, agency, recognition,

is covenantal language. It denotes a covenantal bond with him. The in Christ expression also denotes someone is being saved, a believer. Likewise, it is a central theme of the biblical writers and is crucial to biblical teaching about salvation.

### Union with Christ in Paul

#### Romans 6: 1-14

The phrase ἐν Χριστῷ (in Christ) and similar phrases such as “in the Lord” or “with Christ” occur frequently in Paul’s epistles.<sup>39</sup> One passage in which Paul effectively expounds the essence and implication of “in Christ” is Romans 6. Paul begins the chapter by continuing his message from chapter 5 regarding one’s status (being justified) before God in Christ. He continues to exposit what justification means for those who are “reckoned as righteousness by faith.” His main point is to refute the antinomian argument that those who are “justified by faith” should continue in sin that grace may abound (6:1; cf. 6:15). In his epistles, Paul uses many different images and metaphors to describe “union with Christ.” In Romans 6, he uses baptism and what it signifies to repudiate the antinomian argument. Baptism symbolizes believers’ participation in the life, death, and

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cause, kind and manner, locality, specification or substance, circumstance or condition, the object of faith, incorporation, union, reference or respect, and participation. . . . The phrases are found in reference to things achieved for/given to people, believers’ actions, characteristics of believers, faith in Christ, justification, and new status. The phrases contribute to trinitarian contexts, and they frequently function as periphrases to denote that someone is a believer.” Constantine R. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 60-61, 198-99. Therefore, to embrace the various aspects of union with Christ, Campbell defines “in Christ” “as *union, participation, identification, incorporation*—terms that together do justice to the widespread variety and nuance of Paul’s language, theology, and ethical thought about our relatedness to Christ. *Union* conveys faith union with Christ, mutual indwelling, Trinitarian, and nuptial notions. *Participation* refers to the partaking in the events of Christ’s narrative. *Identification* encapsulates believers’ location in the realm of Christ and their allegiance to his lordship. *Incorporation* gathers up the corporate dimensions of membership in Christ’s body.” He thinks “these terms provide sufficient breadth through which the various characteristics of union with Christ are to be understood—the notions of locality, identification, participation, incorporation, instrumentality, Trinity, union, eschatology, and spiritual reality are all ably represented” (420; emphasis original).

<sup>39</sup>Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ*, 67-73.

resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul's argument relies on the theme of death preceding resurrection. Through baptism, believers are baptized into Christ's death (v. 3), and because Christ's death was a unique event, being "baptized" into his death allows them to identify with him.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, in association with Christ, believers not only participate in his death, but also in his burial and resurrection (vv. 4-5). This participation is conceptual and spiritual, conveying that just as believers partake in Christ's death, they will also participate in his resurrection (vv. 5, 8). Because of this participation with Christ, they follow the pattern of Christ's resurrection from death.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, Paul draws a parallel between believers and Christ: being united to Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection corresponds to the believer's death to sin and new life in Christ. Even as Christ died to sin once for all, those who are in him also die to sin and are thus set free from its dominion (vv. 6-10). They are "dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (v. 11) and are "not under law but under grace" (v. 14). The participating in Christ constitutes the Christian identity; believers belong to Christ.<sup>42</sup> The new identity includes a decisive breach with sin and a new and transformed life in Christ.

### **New Identity: The Symbolic Reality of Baptism**

A believer's new identity is represented by being baptized into the death of Christ (vv. 3-4). Baptism does not establish one's relationship with Christ but symbolizes

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<sup>40</sup>Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ*, 207.

<sup>41</sup>Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ*, 228-30.

<sup>42</sup>Robert A. Peterson, *Salvation Applied by the Spirit: Union with Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2015), 414-20.

the existence of this relationship.<sup>43</sup> By being incorporated or identified with Christ, believers possess a new identity in him. Thus, union with Christ is a fundamental reality symbolized by baptism, or dying-and-rising with Christ. As Campbell states,

Dying and rising with Christ means that believers identify with his representative death and resurrection, and it facilitates a change of lordship as the believers dies to the dominion of sin and death and enters new life in the realm of Christ. Paul's theme of the new Adam relates to these two dominions, with Adam and Christ as the entry points into their respective domains. Thus, participation in the representative and substitutionary acts of Christ brings forth resurrection life.<sup>44</sup>

Baptism involves putting on Christ. By being united to Christ in his death and resurrection, believers have a new master, Christ. This new identity also relocates believers, moving them from the realm of sin and into a new realm, that of Christ. Therefore, participating in Christ by being baptized into his death and resurrection “marks the end of the old existence and the beginning of the new.”<sup>45</sup> A believer thus undergoes more than a change, coming into an entirely new existence that is symbolized by baptism.

### **New Relationship to Sin**

Within a new identity in Christ, baptism further symbolizes the believer's

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<sup>43</sup>Some proponents of the Federal Vision teach that all baptized people are in union with Christ. Since they want to emphasize the objectivity of the covenant, they insist that through baptism, the baptized are in the covenant and also in a living union with Christ. See Douglas Wilson, *Reformed Is Not Enough: Recovering the Objectivity of the Covenant* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2002); Steve Wilkins, “Covenant, Baptism and Salvation” in *The Federal Vision*, eds. Steve Wilkins and Duane Garner (Monroe, LA: Athanasius Press, 2004), 58, 67; John Barach, “Covenant and Election” in *The Federal Vision*, 37. However, the historical Reformed understanding maintains that only the elect are united with Christ through Baptism. Union with Christ is God's act of grace by his effectual calling (e.g., WSC 30, WLC 66). Similarly, Berkhof in *Systematic Theology*, 286-89, distinguishes the dual relation to the covenant: a legal relationship and a living communion with Christ. He asserts that there are those who are members in the covenant legally and only those who are the elect are in the covenant life or in union and communion with Christ.

<sup>44</sup>Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ*, 352.

<sup>45</sup>Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 323.

breach with sin.<sup>46</sup> Those who are in Christ are crucified with him and are no longer enslaved to sin (v. 6): “Believers die with Christ to sin when they are baptized. They are united to Christ in his crucifixion, and sin’s dominance over their lives is broken.”<sup>47</sup> By being united to Christ, therefore, believers shed their flesh and are free from sin, which is definitive and irreversible. Furthermore, as they participate specifically in Christ’s death, believers die to sin and the law so “that in him [Christ] our past guilt is dealt with, and our bondage to sin, the law, and death has been brought to an end.”<sup>48</sup> Free from the curse of the law and the penalty of sin, they are then “alive in Christ” (6:11). As Murray states, “The person who died to sin no longer lives in that sphere. His tie with it has been broken, and he has been translated into another realm.”<sup>49</sup> Once they are set free from sin, believers are under grace and walk in newness of life. Therefore, Paul argues that it is impossible for believers to continue sinning because in their disassociation with sin, they are united to Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. Aptly, Paul summarizes his argument by stating that believers have “died to sin” and are “alive in Christ.”

### **New Life: Resurrected Life**

Those united to Christ are not only dead to sin but are also definitively raised with Christ. Sin no longer has power over them because being united to Christ’s death destroys sin and being united to Christ’s resurrection enables them to walk in newness of life (v. 4). Calvin observes this unbreakable connection: “The old man is destroyed by the

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<sup>46</sup>See John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray: Selective Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1977), 2:277-84; Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 745-48.

<sup>47</sup>Peterson, *Salvation Applied by the Spirit*, 400.

<sup>48</sup>Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, 112.

<sup>49</sup>Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, 2:279.

death of Christ and his resurrection brings justice and makes us new creatures.”<sup>50</sup>

Moreover, participating in Christ’s death necessarily transitions to participating in his resurrection. Packer explains that “under-and-up ritual baptism” symbolizes a radical change in the lives of those who are baptized:

The symbolism of first going under the water as a sign of saying good bye to the style of life one is renouncing and then coming up from under as a sign of starting a new life pattern is clearly expressed, and that evidently is what is important. The washing symbolism shows that this commitment is conceived within the frame of an absolution from the past that sets one free for the new beginning. The rite is thus one of termination, initiation, and commencement.<sup>51</sup>

Having experienced this rite, the believer’s union with Christ is “of a new kind,” for “what the Christian has put off is solidarity with Adam, and what he puts on is Christ, or solidarity with Christ, as the source and principle of his new life (cf. Rom. 13:14; Gal. 3:28),”<sup>52</sup> In addition, by being newly created in Christ, the believer is essentially co-crucified and co-resurrected with him.<sup>53</sup> Murray claims that since Christ’s resurrection is definitive and irreversible, those who resurrected with him are entirely new: “The

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<sup>50</sup>John Calvin, *Commentary on Romans 6:4*, quotes by Paul Wells in “Calvin and Union with Christ: The Heart of Christian Doctrine,” in *Calvin: Theologian and Reformer*, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Garry J. Williams (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 80.

<sup>51</sup>J. I. Packer, *Taking God Seriously: Vital Things We Need to Know* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 128.

<sup>52</sup>J. I. Packer, *Serving the People of God: The Collected Shorter Writings of J. I. Packer* (Carlisle, England: Paternoster, 1998), 2:264.

<sup>53</sup>Frame claims, “It is in Jesus’ death that his people have died to sin, and in his resurrection we, too, have been raised to newness of life (Rom. 6:1-11).” Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 79. Similarly, Letham writes, “In Romans 6:1ff., in answer to charges that his gospel encourages moral indifference, Paul insists that believers, the justified, live to Christ and do not give themselves over to sin. This is because they died with Christ to sin and rose again to new life in his resurrection. Not only did Christ die and rise again for them, but they died and rose with him. Union with Christ is the foundational basis for sanctification and the dynamic force that empowers it.” Letham, *Union with Christ*, 6. Moreover, on death and resurrection, Gaffin writes, “Few will dispute that union with Christ in his resurrection, being united to the resurrected Christ by faith, grounds in its entirety Paul’s teaching on sanctification and the renewal of the Christ. But union with Christ as resurrected is not only renovative. That union also has judicial or forensic significance, as does Christ’s own resurrection.” Richard Gaffin, “Justification and Eschatology,” in *Justified in Christ: God’s Plan for Us in Justification*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2007), 6.

decisive and definitive entrance upon newness of life in the case of every believer is required by the fact that the resurrection of Christ was decisive and definitive. As we cannot allow for any reversal or repetition of the resurrection, so we cannot allow for any compromise on the doctrine that every believer is a new man, that the old man has been crucified, that the body of sin has been destroyed.”<sup>54</sup> Given newness of life, sinners are directly connected to Christ, alive “with Christ” through his resurrection (cf. Eph 2:4-6). Consequently, Paul proclaims that “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation” (2 Cor 5:17). A new creation has a new life because he or she shares in Christ’s resurrected life. For this reason, Paul exhorts, “consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom 6: 11).

Therefore, participation in Christ not only constitutes one’s legal status in relation to God but also involves a new, resurrected life. Through participating in Christ’s death, they experience a definite break from the dominion of sin, and through participating in his resurrection, they walk in newness of life; they are now under the reign and mastery of Christ. In short, union with Christ in his death and resurrection is Paul’s answer to the antinomian charge.<sup>55</sup> In addition, union with Christ opens a transforming reality.<sup>56</sup> In this reality, continuing to sin is impossible because believers are

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<sup>54</sup>Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, 2:293.

<sup>55</sup>See Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 150; Peterson, *Salvation Applied by the Spirit*, 197, 417. Johnson similarly asserts “that the reality of our participation in Christ’s death and resurrection is the ground for the actual holiness of our lives.” Johnson, *One with Christ*, 125.

<sup>56</sup>Jones puts it this way on the antinomian charge: “Some argue that Paul answers the “antinomian” charge with gospel, not with law, in Romans 6:2ff. That point is true, but it needs to be added that Paul responds specifically with the reality of our definitive sanctification (v. 2), as well as Christ’s definitive sanctification (v. 10), and then presses home the reality that we are obedient slaves of God (progressive sanctification)...The response to the problem of whether God’s grace will lead God’s people to licentiousness is emphatically denied by Paul’s teaching of definitive and progressive sanctification. Paul could hardly be accused of antinomianism in his writing and preaching, based on what we read in Romans 6 (see also 1 Cor. 7:19).” Jones, *Antinomianism*, 120-21.

united to Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. They belong to Christ as new creations, are transformed into a new identity, and are “made . . . alive together with Christ” (Eph 2:5). The new life in Christ cannot continue sinning as in the old life. Union with Christ is therefore a life-transforming union that radically converts the lives of those who are engrafted in it.

### **Romans 6:15-23 – New Lordship**

Building on the truth of the believer’s new identity and reality in Christ, in Romans 6:15-23, Paul continues to explain this new reality (the meaning of being ‘united to Christ’) in his answer to the antinomian charge (v. 15). Paul specifically identifies believers as bondslaves to righteousness and God (vv. 16-19, 22). Paul has already argued that sin has no more right to lord over believers (v. 6) because they are under the reign of grace (v. 14). Believers are under Christ’s ownership or lordship because they have been united with him in his death and resurrection. From Christ’s ownership, God has transferred his people from Satan’s ownership.<sup>57</sup> Explaining this transfer of ownership, Paul states that God “has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sin” (Col 1:13-14). The purpose of the newly resurrected life under the lordship of Christ is to serve God. Similarly, under this lordship believers are in a covenant relationship with him and are thus his covenant servants.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>Grant Macaskill argues the phrase “in Christ” in the Pauline Corpus clearly has a locative sense which demarcates an eschatological existence: “This eschatological state is pneumatological, with the Spirit actualizing the significance of this nature in believers, transforming their existence through cogency with their own spirit and conforming them to the likeness of the crucified and risen Son.” Grant Macaskill, *Union with Christ in the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 249.

<sup>58</sup>See Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 33-35.

## **The Antithetical Effect: Death in Adam and Life in Christ**

Believers cannot go on sinning because they are under a new realm of influence, which Paul proposes as life in Christ contrasting death in Adam. In fact, Paul continues his chain of antithetical arguments from Romans 5: Adam vs Christ (5:12-21), dead to sin vs alive to God (6:1-11), law vs grace (6:12-14), and slaves of law or sin vs slaves of God or righteousness (6:15-23).<sup>59</sup> These antitheses are vital for those who claim to be in Christ, who are indeed slaves of righteousness. Rather than implying an injurious servanthood, Paul uses the metaphor of slaves to indicate the new status and freedom believers have in Christ. In his epistles, Paul even calls himself the servant/slave of Christ (Rom 1:1; cf. 14:4; Gal 1:10; 2 Tim 2:24; Titus 1:1). Loyalty to Christ is foundational to his lordship over believers and for their new identities. In their servanthood, they are committed to who they belong, called to serve Christ, who has delivered them from death and slavery of sin. In turn, they obey his teachings from the heart (Rom 6:17). There is a change of obedience precisely because there is a change of lordship from sin to Christ, from being slaves of sin to slaves of righteousness.

### **Antithesis: Slaves of Sin and Slaves of Righteousness**

Slaves of righteousness and slaves of sin are antithetical in nature. Paul emphasizes that one is either a slave of sin, which leads to death, or is a slave of obedience, which leads to righteousness (v. 16b). Thus, one is either under the reign of

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<sup>59</sup>A few more antitheses that Paul states in the Epistle of Romans are law (letter) vs. (newness) of the spirit (7:1-6); spiritual vs sinful (7:13-25); flesh vs spirit [carnal mind vs spiritual mind] (8:1-11); and spirit of bondage vs spirit of adoption (8:12-17). These antitheses echo Jesus at the Sermon on the Mount when he teaches that believers cannot serve two masters, God and money (Matt 6:24).

sin or the reign of grace. These two masters are mutually exclusive and incompatible because “having been set free from sin” is having “become slaves of righteousness” (v. 18). Slaves by definition are totally submitted to their owners without reservation. Therefore, as slaves of sin, they are free from the influence of righteousness (v. 20), but in becoming slaves of God, they are set free from sin (v. 22). These exclusive states of existence also produce opposing fruit and results. One leads to “death” (vv. 16, 21, 23) and “lawlessness” (v. 19), and the other brings “righteousness” (v. 16), “holiness” (vv. 19, 22), and “eternal life” (vv. 22, 23). Clearly, one is either a slave of sin or a slave of righteousness (vv. 18, 19), and being set free *from* sin is inevitably to be set free *to* righteousness. Paul therefore understands that freedom from sin does not mean freedom *from* God but freedom *for* God.<sup>60</sup> People become God’s slaves because he sets them free from slavery to sin. Notably, there is no neutral ground or even enmity between sin and righteousness, which Calvin recognizes by stating that “between the yoke of Christ and that of sin there is so much contrariety, that no one can bear them both; if we sin, we give ourselves up to the service of sin; but the faithful, on the contrary, have been redeemed from the tyranny of sin, that they may serve Christ: it is therefore impossible for them to remain bound to sin.”<sup>61</sup> This contrary nature of sin and righteousness reinforces the point that “it is a sheer impossibility for any man to be a slave to both at the same time. He cannot be a slave to grace and yet live in sin; it is utterly impossible. They are mutually exclusive, mutually contradictory.”<sup>62</sup> A person can only side with one, not both.

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<sup>60</sup>See Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 261.

<sup>61</sup>Jean Calvin and John Owen, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 234.

<sup>62</sup>David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 6, The New Man* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 201.

Therefore, Paul reveals his counterargument, contending that believers are not simply “under the law” but “under grace” (v. 15) so they can live lawlessly. By discussing this opposite reality, Paul emphatically reinforces believers’ liberation from sin’s power and their ensuing service to righteousness.

Richard Lints arrives at the heart of the discussion in Romans 6 by saying, “The rhetorical question of Romans 6:1 and Romans 6:15 points at the reality that Christ is the answer to the antinomian accusation. Being united to Christ means being united to his rule as covenant Lord.”<sup>63</sup> Thus, Paul’s answer to the antinomian charge that the free righteousness of God received solely by faith fosters spiritual slothfulness is “union with Christ.” Calvin provided the same answer to counter the Roman Catholics’ antinomian charge of his time. Union with Christ fundamentally constitutes a new status and identity for those who are in Christ, releasing them definitively from the dominion of sin and transferring them to a new realm in which there is a new master. For these reasons, believers cannot continue in sin. Indeed, sinning is an impossibility because believers’ lives have been ontologically uprooted and placed on new ground, into a new realm in Christ. The new and resurrected life no longer serves sin but serves Christ, the new master, because as a servant of righteousness, the new life cannot be a servant of sin. Moreover, believers are regarded as holy and are progressively made holy by Spirit-enabled power that daily guides them to live out their new identities. Therefore, union in Christ is completely transformative because believers turn from sin to love and serve God, their new Master, and to delight in his law. Furthermore, believers must become

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<sup>63</sup>Richard Lints, “Living by Faith—Alone?: Reformed Responses to Antinomianism,” in *Sanctification: Explorations in Theology and Practice*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 48.

new because the essence of the union is not only legal but also transformative.

Fortunately, Paul is not alone in proclaiming these truths, for the Apostle John also clarifies the transformative nature of union in Christ.

### **Union with Christ: Gospel of John**

Perhaps the Apostle John was the earliest to talk about “union with Christ” or the “in Christ” relationship.<sup>64</sup> Johannine writings do not include the same idioms as Paul’s, but John’s recorded words of Jesus to the disciples, especially in the upper room discourse (John 13-16), similarly express the ideas of participation and incorporation (divine engrafting). These ideas point to a close personal relationship the disciples will have with the Son and the Father by the coming Holy Spirit, or the believer’s participation in communion and fellowship with the Son and the Father by the Holy Spirit.<sup>65</sup> John describes this relationship as Christocentric and Trinitarian,<sup>66</sup> individual and communal, fruit-bearing, and leading to obedience and love unto Jesus.

### **The Mutual Indwelling between Believers and Christ**

Despite that “in Christ” is not found in John’s writings, he frequently uses “in him” to refer to Christ (e.g., John 14:20, 15:4-7; 1 John 2:28).<sup>67</sup> This “in him” relationship is “a mutual indwelling” between believers and Christ or God (John 6:56,

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<sup>64</sup>See Peterson, *Salvation Applied by the Spirit*, 50-72, 249-63.

<sup>65</sup>See Donald Fairbairn, *Life in the Trinity: An Introduction to Theology with the Help of the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 13-21.

<sup>66</sup>Campbell discusses Paul’s implicit trinitarian character of union with Christ in Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ*, 353-68.

<sup>67</sup>See Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 65.

15:4; 1 John 3:24, 4:13, 15, 16).<sup>68</sup> John speaks of this mutual indwelling relationship as reciprocal because Christ “abides” in believers and believers “abide” in Christ. Notably, John uses this language in his metaphor of a vine and its branches, in which the vine is related to its branches in an “abiding union” (John 15:1-8). John also often speaks of this mutual abiding in his epistles (e.g., 1 John 2:6; 3:24; 4:13, 15, 16).<sup>69</sup> Contrasting this abiding to the relationship between Christ and God, Demarest states, “In John’s language, the union between the Son and the Father is one of ‘being’ (John 10:38), whereas the union between the Son and believers is one of ‘abiding.’” John 14:20 and 17:21-23 in no wise endorse an ontological union between Christ and his people.”<sup>70</sup> In this union, believers do not lose individuality, yet by virtue of the union, believers belong to Christ and have communion and fellowship with him.<sup>71</sup>

### **Mutual Indwelling: Believers and the Trinity**

In his writings, John also attributes Christocentric and Trinitarian qualities to his notion of participation. He describes the mutual indwelling between believers and Christ as participating in the Trinitarian life.<sup>72</sup> Jesus says, “In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you” (14:20; cf. 17:21). In an earlier passage, Jesus expresses that there is a mutual indwelling between the Father and the Son

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<sup>68</sup>E.g., Peterson, *Salvation Applied by the Spirit*, 50-72; Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 326-27.

<sup>69</sup>See Peterson, *Salvation Applied by the Spirit*, 249-63, 379-80.

<sup>70</sup>Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 328.

<sup>71</sup>See Peterson, *Salvation Applied by the Spirit*, 420-21.

<sup>72</sup>See Johnson, *One with Christ*, 42-45; Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ*, 363-68; Peterson, *Salvation Applied by the Spirit*, 62-64, 67-68.

(John 10:37-38; 14:10-11). Therefore, by uniting with Christ, believers are not only indwelled by Christ but also by God the Father. As Jesus says, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” (14:23). These words correspond to John’s description of believers’ fellowship: “Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3; cf. 2:24). While these texts do not mention the Holy Spirit in this mutual indwelling, elsewhere Jesus speaks of the Spirit indwelling believers (John 14:16-17). Only a divine person indwells his people, so the logical implication concerning the use of “we” in John 14:23 is that it refers to the Trinity. The doctrine that the three persons of the Trinity always mutually indwell one another further supports this logic. In addition, since the Spirit binds Christ to his people, the Trinitarian persons make their home in and with believers through union with Christ. Therefore, even as the Trinitarian persons mutually indwell one another, they extend this mutual indwelling to believers.<sup>73</sup> A crucial stipulation to note, however, is that this Trinitarian participation does not incorporate believers into the Godhead. Rather, the mutual indwelling between the Trinity and believers is by grace. By contrast, the mutual indwelling among the persons of the Trinity is inherent in their very nature.

Within the Godhead, John depicts a personal communion that is the Trinitarian fellowship God extended to his first creation and then redeemed by bringing his creatures into it. From eternity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have related to each other in a covenantal communion of love and unity. God created human beings to extend this intra-Trinitarian love from the Godhead to his people and, through recreation

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<sup>73</sup>E.g., Peterson, *Salvation Applied by the Spirit*, 416.

(redemption), to restore the fellowship lost through the fall.<sup>74</sup> Participating in the divine life, in the Trinitarian life between the three persons of the Godhead, is at the heart of Christianity: “The heart of Christian faith is the eternal relationship that has characterized the persons of the Trinity, and Jesus explicitly describes the relationship between God the Father and himself, God the Son. This relationship links God’s life to our lives, precisely because our lives are meant to be a sharing in that relationship. . . . our sharing in the Father-Son relationship is at the center of what it means for us to participate in God.”<sup>75</sup> Likewise, Macaskill argues that the transformation of a faith community “is grounded in the ontology of the incarnation,” and it “involves the union of human flesh with the divine fellowship of Father, Son, and Spirit; the participation of believers in the communion of the triune God proceeds from this primary union.”<sup>76</sup> When believers enter into fellowship with Christ, they abide in him and participate in the divine love, life, and eternal communion of the Trinity, thereby fulfilling God’s purpose of redemption.

### **Mutual Indwelling: Individual and Corporate**

The concepts of indwelling and abiding in John’s writings correspond to Paul’s discussions of the believer in Christ and Christ in the believer. Regarding salvation, each person stands alone before God. Nevertheless, as John explains, union with Christ is not only individual and personal but also corporate.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, he discusses the corporate

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<sup>74</sup>E.g., Jones, *Antinomianism*, 83; Fairbairn, *Life in the Trinity*, 232-33.

<sup>75</sup>Fairbairn, *Life in the Trinity*, 37. Similarly, Fairbairn claims that Christian salvation is not exclusively about solving the human problem of sin. Rather, through trusting Christ, believers participate in his life, death, and resurrection and share in his eternal fellowship with the Father (184-92).

<sup>76</sup>Macaskill, *Union with Christ in the New Testament*, 270.

<sup>77</sup>Paul describes union with Christ as both individual and corporate. See Peterson, *Salvation Applied by the Spirit*, 210, 212.

nature of this union through the mutual indwelling of all believers with and in the Trinitarian persons. To further reinforce this mutuality, John provides the analogy of the vine and its branches (John 15) corresponding to the head and members of the body.<sup>78</sup> When these members trust Christ for salvation, the Holy Spirit binds them to Christ, simultaneously linking them to all others who are “in Christ.” Therefore, to be in union with Christ individually is to be in union with Christ corporately.<sup>79</sup> Speaking of this corporate union, Storms states, “Salvation in Christ necessarily entails solidarity with others who in like manner have been incorporated into the spiritual organism we know as the body of Christ. Our true identity, then, is both as individuals and as members of a collective body known as the church.”<sup>80</sup> Likewise, Ellis argues that “in Christ” is not strictly soteriological but is also ecclesiastical: “Being in Christ *is* participation in the new covenant through its life-giving Mediator, and belonging to the people of God *is* union with Christ our head in the Spirit-filled people who are his ecclesial body.”<sup>81</sup> Similarly, he claims, “Union with Christ is that covenantal relationship within which Christ joins us to himself and one another by the Spirit through faith, as the communal fruition of God’s effective word of forgiving and embracing grace.”<sup>82</sup> Joining together with the Christ also engrafts believers into his body. Therefore, a union and communion with the triune God is also a communion and fellowship with other members in Christ because he indwells his people individually as well as corporately.

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<sup>78</sup>E.g. Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 325, 327.

<sup>79</sup>See Peterson, *Salvation Applied by the Spirit*, 212, 415-16.

<sup>80</sup>Sam Storms, *Packer on the Christian Life: Knowing God in Christ, Walking by the Spirit*, ed. Stephen J. Nichols and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 81.

<sup>81</sup>Ellis, “Covenantal Union and Communion,” 82 (emphasis original).

<sup>82</sup>Ellis, “Covenantal Union and Communion,” 101.

## **Mutual Abiding: Moral Obligation**

Further exploring the mutually indwelling relationship with God, John explains that it carries moral obligations.<sup>83</sup> To abide in God is to abide in his love and keep his commandments (cf. 1 John 3:17, 22, 24; 4:16). John is also certain to share Jesus' words on law, love, and obedience: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15; cf 14:23). Obedience to God's commands therefore serves as a measurement of loving God, which Jesus further proclaims by saying "Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me" (14:21). Keeping Christ's commandments and being obedient to him shows that believers love him and are "in him" (1 John 2:5-6, 24), which Peterson explains by noting that "those who claim to abide in Christ (2:6) and follow his example of faithfulness to and love for God gain confidence that they are 'in him' (v. 5)."<sup>84</sup> Peterson also observes the moral obligations of abiding in Christ: "John combines mutual-abiding language with moral obligation. Reciprocal abiding is true of those characterized by obedience to God's commands (1 John 3:24), confession that Jesus is God's Son (4:15), and continuing in love (3:14; 4:16)."<sup>85</sup> In this reciprocity, being in Christ or God is inseparable from obeying him and his commands. John also explains that "no one who abides in him keeps on sinning" (1 John 3:6) and "whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us" (3:24). Thus, abiding in Christ and sinning are antithetical in nature, as is loving the world and loving the Father: "Do not

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<sup>83</sup>See Peterson, *Salvation Applied by the Spirit*, 259-63, 379-80.

<sup>84</sup>Peterson, *Salvation Applied by the Spirit*, 249-50.

<sup>85</sup>Peterson, *Salvation Applied by the Spirit*, 379-80.

love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15). Certainly, abiding in Christ has moral ramifications. While abiding in Christ enables believers to continue in his love by loving him, it also necessitates obedience to him by keeping his commandments, not simply to live a godly life and love him but also to receive the love of the Father and the Son (John 14:21) and enjoy communion with the triune God. Love is therefore central in the mutual abiding between believers and the Triune God, which Jesus implies when he says, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching” and “my Father will love them” (14:23). John further reinforces the centrality of love by saying that “God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him” (1 John 4:16). Through obedience and love, believers cultivate their participation in the Trinity, which was given at the beginning of their Christian lives. John understands that union with Christ brings believers to obey and love God and that God’s grace and his command to obey are not in conflict.

### **Fruitful Life of Abiding in Christ: A Vine and Its Branches**

Like Paul’s, the Apostle John’s teaching on union with Christ presupposes significant implications for the Christian life. John illustrates the sanctified life as a life that bears fruit through the metaphor of a vine and its branches (John 15:1-17).<sup>86</sup> Even as the vine and its branches are related to each other organically and bear fruit, the organic relationship between Jesus and believers in their union (mutual abiding) enables them to bear fruit. However, this fruitfulness comes with the condition that believers must continue to remain (abide) in Christ (vv. 4-7, 10, 12; cf 1 John 2:28). This condition

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<sup>86</sup>For Campbell’s exposition of Paul’s metaphors for union with Christ, see Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ*, 267-324.

exists because “the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine” (v. 4); therefore, believers need to “abide in Christ” (v. 4), for apart from him, they can do nothing (v. 5). In this organic union, believers are completely dependent on Christ and abide in him in a *perpetual* or *continual* mode. Thus, the vine is the source of life for the branches and Christ is the source of life for believers. Speaking on Calvin’s theology in relation to the vine and the branches, Wells comments that “continuance in grace through the Word is absolutely necessary. Christ promises that all who have a living root in Him will be fruit-bearing vines and that ‘the Spirit will always be efficacious in them.’”<sup>87</sup> For believers, participating in the life of the Trinity through Christ puts them in a relationship of continuously abiding in Christ, loving him, and being in fellowship with him in order to produce fruit. Because Christ is the source of life and believers are in reciprocal communion with him, they can find life and be fruitful: “As branches live and bear fruit only in union with the vine, so disciples derive their life and productivity from intimate union with Christ and in fellowship with his Word (v.4).”<sup>88</sup> A believer living out sanctification is in union with the person of Christ and cannot grow in righteousness or holiness apart from him.<sup>89</sup> By contrast, fruitlessness shows that a person is disconnected

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<sup>87</sup>Wells, “Calvin and Union with Christ,” 75.

<sup>88</sup>Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 328.

<sup>89</sup>Fairbairn points out that the early church fathers do not distinguish between justification and sanctification but emphasize the entire Christian life in union with Christ: “As we remain in Christ (remember Jesus’ ‘vine and branches’ speech in John 15), as our union to Christ is deepened by our continued adherence to him, then our lives begin more and more to reflect his righteousness. To say this a different way, in Christ we are righteous (that is, we have been justified through union with Christ), and in Christ we become more and more who we already are (that is, by remaining in Christ we begin more and more to reflect his character and thus to be sanctified). Thus neither the righteousness of justification nor the righteousness of sanctification is ours in the sense that we could possess it on our own. In both cases, righteousness belongs to Christ, the righteous one, and we participate in that righteousness as we are initially united to him (justification), and we reflect and grow in that righteousness as we continue to remain in him. All aspects of Christian life, from beginning to end, revolve around our union with the Son and our reflection of his relationship to his Father. In a corresponding way, all aspects of Christian life involve our trust in Christ—we trust him to share his righteousness with us in sanctification just as much as we initially trusted him to share his righteousness with us in justification.” Fairbairn, *Life in the Trinity*,

from the divine. The truth in the metaphor of the vine and its branches is that the believer's life is transformed and bears fruit by perpetually "abiding in Christ," who is the source for spiritual sustenance and growth.

John also parallels Paul by presenting the Christian life as new in conjunction and communion with Christ. They also similarly envisage union with Christ as life transforming. Moreover, by being "in Christ," believers are in communion with the triune God. This participation in the Trinity does not impact the Christian life neutrally but significantly and morally. John certainly teaches that salvation is ultimately by God's predestined grace, but he also proclaims that salvation in Christ requires obedience to God's commandments. The exhortation to "abide in Christ" and the command to love God suggest believers have covenant obligations. They are obligated to continue to bear fruit by persevering in faith and obedience. Therefore, John understands both objective and subjective aspects of salvation: "John's theology of participation is set firmly in a framework of revelation that involves both an objective component, the revelation that is constituted by Jesus and transmitted accurately as a result of the Spirit's work (14:26; 16:13), and a perceptual transformation that is effected, subsequent to the period of earthly incarnation, by the Spirit."<sup>90</sup> Paul and John also claim that those who receive Christ's justifying righteousness further receive his sanctifying righteousness. As Calvin insists, believers cannot grasp Christ's righteousness "without at the same time grasping sanctification."<sup>91</sup>

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207-8.

<sup>90</sup>Macaskill, *Union with Christ in the New Testament*, 256.

<sup>91</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 3.16.1.

## **Indicative Implies Imperative**

Theologians and biblical scholars generally refer to teachings on the believer's new identity and its moral implication as "indicative implies imperative." Particularly, Paul progressively structures his epistles by moving from indicatives to imperatives and "roots the imperatives of the Christian faith in the indicatives of the Christian faith, making his practical applications—what believers are to do—on the basis of what God in Christ has already done."<sup>92</sup> Since the imperative is rooted in the indicative, the two are not in conflict; rather, the imperative is built upon the indicative. Paul discusses the indicative by claiming that those who put faith in Christ are united in his death and resurrection and, hence, are new creations (2 Cor 5:17) with new identities. They are called to live out their new lives in Christ. Furthermore, he introduces the imperative by strategically teaching believers, exhorting them to live out the new, inner realities that they have in Christ. Specifically, Paul commands his audience to "present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification" (Rom 6:19b). Imperatively, "present" is based on the indicative truth that believers have been identified with Christ in his death and resurrection. Similarly, in Colossians 3, Paul uses the imperative to command his audience to "seek" the things that are above (v 1), "set [their] minds" on things that are above (v 2) and "put to death" what is earthly (v 5). These are based on the indicative truths that believers "have been raised" with Christ (v 1) and "have died" (v 3) and that their lives are "hidden" with Christ in God (v 3).<sup>93</sup> Therefore, Paul indicatively shows

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<sup>92</sup>Carl R. Trueman, *Grace Alone-Salvation as a Gift of God: What the Reformers Taught and Why It Still Matters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 44.

<sup>93</sup>See Fairbairn, *Life in the Trinity*, 208.

that believers have a new identity in Christ and, imperatively, they need to live out who they are in him.

That God chooses his elect is evident in John's gospel, yet his teaching is similar to Paul's because he uses μένω "abide" to explain that human responsibility is required in the new covenant life. Bass expounds on John's use of *abide*, stating that his "purpose for his 'abiding' motif was to incite his readers to persevere in their faith. This was seen in the emphasis on the human responsibility to abide in Christ (15:4-7), abide in his love (15:9), and keep his commandments (15:10)."<sup>94</sup> Likewise, in his epistles, John tells his audience that those born of God love God and obey his commandments (1 John 5:14).<sup>95</sup> Similarly, Peter claims that those who have "been born again" (1 Pet 1:23) need to "put aside" their old, ungodly life style (2:1).<sup>96</sup> Clearly, although believers in the new covenant are new creations, divinely enabled and empowered to obey God's law, New Testament authors understand that human responsibility is not absent. The gift of new identity in Christ is therefore a calling to become who they are in Christ, which Jesus teaches again by way of metaphor: "A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit" (Matt 7:18). Being a good tree and acting as a good tree are necessarily connected. Likewise, a regenerate person is fundamentally a *new* person in Christ and cannot help but produce good fruit because of the *new* life bestowed on him by being in Christ. For this reason, Jesus emphasizes that "doing" is vital for believers: "Not

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<sup>94</sup>Christopher David Bass, "A Johannine Perspective of the Human Responsibility to Persevere in the Faith Through the Use of Meno and Other Related Motifs," *Westminster Theological Journal* 69 (2007): 305-25.

<sup>95</sup>E.g., G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 855.

<sup>96</sup>E.g., Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 855.

everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matt 7:21, cf. Luke 6:46; James 1:22-25, 2:14-26). Believers are called to do the will of God “because they have been the recipients of God’s grace in Christ. In Christ they have a new identity. The work of Christ has changed who they are, and their new identity should now transform how they live.”<sup>97</sup> Thus, the “doing” is consistent with the “being.”

The transformed life of the Christian rests on ethics that are not simple, isolated biblical principles but are utterly imbedded in a biblical, covenantal revelation.<sup>98</sup> Dennison discusses this revelation by claiming that “in a Biblical world and life view, the ethical dimension of the Christian life is grounded in the historical person and work of Jesus Christ. . . . It is not the indicative *and* the imperative, or the indicative *plus* the imperative. Rather, in the Biblical and Reformed worldview the imperative *is grounded in* the indicative, or the imperative *is implied in* the indicative. Or, to say it yet another way, the imperative *flows out of* the indicative.”<sup>99</sup> Likewise, Carrick understands the relationship between the indicative and the imperative: “Although ‘Christianity begins with a triumphant indicative,’ it does not *end* with a triumphant indicative. It always moves on to the imperative. In other words, Christianity is not *altogether* in the indicative mood.”<sup>100</sup> The believer’s indicative state necessarily has moral imperatives because they

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<sup>97</sup>Trueman, *Grace Alone-Salvation as a Gift of God*, 44.

<sup>98</sup>See William D. Dennison, “Biblical Theology and the Issue of Application in Preaching,” in *Reformed Spirituality: Communing with our Glorious God*, ed. Joseph A. Pipa and J. Andrew Wortman (Taylors, SC: Southern Presbyterian Press, 2003), 144; cf. Dennison, “Indicative and Imperative: The Basic Structure of Pauline Ethics,” *Calvin Theological Journal* (April 1979): 55-78; Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard De Witt (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1975), 253-57.

<sup>99</sup>Dennison, “Biblical Theology and the Issue of Application in Preaching,” 144.

<sup>100</sup>John Carrick, “Redemptive-Historical Preaching: A Critique,” in Pipa and Wortman, *Reformed Spirituality*, 157-58.

integrate in union with Christ. Affirming that “imperatives in the New Testament flow from indicatives,” Frame says, “Obligations follow from narrative, from the story. This is not a naturalistic fallacy . . . everything that God is and does is ethically normative.”<sup>101</sup> Grace does not leave those united to Christ as they are but ethically transforms them. Furthermore, Allen argues that grace does not transmute or replace nature but restores, renews, and perfects it. Likewise, grace does not remove responsibility but fulfills and transforms human agency.<sup>102</sup> Therefore, grace changes believers’ status and transforms their lives through the power of the Holy Spirit.

### **Indicative and Imperative: Irreversible and Inseparable**

Richard Gaffin points out two significant principles in this indicative-imperative pattern in the Christian life: *irreversibility* and *inseparability*.<sup>103</sup> Regarding irreversibility, Gaffin says, “The indicative has the priority; the indicative is foundational. It grounds the imperative—not the imperative somehow grounding the indicative. . . . Paul never writes in the imperative without first of all, either explicitly or implicitly, writing in the indicative.”<sup>104</sup> The priority of indicative over imperative is oftentimes labelled as “‘the indicative precedes the imperative’ expressing the way in which morals always follow and flow from grace.”<sup>105</sup> Furthermore, Gaffin argues that the indicative

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<sup>101</sup>John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian life* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2008), 275.

<sup>102</sup>See Michael Allen, *Sanctification*, ed. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 199-225, 227-55.

<sup>103</sup>See Gaffin, *By Faith, Not by Sight*, 81-82. Cf. Carrick, “Redemptive-Historical Preaching,” 158-59.

<sup>104</sup>Carrick, “Redemptive-Historical Preaching,” 158-59.

<sup>105</sup>Allen, *Sanctification*, 194.

and imperative are inseparable: “Paul never writes in the indicative without having the imperative in view, either explicitly or implicitly. . . . Imperative and indicative are given together; and the imperative is a consequence or attestation apart from which the indicative does not exist.”<sup>106</sup> Although the indicative is foundational, it is incomplete and insufficient if it is regarded apart from imperative.<sup>107</sup> The imperative is meant to supplement the indicative, and both are inseparable in the person of Christ.<sup>108</sup> From this understanding, good works as fruit in the believer’s life is not simply the gratuitous response for God’s gracious salvation in Christ but is indicatively grounded in the fact that he or she is a new person, dead to sin and alive to righteousness. Christ’s undeserved grace does not give license to sin but, rather, resurrects a life that serves God.

### **Justification and Sanctification in Christ**

The indicative implies the imperative in the same way the theological terms *justification* and *sanctification* relate to one another. Believers are engrafted and baptized into Christ, having received him not only as their righteousness (free justification), but also as their sanctification (holiness). In the same vein, Billings asserts that “salvation is

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<sup>106</sup>Carrick, “Redemptive-Historical Preaching,” 159.

<sup>107</sup>Carrick argues that the reformed redemptive-historical preaching has failed *the indicative-imperative pattern or structure of New Testament Christianity* in that “there is a tendency to emphasize the *historia salutis* at the expense of the *ordo salutis*. In other words, there is a tendency in redemptive-historical preaching to emphasize *redemption accomplished by Christ* at the expense of *redemption applied to Christ’s people*. In short, there is a tendency in the redemptive-historical school to emphasize the *indicative* at the expense of the *imperative*.” Carrick, “Redemptive-Historical Preaching,” 170 (emphasis original).

<sup>108</sup>Gaffin advocates the need to maintain a balance of the two: “If the indicative permitted to predominate to the exclusion of the imperative, the result will be inclined in the direction of quietism or antinomianism. If the imperative is permitted to predominate to the exclusion of the indicative, the result will incline toward moralism or legalism.” See Carrick, “Redemptive-Historical Preaching,” 173. Moreover, Gaffin argues the Spirit not only plays an essential role in mutually sharing the relationship between Christ and believers but also acts in believers’ on-going sanctified lives. Thus, the Holy Spirit is key to understanding this indicative and imperative teaching. See Gaffin, “The Holy Spirit,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 43, no. 1 (Fall 1980), 77.

nothing less than a new identity received as a gift. In union with Christ, believers receive both forgiveness of sins and new life by the Spirit, as children of the Most High.”<sup>109</sup> Paul also connects these two concepts in 1 Corinthians 1:30: “And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption.” Likewise, he says, “You were washed, you were sanctified, and you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11). Peterson agrees by explaining that both justification and sanctification take place “in Christ Jesus,” or in union with him.<sup>110</sup> Hoekema also comments on the inseparability of justification, sanctification, and union with Christ: “Our justification is one of the fruits of our oneness with Christ, but we cannot be in union with Christ without at the same time being involved in the process of sanctification, whereby Christ through his Spirit makes us progressively more like himself.”<sup>111</sup> Similarly, Calvin insists that justification and sanctification are distinct in union with Christ, “yet you could not grasp this [Christ’s righteousness] without at the same time grasping sanctification also. For he ‘is given unto us for righteousness, wisdom, sanctification, and redemption’ [1 Cor. 1:30].”<sup>112</sup> Justification and sanctification are therefore inseparable because they imperatively flow from the indicative in the form of a living, vital, and life-transforming union with Christ.

In union with Christ, the believer is declared righteous (justification) and made

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<sup>109</sup>J. Todd Billings, *Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 169.

<sup>110</sup>See Peterson, *Salvation Applied by the Spirit*, 326-32, 335-37.

<sup>111</sup>Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 177.

<sup>112</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.16.1.

righteous (sanctification). As some scholars interpret, Paul discusses believers' justification in Romans 5 and explicates the nature of their sanctification in Romans 6.<sup>113</sup> In other words, Paul's discusses the death and resurrection of the believer with Christ in Romans 6 within the context of Romans 5.<sup>114</sup> In Romans 5:12-21 (cf. 1 Cor. 15:20-23), Paul compares and contrasts Adam and Christ, stating that the destiny of the human race are tied to these two figures. Adam and Christ are humanity's representatives before God, which Reformed theology has typically expressed in covenantal terms. As Adam was the covenant head of humanity in the covenant God made with him in the Garden of Eden before the fall (the covenant of works), Jesus Christ, the second Adam, is the covenant head of a new covenant (the covenant of grace).

Since Adam and Christ are covenant heads, their actions significantly impact those they represent. For this reason, Paul presents the works of Adam as antithetical to those of Christ—Adam's devastating effects on humankind contrast Christ's great effects on his people. Paul justifies this antithesis by sharing the creation account in the book of Genesis. Exploring the origins of sin and death, Paul explains they entered the created order through the willing transgression of the first Adam (5:12). Because all mankind descend from the first Adam, are involved in his guilt (original sin), and are in bondage to

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<sup>113</sup>E.g., Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 409. Similarly, Macaskill notes, "The legal dimension of their experience of covenant fellowship with God [Romans 1-5] informs the Pauline account of transformative fellowship in Romans 6-8." Macaskill, *Union with Christ in the New Testament*, 237.

<sup>114</sup>Against N. T. Wright's definition of *justification* as "how you can tell who is a member of the covenant family," in N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 122, Charles E. Hill provides insight that the broad context of Romans 1-5 is one's standing before God in terms of sin or the problem of God's wrath against sin. Furthermore, Hill claims, "It is not 'being in or out of the covenant' but 'having one's sins forgiven.' The emphasis is on getting rid of the sin problem, not on who's in and who's out of the covenant." Charles E. Hill, "N. T. Wright on Justification," *HIIM Magazine Online* 3, no. 22 (2001), 4. Therefore, what all men need is righteousness before God's judgment seat. The solution Paul proposed is "the reckoned or imputed righteousness of Christ through faith" (Rom 3:21-31; 4:1-25; 5:1-21). One is justified through faith not only because of Christ's propitiation and substitutionary atonement but also because he or she is in Christ.

sin, they need the atonement and blessings procured by the second Adam, the new head of humanity (5:14, 19). Peterson expounds on Paul's distinctions between Adam and Christ: "Adam's one sin brings death; Christ brings grace and eternal life (v. 15). Adam's one sin brings condemnation; Christ's grace brings justification (v. 15). Adam's one sin brings the reign of death; Christ brings a reign of life to believers (v. 17)."<sup>115</sup> Paul further explains that through Adam's disobedience many were made sinners, and with Christ's obedience, many will be made righteous (vv. 18-19). Adam's sin and death contrast the life that comes through Christ (1 Cor 15:22). Furthermore, Trueman notes that Christ is tied to Adam since "Jesus represents the action of God in history in response to the failure of Adam."<sup>116</sup> Similarly, Owen concludes that "as the sin of Adam was imputed unto all men unto condemnation, so the righteousness or obedience of Christ is imputed unto all that believe unto the justification of life."<sup>117</sup> With Adam's disobedience, all mankind is guilty before God. Conversely, Christ's "one act of righteousness" brings justification, which is God's verdict of righteousness.<sup>118</sup>

### **Christological Fulfillment of the Covenant**

Both necessary and sufficient, Christ's act of obedience reverses Adam's failure because Christ is the divine Son of God and God has designed the covenantal

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<sup>115</sup>Peterson, *Salvation Applied by the Spirit*, 77.

<sup>116</sup>Trueman, *Grace Alone-Salvation as a Gift of God*, 36.

<sup>117</sup>John Owen, *Works: The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, 5:322. Cf. Matthew Barrett and Michael A. G. Haykin, *Owen on the Christian Life: Living for the Glory of God in Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 211.

<sup>118</sup>Lane G. Tipton expresses the correspondence between the two federal heads: "*The sin of Adam, understood as trespass and disobedience, elicits condemnation and consists in death, both in Adam and those he represents; but in antithetical contrast to this reality, the righteousness of Christ, understood as one meritorious act of righteousness and obedience, elicits justification that consists in eschatological life, both for Christ and those he represents* (Rom. 5:12-19)." Lane G. Tipton, "Union with Christ and Justification," in Oliphint, *Justified in Christ*, 34 (emphasis original).

framework of salvation.<sup>119</sup> In covenant, God requires his perfect loyalty and obedience from his people.<sup>120</sup> Similarly, for the covenants he made with men through redemptive history, God also demands perfect faithfulness, but only his *obedient* Son who is also his eternal image is able to obey him perfectly to rectify Adam's failure.<sup>121</sup> As Scripture emphasizes, Christ is the true offspring of Abraham and the Son of David, the divine Son incarnate come to do his Father's will. As the representative substitute and covenant head, Christ's filial obedience resolves Adam's failure.<sup>122</sup> As Wellum argues, "The Bible uses its epochal-covenantal structure and storyline to develop the identity of Christ as God the Son incarnate" and through his self-identification as "the divine Son of God and the *eternal imago Dei*" and "the *incarnational imago Dei*," the one who would "fulfill all of God's covenant promises as his true Son-King and the last Adam."<sup>123</sup> Therefore, as covenant heads, the first Adam by his disobedience brought himself and his posterity into

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<sup>119</sup>Stephen Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 111-249.

<sup>120</sup>See Wellum, *Christ Alone*, 40-42.

<sup>121</sup>God's plan of redemption in a covenantal storyline only anticipates God's "obedient" Son to fulfill the covenant condition of obedience. See Wellum, *Christ Alone*, 45-52; Brandon D. Crowe, *The Last Adam: A Theology of the Obedient Life of Jesus in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 202-15.

<sup>122</sup>Scott R. Swain and Michael Allen argue that Christ's life and death, both vicarious and obedient, are part of his economic mission on behalf of the elect and derive from his filial relationship to the Father in the Godhead. Distinguishing between the Son's eternal generation and his economic obedience or mission, and rather than the latter replacing the former as his personal property, they say, "The obedience of the Son is the economic extension of his eternal generation to a Spirit-enabled, creaturely life of obedience unto death, and therefore the redemptive foundation for his bringing of 'many sons to glory' (Heb 2:10)." Scott R. Swain and Michael Allen, "The Obedience of the Eternal Son: Catholic Trinitarianism and Reformed Christology" in *Christology, Ancient and Modern: Explorations in Constructive Dogmatics*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Fred Sanders (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 77. Similarly, they argue, "The Son's economic obedience is the means whereby other sons and daughters come to share as creatures in his filial relationship to the Father. Economic obedience, the free and gracious overflow of the Son's natural and necessary generation, is the means whereby the Son's prayer is answered: 'I desire that they may be with me where I am' (John 17:24; cf. 17:5; 1:1, 18) [94]." Moreover, they claim, "The eternal Son's receptivity in relation to his Father—expressed poignantly in the doctrine of eternal generation—provides the metaphysical and relational grounds for his free enactment of his proper activity in the divine economy" (95).

<sup>123</sup>Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate*, 247.

sin and condemnation, and the second Adam, Christ, by his obedience fulfilled the covenantal righteousness in place of those he represents.

The recapitulation of the Adamic story in Christ is not only a Pauline doctrine but is also found in the Gospels.<sup>124</sup> From Adam's disobedience Christ recapitulated this story by his obedience, beginning in his incarnation, continuing throughout his entire life, and culminating in his death. In the four Gospels, Jesus is described as the Son of God through whom God's kingdom comes. Brandon Crowe argues that Jesus as the obedient Son of God is portrayed "as the fulfillment of Israel" and "as the representative leader of Israel who realizes the obedience required of God's son. Jesus's obedience provides the ultimate answer to Adam's disobedience."<sup>125</sup> Jesus' filial obedience does not refer only to his death but also to his faithful obedience throughout his life, which is particularly evident in his temptation.<sup>126</sup> Crowe claims Jesus' obedience is an epochal event in the history of redemption: "The uniqueness of Jesus's perfect obedience . . . underscores Jesus's perfect obedience as God's covenantal representative, which provides the logic for the vicarious nature of his obedience. Jesus's obedience not only *surpasses* that of Israel and Adam, but *overcomes* the disobedience of prior canonical sons of God."<sup>127</sup> As God's obedient Son, Jesus' obedience is superior to all human covenant heads; as representative, Adamic figure, his obedience is vicarious. This emphasis of Christ's vicarious, perfect obedience is also mentioned in the Hebrews: although Christ is tempted as a human and is yet without sin (4:15), in doing the Father's will, he rectifies the

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<sup>124</sup>See Crowe, *The Last Adam*.

<sup>125</sup>Crowe, *The Last Adam*, 67-68.

<sup>126</sup>Crowe, *The Last Adam*, 74-78.

<sup>127</sup>Crowe, *The Last Adam*, 79.

disobedience or unfaithfulness of Adam through perfect obedience (learned obedience), having endured suffering and sacrificial death to become “the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him (5:9).” As image-bearer of God, Adam’s calling was to be obedient and faithful, and his unfaithfulness invokes the need for a true image-bearer of God. Consequently, Christ is the second-Adam and eternal image of God who resolves Adam’s disobedience through perfect obedience, now serving as the ground and example of obedience for his elect. Therefore, by the vicarious and obedient aspects of his life and death, Christ fulfills the absolute demand, the righteous requirement, of God’s covenant for his people.

### **Justification in Christ**

Since redemption in Christ is revealed in the context of the covenants, justification must be understood within the framework of union with Christ.<sup>128</sup> The basis of this union is the saving work of Christ in his life, death, and resurrection. Since sinners are unrighteousness because they are united with Adam by virtue of his covenant headship (“in-Adam”), they can only be reckoned righteous by being united to Christ, the new covenantal head (“in-Christ”). Therefore, those in-Christ are reckoned righteous because of Christ’s righteousness; his righteousness is imputed to them: “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21). Believers are robed in Christ’s righteousness, which is not our own

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<sup>128</sup>E.g., Peterson says that “Paul presents Christ as the second and last Adam, the Mediator of the new covenant, whose ‘one act of righteousness,’ his ‘obedience’ unto death on the cross, is the ground for God’s declaring righteousness (justifying) sinners who trust Christ for salvation and eternal life. So while this passage [Rom 5:12-19] does not deal with an actual faith union with Christ, it lays a foundation for that doctrine in presenting the momentous accomplishment of Christ, the second Adam and Mediator of the new covenant, juxtaposed to the momentous deed of the first Adam and mediator of the covenant of creation.” Peterson, *Salvation Applied by the Spirit*, 78. Here, Peterson rightly claims that Paul does not discuss an actual faith union with Christ in this passage but sets a broad context—in particular, a *covenantal* context for the passages that follow (106).

inherent righteousness, but Christ's righteousness imputed to us. Because of Christ's righteousness, justification is grounded in union with him, and believers partake of his righteousness by uniting to him. Moreover, believers' sin is imputed to Christ, and Christ's righteousness is imputed to them. As discussed above, Christ, as the covenant mediator, assumes a representative role for his people. As a representative, on the one hand, his death is a substitutionary atonement, thereby acquitting their guilt and punishment of sin. On the other hand, his vicarious, obedient life fulfills God's righteous demand. As a result, Christ's righteous obedience is imputed to his people. By being united with Christ, they are not only guiltless but are also righteous before God.

Justification is God's pronouncement of righteousness for believers in relation to their sin and his wrath. Berkhof defines justification by saying it

*is a judicial act of God, in which He declares, on the basis of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, that all the claims of the law are satisfied with respect to the sinner. It is unique in the application of the work of redemption in that it is a judicial act of God, a declaration respecting the sinner, and not an act or process of renewal, such as regeneration, conversion, and sanctification. While it has respect to the sinner, it does not change his inner life. It does not affect his condition, but his state, and in that respect differs from all the other principal parts of the order of salvation. It involves the forgiveness of sins, and restoration to divine favor.<sup>129</sup>*

In relation to God and his law, justification involves one's legal status. It does not change one's inner life, which is renewed in the Spirit's work in sanctification. Therefore, whereas justification deals with one's right standing before God (imputed righteousness) and the consequence is that "there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1), sanctification is the Spirit's work in making believers holy

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<sup>129</sup>Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 513 (emphasis original).

(imparted righteousness).<sup>130</sup> Billings connects the two contextually: “When ‘forensic’ pardon is received in Christ, sinners are acquitted of their guilt and are legally adopted as children. The legal dimension is indispensable—and it is what provides the context for sanctification as a transformative process by the Spirit.”<sup>131</sup> Those who are in-Christ are not only granted a new status before God but also a new life.

### **Sanctification in Christ**

Incorporation in and identification with Christ is participation in his supernatural or resurrected life, which leads to transformative fellowship in him.<sup>132</sup> As previously discussed, both Paul and John explain that union with Christ is life-transforming. Particularly, in Romans 6, Paul proposes that there is great significance for the lives of those who are in-Christ. As head of the new creation, Christ, the second Adam, calls spiritually dead humans to life and unites them with himself. In Romans 5, Paul contrasts life in Christ with death in-Adam. Believers are no longer in Adam (under the covenant of works) because they have been united with Christ (under the covenant of grace), who has fulfilled the covenant of works on their behalf. In these chapters, therefore, Paul reveals the antithetical nature of reality: one is either in-Adam or in-

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<sup>130</sup>Herman Bavinck distinguishes between justification and sanctification: “*Justification and sanctification . . . while distinct from each other, are not for a moment separated. . . .* In order to be completely freed from sin, we must be freed from guilt and cleansed of its stains. And that is what happens in justification and sanctification. Hence the two are equally necessary and are proclaimed in Scripture with equal emphasis. Logically justification comes first in this connection, for it is an evangelical kind of justification. . . . It is a judicial act, completed in an instant. But sanctification is ethical: it is continued throughout the whole life and, gradually makes the righteousness of Christ our personal ethical possession. . . . *In justification Christ is granted to us judicially, in sanctification, ethically; by the former we become the righteousness of God in him; by the latter he himself comes to dwell in us by his Spirit and renews us after his image.*” Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 4:249 (emphasis added).

<sup>131</sup>Billings, *Union with Christ*, 27.

<sup>132</sup>See Macaskill, *Union with Christ in the New Testament*, 237-38.

Christ. There is no neutral position or middle ground. This antithesis affects those who are in-Christ. As aforementioned, in Romans 6, Paul expresses that the “making alive” takes place “in-Christ.” Therefore, those who are in him obtain a new life and continue to grow in holiness. As Letham states, “Union with Christ is the foundational basis for sanctification and the dynamic force that empowers it.”<sup>133</sup> When believers grow in holiness, therefore, they are experiencing sanctification founded on and empowered by covenantal solidarity with Christ.

### **Sanctification: Definitive and Progressive**

While justification is definitive and instantaneous, sanctification is definitive and lifelong.<sup>134</sup> Those who are united to Christ breach with sin and are simultaneously called to progress in holiness. They are also declared to possess “righteousness” and are referred to as “saints.” Therefore, sanctification is both definitive and ongoing.<sup>135</sup>

### **Definitive Sanctification**

To sanctify primarily means to separate or set God’s people apart for holy purposes. In sanctification, the breach with sin for those united with Christ is definitive. As Demarest claims, believers are “‘sanctified’ with initial or definitive sanctification, that powerful work of the Holy Spirit in setting sinners apart to God and constituting

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<sup>133</sup>Letham, *Union with Christ*, 6.

<sup>134</sup>E.g., Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 401; Gaffin, “The Work of Christ Applied,” 284.

<sup>135</sup>Johnson relates sanctification to union with Christ: “The fact that our sanctification includes both a definitive aspect and a progressive aspect is best explained by the corresponding fact that our union with Christ is both definitive (we have been decisively united to Christ) and progressive (we are continually growing in our union with Christ). We have been irrevocably, indissolubly united to the whole Christ, and for that reason we continue to grow into the fullness of Christ throughout our lives.” Johnson, *One with Christ*, 129.

them his saints.”<sup>136</sup> Similarly, John Murray defines definitive sanctification as

a cleavage, a breach, a translation as really and decisively true in the sphere of moral and religious relationship as in the ordinary experience of death. There is a once-for-all definitive and irreversible breach with the realm in which sin reigns in and unto death. . . . In respect of every criterion by which moral and spiritual life is to be assessed, there is absolute differentiation. This means that there is a decisive and definitive breach with the power and service of sin in the case of everyone who has come under the control of the provisions of grace.<sup>137</sup>

By uniting to Christ, there is a radical change in believers in respect to the old domain, where they were in-Adam and in sin. Believers “have been transferred from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of God’s beloved son (Col. 1:13).”<sup>138</sup> From this transfer, they belong to Christ because they have been redeemed and bought with a price by him. They are also dead to and have been liberated from sin.<sup>139</sup> Consequently, “believers have experienced an actual, decisive break with the power of sin through their participation in Christ’s death, and have experienced an actual, decisive newness of life through their participation in his resurrection.”<sup>140</sup> Believers not only experience a break from sin but also gain new lives. Moreover, the Scriptures speak of Christ as the sanctifier who performs the act of sanctification by the one offering of his body (Heb 10:10, 10.14; 1 Cor 6:11). With this perfect sacrifice of Christ, believers are seen as holy, perfect, and spotless in God’s sight. Nevertheless, believers reckoned as saints are not actually sinless although they progress in sanctification.<sup>141</sup> As Reymond asserts, “To the degree that the

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<sup>136</sup>Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 328.

<sup>137</sup>Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, 2:279-80.

<sup>138</sup>Letham, *Union with Christ*, 87.

<sup>139</sup>E.g., Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 757.

<sup>140</sup>Johnson, *One with Christ*, 130.

<sup>141</sup>E.g., Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 758.

Christian ‘reckons himself dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus’ (Rom. 6:11), that is to say, to the degree that the Christian takes seriously the reality of his Spirit-wrought union with Christ, to that degree he will find his definitive sanctification coming to actual expression in his experiential or progressive sanctification.”<sup>142</sup> Therefore, already sanctified in Christ, believers continually transform into the likeness of Christ.

### **Progressive Sanctification**

By justifying believers as righteous, God dedicates and consecrates them to himself. Berkhof defines the ensuing sanctification as “*the gracious and continuous operation of the Holy Spirit, by which He delivers the justified sinner from the pollution of sin, renews his whole nature in the image of God, and enables him to perform good works.*”<sup>143</sup> Believers’ lives are not transformed instantaneously or even completely within their lifetimes; rather, sanctification happens progressively and necessitates that believers consciously act by refocusing on God as the center of their lives. Moreover, sanctification is progressive due to indwelling sin. As von Rohr asserts, “A major reason for Puritan insistence upon the gradual and growth character of sanctification was its realistic recognition of the continuance of sin in earthly experience.”<sup>144</sup> In this line of thinking, sanctification is progressive because moral actions emitting from justification by faith alone are not automated. Thus, the corrupted human nature still sins and need consistent renewal following sin. Due to this sin, sanctification involves continuous purification from the Spirit who empowers the believer to put off the “old self” and put on the “new

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<sup>142</sup>Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 739.

<sup>143</sup>Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 532 (emphasis original).

<sup>144</sup>John von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 106.

self” (Eph 4:22-24) to be transformed into the image of Christ “from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor 3:18).<sup>145</sup> Clearly, sanctification is on-going and gradual in a believer’s life and will not be completed until glorification. As John explains, progressive sanctification comes about as believers remain in Christ because their holiness is not their own; it is Christ’s, and they receive it when they are united to him.

### **Sanctification: A Gift and a Task**

Due to the fact that it is in Christ, sanctification has been referred to as both a gift and a task or calling. Bavinck identifies this duality by saying that “sanctification is also a call to active continued repentance on the part of the Christian. Sanctification is both gift and task.”<sup>146</sup> Similarly, Billings asserts, “This new, adopted identity becomes for Christians both a gift and a calling—to walk by the Spirit rather than by their own power. . . . This newly given, legally valid identity leads to the discovery of one’s new life in the household of God—a new life of sanctification in which the Spirit calls and empowers Christians to live into their adopted identity.”<sup>147</sup> By participating in Christ, believers grow and abide in him, walking in the call for sanctification to live out their new identities.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>145</sup>See Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 332.

<sup>146</sup>Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Abridged in One Volume*, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 579.

<sup>147</sup>Billings, *Union with Christ*, 10-11.

<sup>148</sup>J. I. Packer claims the context of sanctification is justification by the blood of Christ and the source of sanctification is union with Jesus Christ: “Co-crucifixion and co-resurrection with him is how Paul puts it in the opening verses of Romans 6. We are united with Christ at the point where our first life, the old life, ends and the new life begins. The beginning of the new life means the renewing of our hearts so that now we love what before we hated—God and his attributes, God’s will, God’s way, God’s purposes—and the deepest desire of our heart is how to know God, love God, get close and keep close to God, serve God, please God and praise God all our days. The source of Christian sanctification lies just there, in the change of our natures. So the summons to sanctity is no more nor less than the call to be natural as a Christian and let those new instincts, impulses and longings express themselves in the way one lives. Holiness is the naturalness of the regenerate person.” J. I. Packer, “Predestination and Sanctification,” in *Serving the People of God*, 2:323.

Moreover, since sanctification is a calling, it involves human work.<sup>149</sup> Salvation is always monergistic, but growth in the believer's relationship with the Lord is synergistic.<sup>150</sup> It involves human will because moral transformation does not come naturally. The New Testament exhortations (e.g., Eph 4:1-3) clearly indicate that obedience does not come automatically in the lives of the justified.<sup>151</sup> It requires godly efforts and struggle. However, believers neither work autonomously nor merely cooperate with God because sanctification is a concurrent work between them and God.<sup>152</sup> Paul explains this concurrency: "My beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil 2:12-3). God actively engages believers to participate in life transformation through necessary work. Additionally, God's sovereign works do not discourage human activities. By contrast, his grace works within believers to enable them to act in ways that please God. Although God initiates this work, human response is necessary. The progress of sanctification involves believers' cooperative responses to the grace of God operating within them. Thus, believers can work effectively because God works within them

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<sup>149</sup>Hoekema defines sanctification "as that gracious operation of the Holy Spirit, involving our responsible participation, by which he delivers us from the pollution of sin, renews our entire nature according to the image of God, and enables us to live lives that are pleasing to him." Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 192.

<sup>150</sup>Storms, *Packer on the Christian Life*, 96-97. Furthermore, Packer says, "Sanctification is not natural morality but supernatural conformity to the moral and spiritual likeness of Jesus Christ. Sanctification is not mystical passivity, as our use of the slogan 'let go and let God' has too often implied, but is active moral effort energized by prayerful and expectant faith. We look for help in practicing righteousness, and we receive it. Nor is sanctification a solitary achievement. Rather, it is to be worked out and expressed in the close and demanding relationship of the Christian church, primarily the local congregation." J. I. Packer, *Hot Tub Religion: Christian Living in a Materialistic World* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1993), 184-85.

<sup>151</sup>See Carrick, "Redemptive-Historical Preaching," 172. Therefore, in preaching, the emphasis of justification or indicative should not neglect sanctification or imperative. The two should go together.

<sup>152</sup>See Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 401.

through the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>153</sup> In his role, the Spirit works dynamically in believers after they have died to sin and risen to new life in Christ. Therefore, human agency is not eradicated in sanctification and sanctification is inseparable from justification because it is the work of God by the Holy Spirit.

### **Conformed to the Likeness of Christ**

God calls his people to sanctification from his gracious and saving purposes.<sup>154</sup> From this call, the elect grow to be like Christ: “God’s electing purpose culminates in conformity to the image of his Son (Rom. 8:29).”<sup>155</sup> While God’s purpose in salvation is to redeem his elect by the blood of his Son, that purpose comes to greater fulfillment in sanctifying them by the Spirit. Ultimately, the goal of sanctification for believers is to be conformed to the likeness of Christ (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). As they conform to his likeness, they also identify with him. Exhorting believers to conform in this way, Paul directs them toward spiritual maturity by “attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13) so that they “will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is, Christ” (4:15). In addition, conforming to the likeness of Christ also meets God’s purpose for sanctification because it allows believers to participate in his divine nature (2 Pet 1:3-4). Humans are created in the image of God and are meant to reflect his image. However, since this image is distorted because of sin, God uses sanctification to restore his image in humans as intended at creation. As Johnson says, this restoration brings

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<sup>153</sup>See J. I. Packer, *Rediscovering Holiness* (Ann Arbor, MI: Vine Books, 1992), 172-74, 225-28; Storms, *Packer on the Christian Life*, 121-34.

<sup>154</sup>Packer claims that “sanctification is a *goal* of God’s election, a *fruit* of God’s election, the only *proof* of God’s election, and the knowledge of election is a great *spur* to further advance in the way of holiness.” Packer, *Serving the People of God*, 2:327.

<sup>155</sup>Gaffin, *By Faith, Not by Sight*, 114.

believers into Christ's likeness: "God is re-making us into his image, and he is doing so by uniting us to the One who *is* that image."<sup>156</sup> Therefore, through sanctification, the believer is re-created into the image of God in Christ, which is reflected in his or her day-to-day existence. Moreover, sanctification involves not only the renewal of moral character, but also maturity from unreservedly dedicating the self to God. Venema explains the multifaceted purposes of sanctification by saying that "the language of 'sanctification' confirms the nature of our repentance as a conversion to God, whose goal is not only the restoration of God's image in us, but also the re-establishment of his claim upon us as those who were created for fellowship with and obedience to him."<sup>157</sup> To be conformed to the image of Christ is to be obedient and in loyal fellowship with the covenant Lord.

The gospel of salvation in Christ consists of both remission of sin and inner renewal, and union with Christ consists of fellowship in God's righteousness. Notably, this righteousness is not simply justified or imputed but is also transformed or imparted.<sup>158</sup> Moreover, transformed righteousness brings about sanctification that furthers God's work of redemption as believers grow in Christ's righteousness and holiness. Therefore, sanctification is not a byproduct of the gospel but integral to God's gracious work in Christ by the Spirit. Also important to union with Christ is that the believers live the entirety of life in him. Thus, even as justification takes place in this union, the same applies to sanctification. Both definitively and progressively, sanctification can only be

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<sup>156</sup>Johnson, *One with Christ*, 136.

<sup>157</sup>Cornelis P. Venema, *Accepted and Renewed in Christ: The Twofold Grace of God and the Interpretation of Calvin's Theology* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 121.

<sup>158</sup>For Demarest's "The Doctrine of Sanctification: 'Transformed into His Likeness,'" see Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 385-429.

experienced in union with Christ. By uniting with Christ in the new covenant, believers experience grace in free justification as well as in repentance and renewal after the image of Christ. Furthermore, forensic grace and transformative grace are distinct and yet inseparable in union with Christ.<sup>159</sup> Commenting on forensic grace and transformative grace, Ellis says, “Baptismal union with Christ is a covenantal union, and the covenant of grace is a communion with Christ and one another in the life-giving Spirit of the age to come—a union finding its legal basis and power in, and in turn providing the living matrix for, the imputation of Christ’s righteousness received, along with its transformative fruits, by faith.”<sup>160</sup> Imputation of Christ’s righteousness is needed because the elect, as Israel, are not already holy. God chooses them to make them holy. Consequently, the gospel is the good news that God does not only declare sinners righteous but also promises to make them righteous. God also does not only set them apart as instruments of his plan of redemption but also sanctifies them, purifying their old, sinful natures. In redemption and sanctification, Christ “*for us*” and Christ “*in us*” define the gospel God intends for his people.<sup>161</sup> Christ is “*for us*” to resolve a person’s guilt from sin, and Christ is “*in us*” to share the call for a life of continuous transformation. In union with Christ, therefore, believers are definitively justified and progressively sanctified.

### **The New Covenant: Unconditional and Conditional**

In regard to the new covenant, a question that must be confronted is whether it

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<sup>159</sup>E.g., Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 67, 177.

<sup>160</sup>Ellis, “Covenantal Union and Communion,” 102.

<sup>161</sup>E.g., Gaffin, *By Faith, Not by Sight*, 125.

is unconditional or conditional. Often, the new covenant is understood as unconditional because of its newness. Indeed, the new covenant is unconditional because through Christ God sovereignly fulfilled all covenant conditions apart from human efforts, and granting the gift of a new heart to those who believe without conditions. Nevertheless, its unconditionality does not relieve believers from their covenantal obligations. Exploring the unconditionality and conditionality of the new covenant, Frame states, “The new covenant is unconditional in that its very content is God’s unconditional gift of a new heart, fulfilling all covenant conditions. But it is conditional in that those conditions are real and necessary. We are justified by faith alone, not by an effort to earn our salvation (Rom. 3:23-24; Eph. 2:8-9). But the faith by which we are justified is a living and obedient faith.”<sup>162</sup> Like other covenants, the new covenant is unconditional because it is solely based on God’s undeserved grace and is established by him. It is also unconditional because believers are in an indissoluble union with Christ. Through God’s effectual calling, sinners are drawn into the bond of this union, which is grounded “in the unconditional and immutable decree of divine election ‘in [Christ] before the creation of the world’ [Eph. 1:4]. The salvation eternally purposed for believers ‘in Christ’ is infallibly certain of reaching its eschatological consummation in their future resurrection-glorification ‘in Christ.’”<sup>163</sup> God certainly will carry out his covenant purposes and save all those he has given to his Son. While this bond is unbreakable Christ-imitated, it is also a mutual fellowship that demands continuous faith, obedience, and perseverance from

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<sup>162</sup>Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 81; also see 29, 67.

<sup>163</sup>Gaffin, “The Work of Christ Applied,” 282-83.

believers.<sup>164</sup> Like other covenants, therefore, the new covenant is conditional because of its mutuality. Living and obedient faith is not only required at the initial acceptance of Christ as Lord and Savior, but throughout the entire Christian life. In its conditionality, the new covenant necessitates human obedience. Nevertheless, as the Reformed orthodox theologians claim, the covenant's demands are consequential rather than antecedent conditions. The latter are fulfilled by Christ, and the consequential conditions are simply inherent covenant obligations for those who are in the covenant.

Within the context of a restored covenant relationship with God, believers are called to obey him and his law as they undergo sanctification. Although salvation cannot come from keeping the law, the new covenant intensifies believers' obligation to follow the commandments. For believers, Jesus comes not only to restore their broken relationship with God but also to bring them his commandment. Moreover, the Holy Spirit writes God's law in believers' hearts and minds, enabling them to obey. Having the law etched in hearts and minds does not produce perfect obedience but provides a guide for living out God's righteousness. By the Spirit, therefore, God renews obedience to the law in the new covenant.<sup>165</sup> As Paul insists, the justified are not under the law of sin and death but are under the "law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:2). Calvin

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<sup>164</sup>Herman Bavinck comments on conditions in the covenant of grace: "In the covenant of grace, that is, in the gospel, which is the proclamation of the covenant of grace, there are actually no demands and no conditions. For God supplies what he demands. Christ has accomplished everything, and though he did not accomplish rebirth, faith, and repentance in our place, he did acquire them for us, and the Holy Spirit therefore applies them. Still, in its administration by Christ, the covenant of grace does assume this demanding, conditional form." Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Sin and Salvation in Christ*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 3:230.

<sup>165</sup>Venema claims God upholds his law in the new covenant by writing the law in the hearts of the redeemed by the Spirit of Christ: "God not only upholds his own law in the obedience and sacrifice of Christ for his people, but he also upholds his law through the work of Christ's Spirit, who writes the law upon the hearts of his redeemed people and begins to renew them in the way of obedience to the law's obligations (Heb. 10:16)." Venema, *Christ and Covenant Theology*, 431-32.

concurr, explaining that the gospel is not without law, but “the third and principal use [of the law], pertains more closely to the proper purpose of the law, finds its place among believers in whose hearts the Spirit of God already lives and reigns.”<sup>166</sup> Furthermore, the law expresses God’s will and character, serving as rules for life for those he claims as his own. Obeying these rules is imperative to human responsibility in the new covenant.

The new covenant is conditional also because sanctification involves a progressive process of moral transformation that is dipleuric. Salvation belongs to the Lord from the beginning to the end (monergism), and yet believers are responsible in the synergy of sanctification (synergism). Gaffin points out that synergy “is not that of a divine-human partnership, in the sense of a cooperative enterprise with each side marking its own contribution.”<sup>167</sup> By contrast, as Ferguson discusses, synergy occurs when “the Spirit so engage[s] our whole being that in belonging to Christ there is a ‘mutuality’, or ‘covenantal bond’, so that the Spirit’s work and the believer’s faith are absolutely correlative in the union.”<sup>168</sup> The nature of this union is mutual because through the Spirit, God communes with humans as they grow in holiness and righteousness. Thus, Calvin and the Reformed orthodox theologians situate believers’ covenantal obedience within the sanctification process. Additionally, sanctification is charge for both God and humans; it is “a pure gift of God in Christ” and “at the same time a gift to be actively and responsibly received by human beings (with works).”<sup>169</sup> Actively, believers conform to

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<sup>166</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.7.12.

<sup>167</sup>Gaffin, *By Faith, Not by Sight*, 83.

<sup>168</sup>Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, 111.

<sup>169</sup>Henri Blocher, “Sanctification By Faith?” in *Sanctification: Explorations in Theology and Practice*, ed. Kelly M. Kopic (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 66.

the image of Christ throughout the sanctification process.<sup>170</sup> God's sovereign action does not discourage human activities but, instead, motivates godly efforts in covenant obedience. Moreover, even though humans put forth these efforts, God is at work in them to will and act according to his good purpose.

The divine-human covenant relationship believers enter by accepting Christ as Lord and Savior brings with it the condition of human obedience. However, the covenant is also unconditional because Christ, as covenant head and covenant Lord, has sovereignty over everything he has made.<sup>171</sup> As Frame asserts, "The covenants are unconditional because of God's lordship attribute of complete control over the creation. They are conditional because of God's lordship attribute of authority, his right to command and be obeyed."<sup>172</sup> In his lordship, he rules over his people as a king and demands their obedience; they must keep his covenant. Furthermore, the continued need for their obedience indicates God's ongoing legislation for their conduct and faith.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>170</sup>See Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 148-49.

<sup>171</sup>John Frame designates/names his four magnum opus as "A Theology of Lordship:" John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1987); Frame, *The Doctrine of God*; Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*; Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2010). He affirms the centrality of covenant lordship in Scripture and that lordship is a covenantal concept. As Lord, God connects with his people in a covenant relationship. He rules over them by the sanctions of his law and in and through them fulfills the purposes of his grace. Lordship is therefore relational. Moreover, God's name of "Lord" (*Yahweh, Adonai, Kurios*) is key to understanding his covenant lordship. Because he is Lord, he is head of the covenant relationship. Naturally, since there is a Lord, there are servants over whom he rules. The centrality of lordship implies the centrality of covenant, and vice versa. Indeed, covenant lordship is the central theological motif in the Bible, for God is Lord throughout Scripture. For an introduction to Frame's understanding of Lord or lordship, see Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 14-34; Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 21-35. Particularly, in relating *Lord* and *covenant*, he says, "The most central meaning of *Lord* is to designate God's role in a relationship with his creatures, called *covenant*." Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 17. He further says, "God rules over all things as Lord of a covenant before his covenant with Israel, even before his covenant with Adam and Eve. So God's sovereignty over everything he has made is a covenantal relationship" (19).

<sup>172</sup>Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 67. The covenants are related to attributes of God's lordship, including his authority, control, and presence. They also vary, being triperspective: normative, situational, and existential (81-83).

<sup>173</sup>Frame notes that gospel includes law. The appearance of God's kingdom is the manifestation of his authority which demands repentance and proper conduct: "God's kingdom authority is the reiteration of his commandments. When the kingdom appears in power, it is time for people to repent.

Indeed, there are blessings covenant members enjoy, but God's covenant also carries stipulations.<sup>174</sup> As Packer maintains, new covenant obedience is similar to the mutual commitment intrinsic in covenants: "two parties give themselves to each other in total love and loyalty on the basis of promises, stipulations and requirements imposed by the superior party on the inferior, in this case by the divine king and benefactor on those he has saved."<sup>175</sup> The covenant Lord is superior because he rules his people with his holy and righteous covenant law.<sup>176</sup> In addition, even though Christ as covenant Lord fulfills all covenant requirements, its blessings do not supersede the need for human obedience, which Frame explains: "All covenants require obedient faith. This is not a condition of one covenant or another; it is essential to all human dealings with God, simply by virtue of who God is. . . . Individual covenants require specific forms of obedience, but obedience itself, springing from faith, is simply a requirement of all relations between God and human beings."<sup>177</sup> While stipulations for obedience may differ, the demand to be faithful to the covenant maker has and will never diminish.

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They must *obey* (*hupakouo*) the gospel (2 Thess. 1:8; compare *apeitheo* in 1 Peter 4:17). The gospel itself requires a certain kind of conduct (Acts 14:15; Gal. 2:14; Phil. 1:27; cf. Rom. 2:16)." Frame, *John Frame's Selected Shorter Writings* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2016), 3:188-89. Moreover, he says, "God proclaims that he has redeemed his people (gospel), and then asks them to behave as his covenant people (law). Since both gospel and law are aspects of God's covenants, that pattern pervades Scripture" (191).

<sup>174</sup>Packer also sees unconditional and conditional in the new covenant, including its obligations. He argues that "covenant faithfulness is the condition and means of receiving covenant benefits, and there is nothing arbitrary in that; for the blessings flow from the relationship, and human rebelliousness and unfaithfulness stop the flow by disrupting the relationship. Israel's infidelity was constantly doing this throughout the Old Testament story, and the New Testament makes it plain that churches and Christians will lose blessings that would otherwise be theirs, should covenant fidelity be lacking in their lives." "On Covenant Theology," in Packer, *Celebrating the Saving Work of God*, 12.

<sup>175</sup>Packer, "Evangelical Foundations for Spirituality," in *Serving the People of God*, 263.

<sup>176</sup>See Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 83-84.

<sup>177</sup>Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 70.

## **Conclusion**

Following the pattern of the Old Testament, the new covenant consists of unconditional and conditional elements—a covenant relationship unilaterally initiated by God that carries a demand for obedience. In the new covenant, God fulfills the archetypal covenants of the Old Testament when Christ writes his law in the hearts and minds of the redeemed. God also fulfills his purpose of redemption by bringing people into communion and fellowship with him through union with Christ. In Christ and their union and communion with him, believers are declared right with God (imputed righteousness) yet are called to obedience and to grow in grace (imparted righteousness). Reformed understanding teaches that to be united with Christ is to receive the twofold grace of God in justification (forensic) and sanctification (transformative). Therefore, salvation consists of subjectivity in obedience and sanctification. In addition, Paul and John demonstrate that there is moral ramification to the Christian life because the grace of inner renewal (personal transformation) is inseparable from the free remission of sins, and Calvin insists that believers grow into one body with Christ by uniting with him. In this union, believers are both renewed and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. These dual qualities of grace are distinct yet inseparable because they flow from the same source, union with Christ.

Clearly, life in covenant with God entails human loyalty. Questions such as “What law now governs the new covenant community, the church of Jesus Christ?” and “Is the Mosaic law still binding to new covenant believers or does ‘the law of Christ’ replace or supersede the Mosaic law?” are still debated among scholars. Fundamentally, however, believers in Christ are in a covenant relationship with him and must be obedient

to that covenant. While God's salvation is utterly free and unconditional, it is also conditional because the covenant is mutual and requires mutual commitment. The fidelity God requires of his covenant people does not cease under Old or New dispensations, and even the absoluteness of the new covenant does not absolve the need for obedience or obligation. Rather, in continuity with the old, the new exhorts believers to keep God's law in gratitude for blessings received and in anticipation of future blessings.

## CHAPTER 7

### THEOLOGICAL SYNTHESIS

As discussed in earlier chapters, Calvin's understanding of the twofold grace of justification and sanctification as distinct yet inseparable in union with Christ was affirmed during the Reformed Orthodoxy by his successors, who expounded on his understanding by explaining the covenant bond as unilateral (unconditional) and bilateral/mutual (conditional). Historically, therefore, Reformed theology upholds God's covenants with humans as unilateral and bilateral, which undergirds the two chief salvific benefits of justification and sanctification. Moreover, as demonstrated in chapters 5 and 6, this Reformed understanding of the covenant is consistent with the Scriptural teaching that God relates to his human creatures in a covenantal relationship, having done so both before and after the fall. Apart from human negotiation and by his grace, God initiated the covenant at creation and has demonstrated his unconditional grace by establishing redemption to restore the broken relationship with his people. Moreover, although God's covenants with his people are under his lordship and control, the nature of this fellowship is bilateral and mutual, demanding that humans respond to him in love and obedience to enjoy full covenantal benefits. Covenants between God and humans are consequentially dynamic, unilateral in their establishment and bilateral in their administration or application. A strength of this Reformed understanding of the covenants is that in its exposition of the gospel it uncompromisingly insists on the free grace of justification in Christ and, without compromising this grace, declares that believers must be obedient in

salvation. In this exposition, Reformed theology affirms justification apart from works without diminishing the necessity for covenantal obedience in the form of good works in believers' lives. Therefore, contemporary debates on and challenges to the doctrine of justification (or the gospel itself) should examine this Reformed understanding of Calvin's *duplex-gratia* in union with Christ within a context of the unconditional and conditional covenant. Furthermore, the whole gospel must be taught because salvation begins in an absolute and bilateral covenant with God, given by his unconditional, justifying grace, and yet comes with binding conditions or obligations in sanctification.<sup>1</sup>

### **Imputation of Christ's Righteousness**

Views that deny the imputation of Christ's righteousness in justification do not teach the whole gospel. Currently, the evangelical church is challenged with a tendency to reject the traditional doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness or his obedience to the law on behalf of believers. For instance, scholars of the New Perspective on Paul deny or ignore this doctrine, insisting justification is primarily about ecclesiology instead of soteriology.<sup>2</sup> N. T. Wright is one scholar who rejects the imputation of Christ's active obedience for the reason that it "gives the impression of a legal transaction, a cold piece of business, almost a trick of thought performed by a God who is logical and correct but hardly one we would want to worship."<sup>3</sup> For Wright, justification is God's

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<sup>1</sup>See Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance—Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).

<sup>2</sup>See N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 119. He claims justification is about "being in or out of the covenant." It is "not a matter of how someone enters the community of true people of God, but of how you tell who belongs to that community." Cf. Wright, *Justification: God's Plan & Paul's Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 116, 131-32.

<sup>3</sup>Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 110. For more on his understanding of justification and denial of the doctrine of justification, see Wright, *Justification*.

declaration that we are in the covenant community,<sup>4</sup> and it does not include the imputation of Christ's righteousness because God's righteousness is his *covenantal faithfulness*, rather than his judgment or standards.<sup>5</sup> Wright sees a category mistake in claiming that a transferal of God's righteousness is a declaration of his righteousness, as if justice is transferred to a plaintiff in the law court to consequently declare the plaintiff innocent.<sup>6</sup> In other words, Wright claims the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness is legal fiction. He also claims that the gospel is the declaration of the message about Jesus that demonstrates the covenantal faithfulness of God because he "has dealt with sin, and upheld the helpless; and in the crucified Christ he has done so impartially. The gospel—not 'justification by faith,' but the message about Jesus—thus reveals the righteousness, that is, the covenant faithfulness, of God."<sup>7</sup> Explaining his perspective on justification, Wright contends "that those who believe in Jesus Christ are declared to be members of the true covenant family; which of course means that their sins are forgiven, since that was the purpose of the covenant. They are given the status of

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<sup>4</sup>See Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 122; Wright, *Justification*, 95-100.

<sup>5</sup>Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 96.

<sup>6</sup>Wright says, "If we use the language of the law court, it makes no sense whatever to say that the judge imputes, imparts, bequeaths, conveys or otherwise transfers his righteousness to either the plaintiff or the defendant. Righteousness is not an object, or substance or a gas which can be passed across the courtroom. For the judge to be righteous does not mean that the court has found in his favour. For the plaintiff or defendant to be righteous does not mean that he or she has tried the case properly or impartially. To imagine the defendant somehow receiving the judge's righteousness is simply a category mistake. That is not how the language works. . . . If and when God does act to vindicate his people, his people will then, metaphorically speaking, have the status of 'righteousness'. . . . *But the righteousness they have will not be God's own righteousness.* That makes no sense at all. God's own righteousness is his covenant faithfulness, because of which he will (Israel hopes) vindicate her, and bestow upon her the status of 'righteous', as the vindicated or acquitted defendant." Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 98-99 (emphasis original). Similarly, he says, it is "a straightforward category mistake . . . to suppose that Jesus 'obeyed the law' and so obtained 'righteousness' which could be reckoned to those who believe in him." Wright, *Justification*, 232.

<sup>7</sup>Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 129.

being ‘righteous’ in the metaphorical law court.”<sup>8</sup> Therefore, for Wright, although justification is expressed in forensic terms, forgiveness of sin is all that is needed to be declared righteous, and does not include the imputation of Christ’s obedience to believers. However, believers receive Christ’s righteousness by being united with him, because they are in him.<sup>9</sup> Christ’s work on behalf of believers constitutes the basis for the verdict that justification declares.<sup>10</sup>

### **Christ’s Twofold Obedience and the Law’s Twofold Requirement**

In its bond with Christ, the gospel must consist of a forensic declaration in relation to the twofold requirement of the law. This requirement includes “penal sanctions and positive demands” for sinful humans.<sup>11</sup> In their guilt, humans are subject to the penalty and demands of the law even though they cannot live up to God’s standard of righteousness in it.<sup>12</sup> As Murray states, God’s law “demands not only the full discharge of its precepts but also the infliction of penalty for all infractions and shortcomings.”<sup>13</sup> In other words, God’s law requires complete obedience (obligation) and punishment for

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<sup>8</sup>Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 129.

<sup>9</sup>For a defense of the doctrine of imputation against N. T. Wright’s rejection, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *Faith Alone: The Doctrine of Justification: What the Reformers Taught and Why It Still Matters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 253-61; J.V. Fesko, *Justification: Understanding the Classic Reformed Doctrine* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2008), 241-63.

<sup>10</sup>See Cornelis P. Venema, *The Gospel of Free Acceptance in Christ: An Assessment of the Reformation and “New Perspectives” on Paul* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2006), 243-50; Venema, *Getting the Gospel Right: Assessing the Reformation and New Perspectives on Paul* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2006), 80-83.

<sup>11</sup>John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1955), 21. Cf. Andrew A. Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought: A Study in the Reformed Tradition to the Westminster Assembly* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 291-92.

<sup>12</sup>See Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought*, 291-92; Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 21-22.

<sup>13</sup>Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 21.

violation. As a righteous judge, God does not allow his law to be broken without punishment, and he upholds his law by demanding perfect obedience. If in his death Christ served only as the substitutionary sacrifice to satisfy the penalty of the law, his substitution would be insufficient because humanity would also be obligated to perfectly obey God's law. Matthew Barrett and Michael Haykin support this notion, arguing that the "pardon of sin frees us from the 'obligation unto punishment,' but it does not satisfy the necessary obedience to the law's demands."<sup>14</sup> However, Christ serves humans beyond a substitutionary death:

For believers to be restored to favor and right standing with God, they require a Mediator who assumes all their obligations under the law, both preceptive and penal, to be justified. The entire obedience of Christ, which includes his passive endurance of the law's penalty and his active fulfillment of the law's requirements, constitutes the righteousness imputed to believers. By virtue of obedience and satisfaction, Christ merited the gift of justification and eternal life for his people, and thereby redressed the demerit of Adam's (and their own) sin.<sup>15</sup>

Both Christ's passive obedience in enduring the penalty of the law and his active obedience in fulfilling the law are necessary to meet the twofold consequence of punishment (delivery from punishment) and obedience (positive requirements) for the right to eternal life. Certainly, Christ's active obedience to the law (obeying the law's precepts on behalf of sinners) is necessary because human beings cannot obey the law perfectly due to original corruption. Out of necessity, justification is grounded in the active and passive obedience of Christ; both his substitutionary death and his life of perfect obedience to God's law are imputed as gifts to humans at justification. Therefore,

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<sup>14</sup>Matthew Barrett and Michael A. G. Haykin, *Owen on the Christian Life: Living for the Glory of God in Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 213.

<sup>15</sup>Cornelis P. Venema, *Christ and Covenant Theology: Essays on Election, Republication, and the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2017), 431.

the gospel is good news for sinners because they receive the gifts of Christ's active and passive obedience, which are foundational to God's acceptance of them. Consequently, although he sees perfect obedience is required to be right with God, since he denies the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's active obedience, he cannot make sense of God's demand for perfect obedience.<sup>16</sup>

### **Objective and Subjective: Christ *for* Us and Christ *in* Us**

Similarly, as discussed in chapter 1, scholars such as Robert Gundry reject the doctrine of imputation because, as he claims, it mitigates Christian obedience. He argues that the texts used to support the imputation of Christ's righteousness actually do not teach the imputation of Christ's righteousness. Moreover, he argues that "*Paul does not match the imputation of our sins to Christ with an imputation of Christ's righteousness to us believers because he (Paul) wants to emphasize the obedient life of righteousness that we are supposed to live—and indeed will live if we are true believers—apart from the Old Testament law, under which Christ was born, and to emphasize the judgment of our works at the end.*"<sup>17</sup> In his concern about the obedient life of the Christian, Gundry compromises the gracious gospel by supporting Christian obedience or faith as a basis for one being reckoned as righteous. This view does not balance the objective and the

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<sup>16</sup>Wright sees perfect obedience is required to be right with God: "'works of the law' will never justify, because what the law does is to reveal sin. Nobody can keep it perfectly." Moreover, he says a reason why "works of the law cannot justify" because "God has redefined his people through the faithfulness of the Messiah." Wright, *Justification*, 118.

<sup>17</sup>Robert H. Gundry, "The Nonimputation of Christ's Righteousness," in *Justification: What's at Stake in the Current Debates*, ed. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 44 (emphasis original). For critical evaluations of Gundry's view, which offer defense for the traditional Reformation view of the "Imputation of Christ's Righteousness," see D. A. Carson, "The Vindication of Imputation: On Fields of Discourse and Semantic Fields," in Husbands and Treier, *Justification*, 46-80; John Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ: Should We Abandon the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002).

subjective aspects of the gospel that a proper understanding of the unconditional/conditional aspects of the covenants gives believers.

In contrast, the understanding that the gospel consists of both imputation and impartation of righteousness, or forensic and transformative dimensions, in a covenantal fellowship with God in union with Christ supports the objective and subjective aspects of salvation without compromising them. Explaining that the gospel consists of objective and subjective perspectives, John Frame states, “The gospel is good news for the whole person, the subjective as well as the objective. It gives us the freedom to praise God, both for what he has done *for* us and what he has done (and continues to do) *in* us. . . . In the gospel, God discloses his law, complete redemption, and the renewal we need to live the redeemed life.”<sup>18</sup> Because the gospel applies to the whole person, God accomplishes it for sinners objectively and subjectively. Richard Gaffin also understands the objective and the subjective in the gospel: “Christ ‘in us’ is also and ever Christ ‘for us.’ He is in us only as he is also for us, and he is for us only as he is also in us.”<sup>19</sup> God’s work by Christ consists of his objective work that is once-for-all and his on-going work ‘in us’ by the Spirit. On God’s subjective work, Michael Allen specifically argues, “*While participation in God is the goal of the gospel, justification is the ground of that sanctifying fellowship.*”<sup>20</sup> Objectively, forensic imputation is the unilateral ground for the gospel

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<sup>18</sup>John M. Frame, *Theology in Three Dimensions: A Guide to Triperspectivalism and Its Significance* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2017), 37. Similarly, Frame says, “We cannot separate the objective and the subjective. Objective truths are subjectively apprehended. We cannot have objective knowledge, confidence, or assurance unless we are subjectively enabled to perceive what God has objectively given us.” Frame, *John Frame’s Selected Shorter Writings*, 3:196.

<sup>19</sup>Richard B. Gaffin, *By Faith, Not By Sight: Paul and the Order of Salvation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013), 125.

<sup>20</sup>Michael Allen, *Justification and the Gospel: Understanding the Contexts and Controversies* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 37 (emphasis original).

*telos* of participation in God.

Moreover, the covenantal relationship with God in the gospel consists of objective and subjective dimensions that are not in opposition and are not meant to be separated. As a unilateral and bilateral relationship in Christ, salvation consists of *both* God's work of Christ *for* believers that is once-for-all and Christ's work *in* them that is continuous in their Christian lives.<sup>21</sup> This understanding upholds the imputation of Christ's righteousness in justification without de-emphasizing the need for believers' obedience. Believers are saved solely by the work of Christ (justification), and yet the work of believers (sanctification) does not absolve. This work is necessary because salvation in Christ, or union with Christ, is undergirded by a divine-human covenantal relationship that God unconditionally bestows upon sinners by his grace while simultaneously imposing obligations upon them. In other words, God's free grace of justification does not free his covenant people as antinomians, but to obey him as covenant Lord and his law as prescribed in the covenant document (the Bible) willingly and wholeheartedly. By contrast, any interpretation of the gospel that takes the "either/or" approach inevitably leads to errors. Therefore, although Gundry is correct in supporting the need of obedience in Christian life, but he does not adequately think about the

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<sup>21</sup>J. Todd Billings argues divine and human agency are not divided in salvation: "In light of Augustine's insight about grace derived from the incarnation, we find that to be fully human is to be in harmony and obedient communion with God. Thus, any partitive attempts to divide salvation between God and human beings are destined to fail. Rather, God's action by the Spirit in the human does not threaten the human's own agency but actually enables it. When humans are empowered by the Spirit to live in Christ—when they act 'in Christ' rather than 'in themselves'—they are being restored as the children of God they were created to be." J. Todd Billings, *Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 60-61. Similarly, Billings says, "It is deeply pastoral, integrated with concerns for a Christian life as one of voluntary gratitude. Contrary to common criticisms of Calvin, it shows how Calvin refused to see divinity as a polar opposite to humanity, but saw union with Christ as the restoration of primal communion and differentiated union with God. This soteriological restoration does not set divine and human agency at odds with each other, but conceives of the uniting communion with Christ through the Spirit as involving the healing and activating of the primal, created nature of humans." Billings, "John Calvin's Soteriology: On the Multifaceted 'Sum' of the Gospel," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 11, no. 4 (2009), 442.

unconditional/conditional nature of the covenants and thus fails to maintain a proper relation between imputed and imparted righteousness and the objective and subjective aspects of the gospel. The proper understanding of the doctrine of the imputation in unconditional/conditional covenants does not foster antinomianism.

### **Confounding Justification and Sanctification**

Similar to views denying the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness, any understanding that conflates justification and sanctification does not account for the full range of biblical teaching. As discussed in chapter 2, while Antinomians separate justification and sanctification, legalists confuse the two.<sup>22</sup> The New Perspective on Paul not only rejects the doctrine of imputation but also teaches final justification by works, thereby confounding justification and sanctification in salvation. For instance, in his "covenantal nomism," Wright teaches that one enters the covenant by grace but remains in it by keeping the law. He understands that justification is a process that involves "both future . . . and present,"<sup>23</sup> arguing for an *initial* justification at the present and a *final* justification on the Day of Judgment according to works: "When this [justification] is cashed out in terms of the underlying covenantal theme, it means that they are declared, in the present, to be what they will be seen to be in the future, namely the true people of God. Present justification declares, on the basis of faith, what future

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<sup>22</sup>See Robert J. McKelvey, "That Error and Pillar of Antinomianism: Eternal Justification," in *Drawn into Controversie: Reformed Theological Diversity and Debates Within Seventeenth-Century British Puritanism*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin and Mark Jones (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 223-62; Mark Jones, *Antinomianism: Reformed Theology's Unwelcome Guest?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013); Fesko, *Justification*, 31-32.

<sup>23</sup>N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 336 (emphasis original).

justification will affirm publicly . . . on the basis of the entire life.”<sup>24</sup> It seems that Wright holds to two verdicts, the first in the present is based upon the work of Christ and the second in the future is based upon the Spirit-produced works of the believers. In this understanding, obedient works are the *basis* of final justification rather than merely its evidence. Therefore, while Wright insists God’s righteousness is his covenantal faithfulness and one enters the covenant by his grace, the *basis* of final justification is the believer’s covenantal faithfulness/obedience. By contrast, Cornelis Venema argues, “Paul’s teaching that works are absolutely excluded as a basis for the justification of believers is simply incompatible with the idea that (final) justification will ultimately be based upon the works of believers.”<sup>25</sup> In his covenantal nomism, while Wright is correct in insisting believers must do good works to be justified, but his articulation seems to be a form of legalism that salvation involves believers’ cooperation with God’s grace in producing a *basis* for their acceptance.<sup>26</sup>

However, later Wright nuanced his phrase “on the basis of” to mean “in accordance with” works.<sup>27</sup> By this nuancing, Thomas Schreiner claims “that in using the

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<sup>24</sup>Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 129. Similarly, he remarks “This declaration, this vindication, occurs twice. It occurs in the future, as we have seen, on the basis of the entire life a person has led in the power of the Spirit—that is, it occurs on the basis of ‘works’ in Paul’s redefined sense. And near the heart of Paul’s theology, it occurs in the present *as an anticipation of that future verdict*, when someone, responding in believing obedience to the call of the gospel.” Wright, “New Perspectives on Paul” in *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 260 (emphasis original).

<sup>25</sup>Venema, *The Gospel of Free Acceptance in Christ*, 285-86.

<sup>26</sup>For critiques on the New Perspectives on Paul, see Robert J. Cara, *Cracking the Foundation of the New Perspective on Paul: Covenantal Nomism Versus Reformed Covenantal Theology* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2017); Guy Prentiss Waters, *Justification and the New Perspectives on Paul: A Review and Response* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2004); Venema, *The Gospel of Free Acceptance in Christ*; Venema, *Getting the Gospel Right*.

<sup>27</sup>Wright was asked what he means by we will be justified “on the basis of the whole life lived.” It seems he did not answer the question directly. See Trevin Wax, The Gospel Coalition, November 19, 2007. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/trevin-wax-interview-with-nt-wright-full-transcript/>. Moreover, Thomas Schreiner asked him a similar question in a panel discussion at the ETS on

word [basis] Wright does not mean that human works are the ultimate basis of one's right standing with God."<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, although Wright discusses the doctrine of justification in a covenantal context, his model of covenant theology fails to properly distinguish between forensic and transformative grace or God's unilateral grace in justification and believers' obedience in sanctification.<sup>29</sup> He could avoid the ambiguity of the view that he argues for, if he fully grasps the unconditional/conditional nature of the covenants that manifests God's covenant faithfulness and simultaneously binds the elects to covenant obedience without compromising the monergistic nature of salvation.

### **Faith and Works**

Similar to the challenge of the New Perspective on Paul in confounding justification and sanctification, the struggle to reconcile the necessity of faith, obedience, and good works in salvation is undeniable. As noted in chapter 2, controversies over justification in church history have revealed such struggles and, in particular, how faith, good works, and obedience interplay in salvation.<sup>30</sup> Those scholars who deny the imputation of Christ's righteousness and confound justification and sanctification in order

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November 19, 2010. Wright conceded by nuancing his phrase "on the basis of" to mean "in accordance with" works. See Collin Hansen, The Gospel Coalition, November 19, 2010, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/a-justification-debate-long-overdue/>; Denny Burk, November, 20, 2010, <http://www.dennyburk.com/n-t-wright-on-justification-at-ets/>.

<sup>28</sup>Schreiner, *Faith Alone*, 242n9.

<sup>29</sup>See Michael Horton's assessment of N.T. Wright's view of the covenant in "Engaging N. T. Wright and John Piper" in *Justified: Modern Reformation Essays on the Doctrine of Justification*, ed. Ryan Glomsrud and Michael S. Horton (Escondido, CA: Modern Reformation, 2010), 11-32.

<sup>30</sup>John Piper advocates that "a detailed defense still needs to be done on the historic Protestant view of the relationship between faith and obedience, so that the two are not conflated in the instrumentality of justification, as many in biblical-theological circles are doing these days." John Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ: Should We Abandon the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 42n2. For response to Piper's proposal, see Samuel E. Waldron, *Faith, Obedience, and Justification: Current Evangelical Departures from Sola Fide* (Palmdale, CA: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2006).

to promote believers' obedience in salvation are similar to scholars who see obedience in faith and good works as groundings of justification. For instance, Paul Rainbow claims salvation is a future goal that depends on obedient faith:

After we are made partakers of Christ's righteousness of his Spirit, however, salvation remains a goal to be attained in the future (Rom. 5:9-10), righteousness in the fullest sense is still a matter of hope (Gal. 5:5). The dual condition for finishing well is perseverance in faith (Col. 1:23) and in doing good (Rom. 2:7, 10, 13, 26; 6:22; 8:13), or, expressed as a single, compound condition, 'faith working through love' (Gal. 5:6) or the 'work of faith' (1 Thes. 1:3; 2 Thes. 1:11).<sup>31</sup>

Moreover, he argues although "faith is the primary instrument by which we accede to divine grace," because it is "dynamic and sets us in action as we journey toward the end," good deeds are not merely "the demonstration of saving faith and the sign of that righteousness which God has already given" but are also "instrumental in meeting the outstanding condition for the culminating moment of justification. It is a second condition in its own right besides faith, because God requires holiness just as surely as he requires faith for salvation, and will use good works at the judgment as the index of faith's authenticity."<sup>32</sup> Rainbow seems to mix the categories of faith as the instrument for justification and good deeds as fruit resulting from it. Even as he recognizes obedience as a fruit of grace, because of "its divine root," he claims, "deeds do not form a separate condition wholly independent of faith."<sup>33</sup> His understanding differs from the classic Reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone.<sup>34</sup> While faith and good works are

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<sup>31</sup>Paul A. Rainbow, *The Way of Salvation: The Role of Christian Obedience in Justification* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2005), 206.

<sup>32</sup>Rainbow, *The Way of Salvation*, 206.

<sup>33</sup>Rainbow, *The Way of Salvation*, 206.

<sup>34</sup>Rainbow acknowledges his argument differs from the traditional understanding: "Clearly the picture I present differs from the classic Lutheran/Reformed doctrine which represents future salvation as unconditionally based on past justification, good works in the meantime being, at most, evidential of the definitive saving event having taken place, so that the coming judgment will dole out only rewards to

necessary concomitants in salvation, good works are evidence of saving faith, and as evidence, are distinct from faith.

As discussed in chapter 4, in historical Reformed theology, while faith and works are conditions of the covenants, they are not meritorious. Moreover, faith is the condition for justification, but it is only an instrumental cause and is also a gift of God. In support of the non-meritorious nature of faith and works, the Westminster Larger Catechism 73 asks, “How does faith justify a sinner in the sight of God?” Responding, the Catechism declares that “faith justifies a sinner in the sight of God only as a tool by which the sinner receives Christ and puts Christ’s righteousness into effect, not because of any other grace that accompanies faith and not because of any good works that result from faith. Nor is it the case that the grace of faith or any action springing from it is imputed to the sinner for his justification.” Faith in justification is simply an instrument by which believers receive God’s grace passively, and it is not accompanied by any other graces. Furthermore, the Westminster Confession of Faith 11:1 denies justification on the basis of “imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them [believers], as their righteousness.”<sup>35</sup> Guy Waters concurs, stating that “the act of believing . . . does not constitute our righteousness in justification, nor ought we to confound our faith in justification with faithfulness. Paul consistently argues that we are justified solely on the ground of Christ’s merits. Faith is merely the instrument by which the righteousness of Christ is appropriated. Faith, then, in its office of justification, is

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believers whose eternal destiny is already settled.” Rainbow, *The Way of Salvation*, 206.

<sup>35</sup>The Westminster Confession of Faith, 11:1.

entirely receptive.”<sup>36</sup> Therefore, justifying faith and evangelical obedience are distinct in the doctrine of justification. Any understanding that confuses them is deficient in presenting a whole gospel.

Nevertheless, saving faith must be living faith that demonstrates itself by producing good works out of obedience to God. Believers are not justified by good works, but they also cannot claim to be justified if their lives do not manifest the fruit of justifying faith—works of obedience.<sup>37</sup> In this understanding, faith and works are distinct yet are companions.<sup>38</sup> Faith alone saves, but the faith that saves must work itself out in love.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, as Lyle Bierma argues, “Both faith and works of obedience are the fruit not of our own efforts but of the renewing power of the Spirit within us. . . . we can fulfill our obligations in the covenant only because the Holy Spirit stimulates us to do so.”<sup>40</sup> Therefore, faith and works of obedience in believers’ lives are evidence of the grace of God. In addition, while obedient faith to God is required in a covenantal relationship, it cannot be the basis of believers’ acceptance by God. Richard Baxter erroneously claims

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<sup>36</sup>Waters, *Justification and The New Perspectives On Paul*, 188-89.

<sup>37</sup>The general consensus of evangelical scholars on faith and works, respective to Paul and James, is that they are not mutually exclusive. Peter T. O’Brien says, “The ground of justification lies not in works, nor in faith, but ‘in the revelation of God’s grace in Christ embraced by faith’. Works are indispensable for they demonstrate the presence of true faith and are evidence of one’s being united with Christ in his death and resurrection. Yet even these works are acceptable to God only as they are wrought in Christ and on account of his death and resurrection.” Peter T. O’Brien, “Justification in Paul and Some Crucial Issues of the Last Two Decades,” in *Right with God: Justification in the Bible and the World*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 94.

<sup>38</sup>See Gaffin, *By Faith, Not by Sight*, 114-18.

<sup>39</sup>Norman Shepherd is charged with mixing faith and obedience in his exposition of justification by faith, thereby placing obedient faith as the basis for justification. However, this explicit claim is absent from two of his works: Norman Shepherd, *The Call of Grace: How the Covenant Illuminates Salvation and Evangelism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2000); Shepherd, “Justification by Faith Alone,” *Reformation and Revival* 11, no. 2 (Spring 2002): 75-90. In the latter, he attempts to describe justifying faith is not dead but is living and active. In the former, he contends that the grace of the gospel consists of a calling that does not confuse the categories of justification and sanctification.

<sup>40</sup>Lyle D. Bierma, “Federal Theology in the Sixteenth Century: Two Traditions?” *Westminster Theological Journal* 45 (1983): 315.

that obedient faith plays a role in one's justification because although obedience and good works are necessary for salvation in the sanctification process, they are not conditions for justification. Therefore, obedience and good works are necessary for salvation, but they are distinct from faith as the instrument for justification and also do not supply a basis for it. Nevertheless, since salvation in a covenantal bond in Christ consists of the inseparable benefits of forgiveness of sin and moral transformation, the justified consequently produce obedient works. As they are transformed and sanctified, the justified come into communion and fellowship with God to be renewed into the image of his Son. Thus, when believers receive the imputed righteousness of Christ upon their salvation, it is once-for-all, and they are imparted righteousness from beginning to end as they produce good works. Therefore, Rainbow and those who mix faith and obedience are similar to Baxter's neonomianism in insisting believers are not justified by faith alone but also by faithfulness. They fail to distinguish that by the indwelling presence of the Spirit believers are justified by faith alone and consequently produce the fruit of good works. Thus, by confusing faith and good works, they fail to maintain a gracious gospel in the unconditional/conditional nature of the covenants.

### **Law and Gospel: Covenant of Works and Covenant of Grace**

#### **The Covenant Theology of Scholars at Westminster Seminary California**

Moreover, similar to teachings of Legalism that confound justification and sanctification, teachings that stress an antithesis between the law and the gospel in justification do not support the whole gospel. For instance, although Horton and scholars at Westminster Seminary California recognize the mutual, bilateral covenant requires

obligations,<sup>41</sup> they emphasize an antithesis between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace for the doctrine of justification. While they rightly see a law/gospel distinction in justification, their antithetical emphasis does not present the full scope of biblical teaching. It tends to cause suspicion that salvation can be obtained without moral renovation (renewal) in Christian obedience. Although they also see the distinction and inseparability for justification and sanctification in union with Christ, their stress on the law/gospel antithesis misses a piece of the whole.

### **Law and Gospel**

The distinction and inseparability of the twofold grace in the covenantal bond with Christ coincides with the historical Reformed theology's law and gospel distinction. As discussed in chapters 3 and 4, both Calvin and the Reformed orthodox theologians maintain the law and the gospel are not in antithesis. Moreover, the law and gospel distinction has been applied to a redemptive-historical contrast between the time of the law and the time of the gospel. At other times, the law and gospel distinction is understood in terms of the covenant of works versus the covenant of grace. In addition, in regard to justification, the law and the gospel are antithetical.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, Reformed theology supports harmony between the law and the gospel (ultimacy of grace and law): the gospel includes the law and the law includes the gospel.<sup>43</sup> How? Because present in

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<sup>41</sup>Michael Horton, *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 148-52.

<sup>42</sup>Mark Jones, *Antinomianism: Reformed Theology's Unwelcome Guest?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013), 59.

<sup>43</sup>J. Ligon Duncan argues, "It [covenant theology] accents God's love, but not at the expense of his holiness; his grace, but not at the expense of his law; his free gift of salvation, but not at the expense of his costly provision of redemption. Covenant theology reminds us again that the communion of God with his people is not only gracious but just." J. Ligon Duncan, preface to *The Federal Theology: Its Import and*

God's covenants with humans, the divine law expresses his character and will, and he ultimately upholds it in believers' sanctification as they are obedient to it.

### **Continuity in Obedience between the Covenants of Works and Grace**

Certainly, both discontinuity and continuity exist between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. For example, the prelapsarian covenant, or covenant of works, and the postlapsarian covenant grant life by opposite means. The first covenant is centered on the condition of perfect human obedience; the second is promised to those who trust Christ by faith. Despite their contrast, they are similar in that they both demand obedience to the covenant head and his divine law. Indeed, the stability of the divine law connects the covenant of works and the covenant of grace through fellowship with God. The divine law reveals his essential attributes of holiness and righteousness and serves as the basis for humans to fellowship with a holy and righteous God.<sup>44</sup> Commenting on the law's stability and promise within a covenantal scheme, Heber Carlos de Campos explains,

Seventeenth-century federal theology commonly stated that the law remains constant and that the gospel is not a salvation disconnected from the prelapsarian dispensation. Though the covenant of works was frustrated in us, its requirements still stand, and Christ had to undergo both its requirement as well as its judgment. Thus, the character of the Judge and His law remains immutable, while the glorious character of the second Adam is to have performed what the first Adam did not do.<sup>45</sup>

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*Its Regulative Influence* by John L. Girardeau, ed. J. Ligon Duncan (Greenville, SC: Reformed Academic Press, 1994), 6.

<sup>44</sup>Richard A. Muller, "The Covenant of Works and the Stability of Divine Law in Seventeenth-Century Reformed Orthodoxy: A Study in the Theology of Herman Witsius and Wilhelmus à Brakel," in *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 175-89.

<sup>45</sup>Heber Carlos de Campos, *Doctrine in Development: Johannes Piscator and Debates over Christ's Active Obedience* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), 259-60.

Even after the fall, God’s law—first written on the human heart in the covenant of works—remained immutable, “a perfect rule of righteousness.” As such, it was republished in the Ten Commandments for the Israelites and again in the new covenant. The law’s stability shows that, rather than abolishing it, God has upheld it by Christ’s perfect obedience and subsequent obedience in believers.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, the divine law ultimately fulfills in the new covenant by the Spirit writing it on human hearts as a “rule of life” because of the law’s stability. Notably, even in the new, better, covenant, the gospel includes law, demanding human obedience to the covenant.

In God’s covenants, the gospel and the law are his grace and his mandates. By his grace, he gives his law and its commands to those who are in covenant with him so that his saving grace guides their conduct.<sup>47</sup> Thus, God offers promises and blessings yet demands obedience from his covenant partners. Elaborating on the gospel-law relationship within God’s covenants, Frame states, “God proclaims that he has redeemed his people (gospel), and then asks them to behave as his covenant people (law). Since both gospel and law are aspects of God’s covenants, that pattern pervades Scripture.”<sup>48</sup> Because this pattern is pervasive, it applies to Old and New Testament covenants, with Christ as the mediator in the New through the covenant of grace. By his obedience, Christ fulfills the conditions of the covenant of works, abrogating the law of its power to condemn and accuse but sustaining it as a “rule of life.” Understanding the law serves a

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<sup>46</sup>Venema, *Christ and Covenant Theology*, 431-32.

<sup>47</sup>John Murray claims there is no conflict between law and love in biblical ethics. Love fulfills the law and yet needs the law as a guide to gospel obedience. See John Murray, *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1957), 21-26.

<sup>48</sup>John M. Frame, *John Frame’s Selected Shorter Writings* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2016), 3:191.

governing purpose for God’s people, von Rohr claims, “constituting that directive were the mandates of the Old Testament and New Testament alike, with the ancient Law seen as adopted and renewed by Christ.”<sup>49</sup> This adoption and renewal lead the law to play a radically different role in justification and sanctification within the new covenant:

Justification has removed the weight of the law on believers. There can be no return to the forensic character of the law in sanctification, lest the completed work of Christ be undermined. . . . The law is no longer the basis by which our place in the covenant with God is based. Accordingly the law does not return to its judicial function in sustaining that place in the covenant with God. In sanctification the law functions in a nonforensic fashion. It no longer has an accusatory or a rewarding function. Believers belong forensically to Christ (in justification) by virtue of which they now stand in a different (i.e., nonlegal) relationship to the law.<sup>50</sup>

For the justified, the law no longer has the power of condemnation because of its nonlegal status. The WCF confirms how the law affects the justified in the new covenant: “true believers be not under the law, as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified, or condemned.”<sup>51</sup> By contrast, “the law is now the source of wisdom in the life of believers. It is pedagogical rather than judicial in its function.”<sup>52</sup> Even Horton and his colleagues at Westminster Seminary California who are committed to the law/gospel distinction, or the distinction “between the covenant of works as law and the covenant of grace as gospel,”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>John von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 75.

<sup>50</sup>Richard Lints, “Living by Faith—Alone?: Reformed Responses to Antinomianism,” in *Sanctification: Explorations in Theology and Practice*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 49.

<sup>51</sup>Westminster Confession of Faith states: “Although true believers be not under the law as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified or condemned; yet is it of great use to them, as well as to others; in that, as a rule of life, informing them of the will of God and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly” (19:6).

<sup>52</sup>Lints, “Living by Faith—Alone?,” 49.

<sup>53</sup>R. Scott Clark, ed., *Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry: Essays by the Faculty of Westminster Seminary California* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2007), 18-19. Cf. Michael Horton claims, “*The deepest distinction in Scripture is not between the Old and New Testaments but between the covenants of law and the covenants of promise that run throughout both.* The two covenant traditions are distinguished in form and content, even throughout the same unfolding history of redemption.” Michael

insist that “in its first use, the law thunders forth from heaven as the word of the judge. In its third use, it directs, reproveth, and exhorts us as the Father’s loving hand on our shoulder.”<sup>54</sup> In respect to justification, the law is antithetical to the gospel in its first use, “but in respect to sanctification, the law belongs to the gospel as it is enlivened by the Spirit who sanctifies believers in the way of obedience.”<sup>55</sup> Moreover, in its third use, the law is not antithetical to the gospel but serves as the moral guide for believers’ lives. Thus, there is no absolute antithesis between the law and the gospel in believers’ lives.<sup>56</sup> The justified do not appeal to the law to seek God’s favor, but they are called to be renewed through obedience to the law.

In this renewal, God’s covenantal grace restores and transforms the justified so they increasingly submit to the covenant Lord. Therefore, although the law and the gospel, or the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, are distinct, they are not in direct opposition in God’s original design. They have always been complementary in God’s covenants, and since the fall, God has fully harmonized the two in the new covenant by the Spirit writing the law on human hearts. Therefore, the Bible as a whole is both law and gospel, which Frame asserts: “In both law and gospel, then, God proclaims his saving works, and he demands that his people respond by obeying his commands. The term *law* and *gospel* differ in emphasis, but they overlap and intersect. They present the

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Horton, “Engaging N. T. Wright and John Piper,” in Glomsrud and Horton, *Justified*, 17 (emphasis original); Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 149.

<sup>54</sup>Michael Horton, *Calvin on the Christian Life: Glorifying and Enjoying God Forever*, ed. Stephen J. Nichols and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 171.

<sup>55</sup>Venema, *Christ and Covenant Theology*, 430-31.

<sup>56</sup>Gaffin, *By Faith, Not by Sight*, 114-18.

whole Word of God from different perspectives.”<sup>57</sup> God’s gracious covenant requires obedience, but rather than adhering to “do this and live” (works), believers are alive in Christ and are guided to “live and do this” (grace).

Given the historical Reformed understanding that harmonizes the law and the gospel, if the emphasis on an antithesis between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace by scholars at Westminster Seminary California does not weaken the demand of believers’ obedience (sanctification) or encourage antinomianism, it at least insufficiently affirms the Reformers’ teaching on the inseparability of justification and sanctification as well as Reformed covenant theology’s teaching on the unilateral and bilateral or unconditional and conditional character of the covenant of grace. Therefore, what they desire in the end could be better explained by a better grasp of the covenants.

### **The Whole Gospel and Original Sin: Guilt and Corruption**

The whole gospel must consist of justification and sanctification as remedies for original sin. This twofold grace received in union with Christ correlates to the twofold catastrophe from humanity’s solidarity with Adam. This twofold catastrophe comprises what is often called original sin: (1) imputation of guilt and (2) pollution of sin or corruption of human nature.<sup>58</sup> Regarding the first, Hopkins states, “Adam’s sin is imputed to our condemnation, only because we covenanted in him, and not merely because we

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<sup>57</sup>Frame, *John Frame’s Selected Shorter Writings*, 3:190.

<sup>58</sup>See Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1992), 1:629-43; Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service: God, Man, and Christ*, trans. Bartel Elshout, ed. Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 1992), 1:381-94; Ezekiel Hopkins, *The Doctrine of the Two Covenants: Wherein the Nature of Original Sin Is Explained and St. Paul and St. James Reconciled in the Great Article of Justification* (London: Forgotten Books, 2015), 71-80; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 232-33, 244-49; Michael Allen, *Sanctification*, ed. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 123-28.

descended from him.”<sup>59</sup> On the second, Hopkins refers to “the loss and privation of the image of God.”<sup>60</sup> Due to humans’ covenant relationship with Adam, they partake in original sin, are imputed with guilt from his sin, and abide in corruption resulting from the guilt.<sup>61</sup> Elaborating on the twofold catastrophe, Barrett points out that “while original guilt is a legal concept involving one’s status, original corruption or pollution is a moral concept meaning that man’s moral nature has been corrupted after the fall as a result of imputed guilt.”<sup>62</sup> Due to original sin, therefore, humans are guilty and deserving of condemnation because they are “liable to punishment for the violation of a law or a moral requirement”<sup>63</sup> and sin has polluted and corrupted their moral character and faculties so they cannot live up to God’s moral standards. Not surprisingly, the consequence of original sin leads to twofold need: satisfying the penalty of the law and redeeming humans from their depraved state. Only the redemptive work of Christ as mediator can meet this twofold need, which is best understood in terms of covenants.

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<sup>59</sup>Hopkins, *The Doctrine of the Two Covenants*, 75.

<sup>60</sup>Hopkins, *The Doctrine of the Two Covenants*, 72. To clarify this point, Hopkins adds “The clarity of our understandings, the obedience of our wills, the order of our affections, the perfect harmony of the whole man in the subjection of his inferior faculties to his superior, and all unto God, being utterly lost and renounced; so that now we are become both unable and averse to every thing that is good. Besides this, it is commonly affirmed, that there is some positive malignant quality in original sin, namely, a violent propension and strong bent of the whole man unto what is evil and sinful” (72).

<sup>61</sup>In Reformed theology, original sin consists of two aspects: guilt and corruption (or pollution): “Guilt is a judicial and legal term, concept, or category describing man’s relationship to the law of God. Guilt means that man has broken and violated God’s holy law and is therefore liable to be punished, as was the case with Adam in Genesis 3. In regard to original sin, Calvinists have affirmed the hereditary nature of both guilt (*reatus*) and corruption (*vitium*). Original sin means that guilt and corruption have spread to all men. Exactly how original sin is transmitted is debated, but Calvinists have traditionally argued that the guilt of Adam’s sin is imputed to all of mankind, since Adam was acting as our federal head or representative when he sinned (Rom. 5:12-21). The doctrine of original guilt is supported by passages such as Psalm 51:1-2; Romans 5:14-18; and 1 Corinthians 15:22-45. As Paul says, ‘one trespass led to condemnation for all men’ (Rom. 5:18) and ‘by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners’ (Rom. 5:19).” Matthew Barrett, *Salvation by Grace: The Case for Effectual Calling and Regeneration* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013), 38.

<sup>62</sup>Barrett, *Salvation by Grace*, 38.

<sup>63</sup>Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 232.

## Twofold Righteousness and Original Sin

Justification, or being declared righteous in Christ, is God's solution to sinners' first problem, yet salvation in Christ does not end here. The problem of human depravity or corrupted human natures remains. As Johnson claims, God has solved this problem: "The biblical doctrine of sanctification makes clear that God has made provision for this aspect of our fallen condition as well. . . . God not only declares us righteous in Christ, he also makes us righteous in Christ. Sanctification tells us that God will not leave us in our polluted, depraved condition, for he *has* promised us that he has healed us, and *will* heal us, in Jesus Christ."<sup>64</sup> In addition, Christ's obedience to the law on the believer's behalf does not eliminate the need to obey the law. By contrast, Christ's active obedience in fulfilling the demand for righteousness establishes God's later work of restoration and transformation because fellowship with God requires perfect obedience, which his covenant people cannot fulfill alone.<sup>65</sup> As Allen states, "The gospel does not simply speak of God taking the place of the human. . . . that substitutionary work serves as a foundation for God's later work of indwelling and transforming the human from within. The covenant reminds us of, and redemption does not undo but fulfills, God's design to dwell with human partners."<sup>66</sup> Christ's active obedience in obeying God's law on behalf of believers serves as the basis for him to work through the Spirit to indwell and renew the corrupted human nature, thus enabling them to be

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<sup>64</sup>Marcus Peter Johnson, *One with Christ: An Evangelical Theology of Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 117 (emphasis original).

<sup>65</sup>Christ's active obedience is the necessary basis for God's transformative work because the latter is non-meritorious and cannot be meritorious because of its imperfection. For this reason, it has to build on Christ's perfect and complete obedience.

<sup>66</sup>Allen, *Sanctification*, 242.

obedient to his law.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, in God's plan of salvation, Christ's obedience and human obedience are not in opposition. The former is a foundation for the latter. This is best accounted for in the nature of covenants. The bilateral and mutual covenant of grace not only affirms the sufficiency of Christ's work as maintained by the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone but also demands human responsibility in covenant obedience.

Christ's twofold representational and substitutionary obedience not only meets the twofold requirement of the divine law and also solves the twofold predicament of sinners from the fall. In these dual understandings, the gospel in Christ must include the twofold grace of justification and sanctification.<sup>68</sup> Andrew T. B. McGowan rightly acknowledge the duality of these problems and solutions: "The *ordo salutis* must account for the two problems that fallen human beings face, namely, their broken relationship with God and their polluted, sinful condition. Thus in the *ordo salutis* the various doctrines were divided into two groups: those which described the change in the sinner's

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<sup>67</sup>As Paul proclaims. "For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Rom 8:3-4).

<sup>68</sup>Billings asserts, "Humans were created for communion with God, and redemption involves a restoration of communion with God through the double grace of union with Christ." Billings, *Union with Christ*, 6. Donald Fairbairn, in *Life in the Trinity: An Introduction to Theology with the Help of the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), claims the early church does not make a sharp distinction between justification (our being declared righteous in God's sight) and sanctification (our being made actually righteous). Christian life is not simply about solving one's problem of sins (forgiveness and justification) nor acquiring or developing the character of God (sanctification); "instead, both forgiveness and becoming Christlike flow from our participation in a relationship, from our becoming sons and daughters by adoption so as to share in the communion that the natural Son has with God the Father" (10). Similarly, he writes, "They spoke of salvation as *theōsis*, a word that emphasizes the believer's participation in the life of God. Believers are given this participation at the onset of faith and grow in it through what we call sanctification. Therefore, one may not speak of the righteousness that comes from sanctification as being our own any more than one may speak of initial justification as being our own. Instead, we come to life by union with Christ, and we grow in Christian life by remaining united with Christ, by fostering our relationship with him through the action of the Holy Spirit" (208). Both justification and sanctification happen in union with Christ, which brings about the believer's participation in the fellowship of the triune God (205-9). Fairbairn supports these understandings of salvation and the Christian life as the consensus of the early church.

relationship to God and those which described the renovation and renewal of the human condition.”<sup>69</sup> Therefore, the *ordo salutis*, the application of salvation in union with Christ, accounts for two human problems: status (the sinner’s relationship to God) and corruption (the sinner’s inner condition).<sup>70</sup> The good news of the gospel is that God gives everything his people need by uniting them to Christ, who is their “righteousness, sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30). The in-Christ designation points to the blessings of redemption, including justification and sanctification, being given to his people. In union with Christ, believers’ sins are forgiven, they are reckoned as righteous, and they enter into the process of sanctification, being made righteous by the power of the Spirit.<sup>71</sup> Certainly, the gospel grace purchased by Jesus Christ for sinners is twofold, and once accepted, it makes them inseparable in Christ. Therefore, salvation must consist of justifying and sanctifying graces that remedy the original sin of guilt and corruption. This twofold grace is properly accounted for in the unilateral and bilateral covenants that uphold God’s unconditional grace without compromising covenant obedience.

### **Unilateral and Bilateral Covenants**

Union with Christ is a covenantal relationship in him and with the triune God in which he unconditionally justifies sinners by the work of Christ and simultaneously

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<sup>69</sup>Andrew T. B. McGowan, “Justification and the *ordo salutis*” in *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 149.

<sup>70</sup>See McGowan, “Justification and the *ordo salutis*,” 151.

<sup>71</sup>Allen expresses the gospel in terms of holiness: “*The gospel is the glorious news that the God who is himself holy freely shares that holiness in covenant with us and, when we refuse that holiness in sin, graciously gives us holiness yet again in Christ. While justification is the ground of this participation in God, sanctifying fellowship is the goal of the gospel.*” Allen, *Sanctification*, 34 (emphasis original).

binds them to sanctifying fellowship and obedience under the governance of his commandments. The historical understanding of this bilateral or conditional nature of the covenant upholds the monergistic nature of salvation because the covenant of grace is grounded in an intra-trinitarian covenant, which is the foundation of all the irrevocable blessings. Thus, God's saving activities in history as evident in the covenant of grace originate from an eternal, inviolable intra-trinitarian covenant, the covenant of redemption.

Moreover, this historical understanding of God's covenants with humans as unilateral and bilateral has continued and is a general consensus among most modern Reformed theologians.<sup>72</sup> For instance, Louis Berkhof asserts that a covenant is a mutual agreement between two parties that binds them "to the fulfillment of certain promises on the basis of stipulated conditions." He adds:

It is perfectly true that both the covenant of works and the covenant of grace are monpleuric in origin, that they are the nature of arrangements ordained and instituted by God, and that God has the priority in both; but they are nevertheless covenants. God graciously condescended to come down to the level of man, and to honor him by dealing with him more or less on the footing of equality. He stipulates His demands and vouchsafes His promises, and man assumes the duties thus imposed upon him voluntarily and thus inherits the blessings. In the covenant of works man could meet the requirements of the covenant in virtue of his natural endowments, but in the covenant of grace he is enabled to meet them only by the regenerating and sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit. God works in man both to will and to do, graciously bestowing upon him all that He requires of him. It is called the covenant of grace, because it is an unparalleled revelation of the grace of God, and because man receives all its blessings as gifts of divine grace.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>See J. I. Packer, "On Covenant Theology," in *Celebrating the Saving Work of God: The Collected Shorter Writings of J. I. Packer* (Carlisle, England: Paternoster, 1998), 1:11-12; Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 264, 80-81; John Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013), 29, 67-81; Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 111, 115-16; Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Sin and Salvation in Christ*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 3:203-5, 30; R. Michael Allen, *Reformed Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2010), 45; Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 148-52; Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 182-86.

<sup>73</sup>Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 264.

For Berkhof, the covenant of works and the covenant of grace are monopoleuric, and while the former comes from a condescending grace, the latter is born of redemptive grace and people believe it by the power of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, since both are covenants, stipulations are present. Similarly, Frame says,

God's covenants with human beings . . . each of them is both unconditional and conditional. They are unconditional in that God will surely accomplish his purposes through the covenants. They are conditional in that human beings receive the blessings of the covenant through obedient faith. This does not mean that human beings *earn* blessings through obedience but that God accomplishes his sovereign purposes by bringing about a faithful human response.<sup>74</sup>

In his sovereignty, God predestines grace for the elect and does not rely on human activities. Certainly, God saves those he predestines by supplying them the covenantal requirements of faith and obedience. Allen concurs, claiming that “predestination is not meant to reduce human responsibility in any way; there is, indeed, a bilateral element in divinely decreed human activity. . . . the covenants are unilaterally bestowed by God. . . . Yet such covenants involve bilateral conditions with real human obligations, so that their maintenance is dependent upon creaturely action.”<sup>75</sup> Conceptually, therefore, covenant and predestination are compatible. In addition, covenant is God's means of working out his eternal decree in history through human interaction and responsibility. Specifically, salvation in union with Christ “involves a correlation of the action of God with the action of man.”<sup>76</sup> In this correlation, the Spirit engages with those who belong to Christ in a mutual or covenantal bond because they must carry out covenantal demands. Therefore,

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<sup>74</sup>Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 29 (emphasis original).

<sup>75</sup>Allen, *Reformed Theology*, 45.

<sup>76</sup>Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, 115-16.

although Scripture stresses the unconditional or monergistic roots of God's grace in covenants, they are also conditional because they simultaneously impose obligations on those engaged by God.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, with its bilateral dimension, the covenant is within the framework of a monergistic soteriology.

### **Covenant Conditions**

An understanding of God's covenants as both unilateral and bilateral and unconditional and conditional implies that they have conditions. Although scholars do not agree on the conditionality of the covenants, especially the new covenant, most agree Christ met or fulfilled the condition of the covenants, which was perfect obedience by his vicarious covenantal obedience (both active and passive). As discussed, the obedience of Jesus is his life and his death (his entire obedience). As the second Adam and the representative head of the covenant of grace, Christ's obedient life rectified the covenantal disobedience of the first Adam. This understanding promotes Christ as the *meritorious* condition of the covenants who met the righteous demand of God. Thus, by his vicarious and representative obedience, Christ fulfilled the condition of the covenants on behalf of his people and made the new covenant absolute and without condition.

Although many scholars insist that God's covenantal promises are absolute and without condition, some of them also acknowledge that covenants come with stipulations imposed by God. Since Christ fulfilled the condition of the law on behalf of his people, stipulations or obedience to the law in the covenant are not recognized as conditions;

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<sup>77</sup>See Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Sin and Salvation in Christ*, 3:203-4, 230; Packer, "On Covenant Theology," 11-12. Similarly, Jones says, "The covenant of grace was in the first place one-sided (*foedus monopleuron*); humanity's fallen condition meant that they could receive the benefits of the covenant only God's grace. That did not, however, rule out conditions for God's people." Jones, "The 'Old' Covenant," in Haykin and Jones, *Drawn into Controversie*, 183.

rather, they are covenant obligations or duties arising for covenant beneficiaries. As Murray explains, “The duties prescribed are faith and repentance, worship and obedience, separation from the world and consecration to God, all of which may be summed up in the obligation to be God’s people and live as his redeemed.” Observing disagreements and agreements regarding covenant conditions, Murray states that among scholars, “there was no thought of the covenant as contingent upon human autonomy or as deriving any of its ingredients from a contribution which man in the exercise of his own free will supplied.”<sup>78</sup> Moreover, he says, “None held that the covenant relation obtained or that its grace could be enjoyed apart from those responses on the part of the person in covenant fellowship with God.”<sup>79</sup> Therefore, covenant’s unconditionality does not conflict with its mutuality which requires conditions. For instance, although Horton stresses the absoluteness of the new covenant, he acknowledges its mutuality and conditionality.<sup>80</sup> In addition, the unilateral and unconditional qualities of the covenants do not remove the obligations through which God binds his people. Therefore, Reformed scholars generally agree that God’s covenants with believers are unilateral in divine promise and bilateral in obligation.

The bilateral dimension or conditional aspect of the gospel can be described as its commanding power in the covenant—the gospel commands obedience. This conditional aspect carries a mandate for faithfulness in obedience to God’s law. In

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<sup>78</sup>John Murray, “Covenant Theology,” in *Collected Writings of John Murray: Studies in Theology* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1982), 4:229.

<sup>79</sup>Murray, “Covenant Theology,” 230.

<sup>80</sup>See Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 148-52; Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology*, 182-86. Similar to Horton, Jeong Koo Jeon stresses the law/gospel antithesis yet asserts “covenant obligation is required according to the logic of the *bilateral* covenant of grace.” Jeong Koo Jeon, *Covenant Theology: John Murray’s and Meredith G. Kline’s Response to the Historical Development of Federal Theology in Reformed Thought* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1999), 5.

Reformed theology, the idea of obedience to God's law is a covenantal obligation and duty. The gospel is conditional on faith as an instrumental cause for justification and continuously demands faith, repentance, new obedience, and good works in progressive sanctification. Notably, these demands are not meritorious. Murray comments on the contrast between an instrumental and meritorious cause by exploring Turretin's understanding of condition in covenants: "If condition is understood in the sense of meritorious cause, then the Covenant of Grace is not conditional: it is wholly gratuitous and depends solely upon God's good pleasure. But if understood as instrumental cause, receptive of the promises of the covenant, then it cannot be denied that the Covenant of Grace is conditioned."<sup>81</sup> For humans, there are necessary conditions or obligations for salvation, yet these are non-meritorious. As Crowe claims, "Jesus is definitively and representatively obedient as the Adam and Son of God, and his people are obedient in a derivative sense, through faith in him."<sup>82</sup> Only Christ's obedience is meritorious and believers' obedience is derivative of his obedience. Therefore, the absolute nature of the covenant of grace is founded in Christ because he meritoriously fulfilled the condition of the covenant by his substitutionary atonement. Nevertheless, there are non-meritorious conditions or obligation for those who are in covenant with God. As the Reformed orthodox theologians maintained, Christ's obedience is the sole condition of the covenant and the foundation of believers' acceptance before God, and the conditional nature of believers' faith and obedience is simply a qualification for them to receive what has been promised. While the former is meritorious and causal, the latter is non-meritorious and

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<sup>81</sup>Murray, "Covenant Theology," 233.

<sup>82</sup>Brandon D. Crowe, *The Last Adam: A Theology of the Obedient Life of Jesus in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 215.

serves as consequent condition to receiving promises. In other words, since Christ met the absolute demand of the covenant by his faithfulness on the behalf of his people, God's demand for their unreserved obedience is reasonable and due him. Christ's perfect obedience is to restore humans to the purpose of creation.<sup>83</sup> Thus, although God's justifying grace is absolute, believers' covenant obedience is commanded in the process of sanctification in their union with Christ.

The mutual, bilateral, or conditional nature of the covenant is grounded in God's eternal design (metaphysical reality) and his desire to have communion and fellowship with humanity. God's promises and man's responsibility and obedience are inherent in the covenant because of its mutuality. Therefore, the gospel of salvation consists of dual dimensions: forensic and transformative, objective and subjective, God *for* us and God *in* us, grace and law, faith and works. Moreover, what sinners lost in the fall must be met by the salvific benefits they partake of in Christ. Specifically, the good news of God cannot simply be relationships reconciled to him while believers' sinful natures remain intact. The fall brought sinners both guilt and pollution—guilt from legal status in relation to God and pollution of their natures. Consequently, the gospel must consist of the twofold grace of justification and sanctification because they are necessary to remedy sinners' consequences from the fall.

### **Unconditional and Conditional Covenant: Justification and Sanctification in Union with Christ**

The unity and continuity between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace and the harmonization of the law and the gospel correlate to the twofold grace of

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<sup>83</sup>See Stephen Wellum, *Christ Alone: The Uniqueness of Jesus as Savior: What the Reformers Taught . . . and Why It Still Matters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 244.

justification and sanctification in God's design of covenants in salvation. As discussed in chapters 3 and 4, both Calvin and the Reformed orthodox theologians claimed that justification and sanctification are distinct and yet inseparable in union with Christ, the covenant mediator. Through faith alone, believers are united with their covenant head to enjoy the double grace of free justification (acceptance with God) and sanctification (renewal after the image of God). While in justification believers are declared righteous once-for-all, in sanctification they gradually mortify sin and purify their corrupted natures, growing in holiness. Consequentially, believers are being united with Christ, who is their substitute and representative and can share his righteousness, life, and all other blessings. Christ alone is the foundation of their acceptance before God, and in Christ, their lives are continually renewed and transformed. Also because they are in Christ, believers look forward to the future glory awaiting them.

Moreover, as discussed earlier, the law and the gospel are not antithetical in God's covenants. Indeed, these covenants are grounded in his unconditional grace, and he imposes obligations to those people who are in covenant with him. Therefore, through the unconditional and conditional covenant in Christ, God gives his people the twofold grace of justification and sanctification to remedy the twofold predicament of guilt and corruption from original sin. Murray supports this Reformed understanding, explaining that "the covenant is that by which God reconciles us to himself in Christ and bestows upon us the twofold benefit of gratuitous righteousness in the remission of sins and renovation after God's image."<sup>84</sup> While justification addresses the problem of sin's guilt, sanctification deals with sin's corruption and the believer's renovation. The mutual

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<sup>84</sup>Murray, "Covenant Theology," 225.

covenant of grace harmonizes justification and sanctification without confusion because they are inseparable. Furthermore, justification and sanctification in union with Christ and in the covenant of grace harmonize Christ's obedience and believer's obedience. Although Christ's obedience is believers' sole ground of justification, in sanctification they are not absolved of obligation to obey God's commandments; rather, they are free to willingly obey and conform to Christ progressively in the sanctification process as they commune and fellowship with God.

### **Justification and Sanctification Relationship**

Modern Reformed scholars disagree on the relationship between justification and sanctification. As discussed in chapter 2, scholars such as Gaffin argue for the concurrency of the two in union with Christ from his understanding of Calvin. Other scholars claim that justification serves as the basis for transformative sanctification by the Spirit.<sup>85</sup> Venema is in the latter camp:

When sanctification is placed within the framework of the believer's free justification . . . it represents the free, Spirit-authored life of a forgiven sinner in the presence of his gracious heavenly Father. If sanctification does not occur in the context of the believer's 'prior' acceptance with God, it inevitably becomes tainted with the infections of 'anxiety' before God . . . , 'pride' . . . and a 'mercenary' spirit. In Calvin's view, the Holy Spirit 'enlivens' the law of God by working in the believer a kind of glad-hearted and spontaneous obedience and devotion to God.<sup>86</sup>

Justification is logical or theological prior to sanctification because the former serves as the sin-free context for the latter, which frees sinners from the concern of God's

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<sup>85</sup>See Allen, *Sanctification*, 182-83.

<sup>86</sup>Cornelis P. Venema, "Union with Christ, the 'Twofold Grace of God,' and the 'Order of Salvation' in Calvin's Theology," in *Calvin for Today*, ed. Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009), 113.

acceptance. Similarly, arguing that the Reformed covenantal hermeneutic opposes the grace/law distinction in Lutheran theology, Peter Lillback states, “The Reformed hermeneutic discussed *works in the context of justification* because the covenant had two parts. Justification was the first blessing of the covenant while the second was the law of love engendered by the Holy Spirit. Faith was the condition of the first part of the covenant, and love or obedience was the condition of the second part.”<sup>87</sup> In this understanding, Lillback places works and love of sanctification in the context of justification. However, this understanding differs from scholars at Westminster Seminary California. They argue that justification as the judicial basis that causes sanctification. Nevertheless, these differing views affirm that union and communion with God is grounded in Christ’s obedience, and the breadth of the gospel consists of both Christ’s work *for* believers (justification) and Christ’s work *in* them (sanctification) because this twofold grace is distinct and yet inseparable in him.

### **Conclusion**

God always relates to humans in a covenantal relationship. This relationship has been evident since creation with the first parents, throughout redemptive history with the nation of Israel, and in the new covenant, accomplished by Christ. Salvation takes place in a personal union with Christ, a personal covenant bond with the covenant head. This covenant relationship thrives in a guilt-free context where believers are enlivened by the Spirit to obey God and his law with gratitude. Historically, this understanding of the covenant relationship has emerged from the Reformed doctrine that all covenants in their

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<sup>87</sup>Peter A. Lillback, *The Binding of God: Calvin's Role in the Development of Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 125 (emphasis added).

essence are unconditional, grounded in God's gracious and eternal purposes and Christ's substitutionary atonement. Moreover, the whole gospel involves reconciliation between God and his people as they are in mutual fellowship and communion with mutual commitment in sanctification. Mutually, therefore, salvation is God's forgiveness and a moral transformation in the believer's life. In a covenantal context, the whole gospel maintains the two—what God did *for us* demands humans' obedience and through the Holy Spirit, he works *in us* to conform to the image of his Son. Therefore, salvation is good news because it includes God's acceptance of sinners as righteous and the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit to transform life. In addition, the good news of free grace is also the call to discipleship.<sup>88</sup> Thus, understanding the full nature of the application of Christ's work to believers in salvation is best accounted for this way. This historical Reformed understanding of covenants that keeps the forensic and transformative aspects of salvation inseparable yet distinct is constructive to contemporary debates.

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<sup>88</sup>See Anthony N. S. Lane, "Twofold Righteousness: A Key to the Doctrine of Justification?" in Husbands and Treier, *Justification*, 219.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION

Christians are in a covenantal relationship with God in Christ. This relationship is personal and based on the objective reality that they are reconciled to God by Christ's penal, substitutionary atonement (vicarious obedience). Additionally, Christians are reckoned as righteous because of Christ's imputed righteousness and obedience. For a Christian, this good news of the gospel not only consists of the benefit of a new legal status but also of a covenantal, life-transforming relationship wrought by the Spirit. Furthermore, while those in Christ are free *from* obedience to the law and from performance of works as the means to obtain eternal life, they are simultaneously free *for* obedience to God and his demands. Thus, for believers to live out their new lives in Christ by the Spirit is to embrace God's covenant with them. A key distinctive of this covenantal life is covenant obedience or faithfulness. The foundation of a Christian's obedience is the lordship of Christ because God has claimed his people wholly and entirely for himself through Christ. Yielding to the lordship of Christ must be the focus of the Christian's life—in knowing what to believe and how to live.

Covenant obedience also involves Christians' hearing and doing God's words. Hearing God's words coheres with doing his words: doctrine and life. However, obedience unto God and his words in the Christian life does not come automatically. This obedience requires a conscious act of returning to the Lord, which is known as progressive sanctification. As Christians obey God's words willingly and consistently,

they progressively live in transformative communion with Christ. In this personal and living relationship, they come to know God's will through his words and renew their conscience according to his standards. With clear and pure conscience, Christians incline toward God, loving and obeying him in fulfilling his law. Moreover, obedience unto God needs continuous motivation throughout believers' lives. Their motivation comes from experiencing God's power and his love for them as a Father. Since covenantal obedience is not coercive but is willing duty from children to their heavenly Father, as they taste his goodness, they are motivated to revere and obey him more, willingly yielding to his law as it rules their thoughts and affections.

Furthermore, since believers' lives are in response to God's lordship, they ought to develop their whole persons by loving and obeying him. That is, Christians are called to love and serve God with their whole selves—mind, heart, soul, and strength. Therefore, in the process of inner renewal, they must develop all faculties by yielding to God with undivided hearts and unwavering devotion as they fulfill their vocations. Notably, a person whose mind and heart are intertwined can possess high intellectual ability, but his or her thinking can go astray if the heart does the same. Even with noble intentions, a person's thinking may not be edifying if it is reductionistic or lacks wisdom. Therefore, to know the Scripture, a Christian cannot simply read it devotionally but must study it personally and with the church community. To seek a full life of covenant obedience is to increase in knowledge, develop understanding, and grow in discernment and wisdom. Indeed, progressive sanctification is an attitude of continuous learning and growing as believers develop potential and strength to better fulfill their callings, in which they seek to glorify God by striving for excellence in all they do.

A life of covenantal faithfulness does not simply involve Christlike character growth; it also involves action since believers are active participants in the covenant with God. For Christians, public life is the living out or manifestation of that new relationship and identity in Christ. Furthermore, Christians must be faithful and responsible in the contexts where God places them. In these contexts, Christians are called to different vocations, but they strive toward the same goal—to please the Lord. Through covenant obedience, Christians please him by relying on him and his guidance. When they are fruitful and successful, they ought to be thankful that only by his grace can progress be made. However, when setbacks come, these should serve as reminders to Christians that they are not yet what they shall be before the Lord. This truth ought to constantly drive them back to himself.

Since Christian obedience to God's will is not moralistic self-effort, adversities can also be learning opportunities to enjoy God and be realistic in covenant obedience. Occasionally, Christians fall into the danger of task-oriented or performance-based covenant obedience, thinking God will appreciate them more if they achieve more. In these thoughts, they do not realize their minds are legalistic or merely self-fulfilling. Through such hardships, God can lead them to more deeply understand the basic truth that they no longer need to achieve works to be accepted before him. Rather, they are now adopted as children of God in Christ, and in God's grace, they can admit they are not perfect because sanctification is not perfected in the Christian life. Moreover, they can also enjoy God, the life he gives, and his good gifts, living for his glory in response. With this mindset, they will offer God sincere devotion through thankful and purposeful obedience. A covenantal, obedient life is to balance the knowledge of being wonderfully

made by God, in his image and as his image-bearer, blessed to carry out this noble calling by relying on him.

Christians' lives must be characterized by trusting Christ and ultimately living to please him because he is their Savior and Lord. In this transformation, covenant faithfulness characterizes their lives, and they are active in covenant obedience, offering God their best by using the gifts he gives. Also, Christian faithfulness is not dependent on self-sufficiency but is grounded in a communion with God that continuously grows in the knowledge and wisdom of his words as Christians joyfully yield to his obedience. While the obedient, covenant-based life is not perfect or free of trouble, continuously seeing the need to grow in God's grace and enjoy him enables Christians to carry out whatever vocations he calls them to for the advance of his kingdom. Through fellowship with himself in Christ, God has designed salvation so Christians not only anticipate the final glorification in the new heaven and new earth, but they also participate in his kingdom works toward that goal while on Earth. With this perspective, Christians learn to carry out their covenant responsibilities and callings with sincere obedience, doing so willingly under Christ's lordship.

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## ABSTRACT

### A HISTORICAL, BIBLICAL, AND THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF COVENANTS: UNCONDITIONALITY AND CONDITIONALITY IN RELATION TO JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION

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This dissertation involves four interrelated subjects: justification, sanctification, union with Christ, and covenant theology. It is comprised of four main parts, set forth with the thesis that the nature of the biblical covenants God makes with humans is both unconditional and conditional (or unilateral and bilateral), which undergirds the two basic covenantal benefits of justification and sanctification that believers receive in union with Christ. I substantiate my argument with teachings of the Reformer, John Calvin; his successors, the Reformed covenant theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; and biblical covenants as evident in Scripture.

Chapter 1 introduces the thesis, and chapter 2 presents brief historical and contemporary challenges to the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone, and describes contemporary responses to these challenges from those who proposed union with Christ and covenant theology as solutions. As constructive as they are, these solutions neglect the historic understanding of an unconditional and conditional covenant of grace as the foundation for holding justification and sanctification together as distinct yet inseparable.

Chapters 3 and 4 present the historical retrieval of covenant theology by exploring the unity and continuity of covenantal thought from John Calvin to Reformed Orthodoxy. In doing so, the chapters affirm justification and sanctification as *duplex-gratia* (double-grace), distinct but inseparable, in union with Christ through a unilateral and bilateral, mutual covenant of grace.

Chapters 5 and 6 survey key temporal and biblical covenants in Scripture from both the Old and New Testaments to demonstrate that the covenants God makes with humans are always unilateral and bilateral in nature. These chapters further show that the elements of divine benevolence and human responsibility run through these covenants and, thus, evangelical obedience to the covenants is always required.

Chapter 7 presents theological synthesis explaining the significance of the biblical covenants as both unconditional and conditional in relation to the doctrines of justification and sanctification as discussed in current theological debates.

Chapter 8 poses some practical implications for Christians today based on this dissertation's thesis.

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