

## **Is There a Covenant of Grace?**

**by Jon Zens**

With the contemporary rise of interest in Calvinistic theology, the thinking of many Christians has been radically changed. To a good number of brethren, the realization that the essential structure of doctrine they learned for years in evangelical-fundamentalism was defective and anemic has brought about what might be termed "spiritual shock." The bulk of their past cherished assumptions ("free-will," "carnal Christians," the "altar call," the "pre-tribulation rapture," etc.) have had to be scrapped.

In this rebuilding process, not a few Baptists have incorrectly assumed that the only alternative to the Arminian and Dispensational scheme is "Covenant Theology." So they go "all the way" and embrace infant baptism, thinking that a "covenantal" approach to history necessarily involves abandonment of a Baptist position. David Kingdon's book, *The Children of Abraham*, is an attempt to show that one can be a Baptist, a Calvinist, and also take the "covenant of grace" seriously.

### **Are There Just Two Alternatives?**

However, it seems to me that there is one concept that is consistently *assumed* by many Calvinistic Baptists and all Calvinistic paedobaptists where our thinking needs to be Biblically sharpened. This the "covenant of grace" concept. While Dispensationalism stresses the diversity of God's dealings with men in different eras of history, Covenant Theology has emphasized "one" covenant of grace. The historical covenants are seen as just different administrations of the "covenant of grace." Are these two approaches the only two alternatives? Historically, during the last hundred years, the answer has been "Yes" (see Calvin Knox Cummings, *The Covenant of Grace*, pp.6-7). But I want to suggest the possibility that the Biblical data reveals another position. Because this position may be more in line with Scripture, the pitfalls of the other two systems are avoided, and justice can be done to *all* that the inspired Word teaches. And I would stress that our minds must be glued to every word that comes from God's mouth (Matt. 4:4). The "covenant of grace" indeed is embedded in the *history* of Reformed thinking. But this in and of itself does not guarantee the accuracy of the concept. And, it must be made clear that its rejection does not call into question the Calvinistic theology of the *Westminster* or *Philadelphia* confessions of faith.

Furthermore, no Christian "system" of thought can ever be absolutely fixed. Even John Murray, an ardent covenant theologian, encourages us to subject this system to further analysis.

It would not be, however, in the interests of theological conservation or theological progress to think that the covenant theology is in all respects definitive and that there is no further need for correction, modification, and expansion. Theology must always be undergoing reformation. The human understanding is imperfect.... there always remains the need for

correction and reconstruction so that the structure may be brought into closer approximation to the Scripture....It appears to me that the covenant theology...needs recasting (*The Covenant of Grace*, The Tyndale House, 1954,pp.4-5)

Also, it must be understood that my main interest in this study is to call into question the use of the "one covenant/various administrations" concept as a central argument for infant baptism. As one reads Reformed theologians, he sees at the heart of their rationale for including infants "in the covenant" is the idea that one covenant of grace stands *above* history, and is reflected in the historical covenants. Since infants were included in the Abrahamic administration of the "covenant of grace," why should we think that infants are excluded from the new administration of the same "covenant of grace"?

### **The Biblical View of God's Plan in Christ**

Let us now seriously reflect on the Biblical data. How does the Bible describe God's plan *before* history; how does the Bible reflect on the unfolding of that plan *in* history?

With respect to God's intentions before time, the Scripture designates them comprehensively as an "eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph.3:11; see 2Tim.1:9). This "purpose" of God in Christ is elsewhere called a "decree" (Ps.2:7), a "determinate counsel" (Acts 2:23; 4:28), and "foreordination" (1 Pet.1:20). Jesus called it His "Father's business" (Luke 2:49), "the work" given to Him by the Father (John 17:4), and "the will of Him Who sent Me" (John 6:38; see Heb.10:9). Clearly, before history, God "purposed" to glorify His Son in history (John 17:1,5).

The Bible, then unfolds the history of God's purpose to exalt Christ. We may summarize the direction of human events by saying that the historic process moved *toward* Christ through Abraham's seed (Rom.9:4), and then after Christ's work the gospel goes **out** to all nations in fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant (Gal.3:8). The history which moves toward Christ is structured by several covenants; the history after Christ is comprehended by the New Covenant.

The New Covenant is the pivotal point in redemptive history. From the saying of Christ, "it is finished," we must observe something very important. The earthly accomplishment of redemption by the Messiah is *both* the culmination of (1) the eternal purpose (1 Pet.1:20), and (2) the historic process (Gal.4:4). In other words, the ordained plan *prior* to history, and redemptive history *itself* come to focus and fulfillment only by Christ sealing the New Covenant with His blood. This "blood" was both "foreordained" in eternity and typified in the sacrificial blood of the Mosaic era.

Summarizing, I see in the Biblical account the following: (1) a precreation "purpose" of God "in Christ"; (2) an historic process which is structured by several covenants; and (3) an historic manifestation of the obedient Son who fulfilled both His Father's pre-creation "will", and all the promises in history to the fathers (Rom.15:8).

## Covenant Theology's View of God's Plan In Christ

Covenant theologians have substituted for the Biblical words describing God's eternal plan, such as "decree" and "purpose," the concepts of a "covenant of redemption" and a "covenant of grace." The "covenant of redemption," they say, was between the Father and the Son. In this "covenant" they agreed to save the elect by the work of Christ. The "covenant of grace" is between the Trinity and elect sinners (see Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, pp.269-270; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol.2,pp.358-359; Donald MacLeod, "Covenant 2," *Banner of Truth*, June, 1975,p.25).

Immediately, I have great difficulty with viewing this "covenant of redemption" as Bitarian, that is, between the Father and the Son. The covenant theologians consistently assert that in this covenant the Father and Son are the parties. On what basis is the Holy Spirit left out? Must not any plan of the Godhead necessarily be *Trinitarian*? As E.W. Johnson states, "The very idea of a contract between the Father and Son is foreign to the biblical concept of the covenant of our salvation" ("Covenant Theology," *Sovereign Grace Message*, September, 1971,p.2.)

But, further, why must the "covenant" concept be called into service to describe the "eternal purpose" of God in Christ? Why not be satisfied with the *Biblical* delineation? As far as I can tell, the Bible *nowhere* calls the pre-creation commitments in the Godhead - among themselves or to elect sinners - a "covenant."

The reason this is so, I believe, is because the Bible indicates that "covenant" is a specifically *historical* term. In other words, a "covenant" is a revelation of God's purposes to men *in time*. The covenants prior to Christ structure history and present aspects of Christ's work. No one covenant in the era before Christ comprehends *all* the Messiah's future work. But the New Covenant is final (no covenant will take its place) and fulfills *all* that was ever promised before to the fathers. Covenant theologians must face these important questions: (1) is there any Biblical evidence that the word "covenant" is ever used with reference to something that is not a revelation of God *in time*? (2) is there any evidence in the Bible of "one" covenant? As Paul looked back upon the old era he does not see "one covenant with various administrations," but rather "covenants [plural] of promise" now fulfilled in Christ (Eph.2:12; Rom.9:4; see John Murray, *The Covenant of Grace*, p.26).

It is interesting that - for whatever reasons - - Eph.2:12 is misquoted sometimes. My guess is that some men are so used to thinking in terms of "one" covenant that they put in this concept where, in fact, the word is in the plural.

Until we thus believe we are aliens and strangers from the covenant of promise (Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol.2,p.364).

Rather he meant that in their unregenerate state they were... "strangers from the covenant of promise" (Kingdon, *Children of Abraham*, p.33).

Obviously, these "covenants" Paul speaks of were solemnized *in history*. There was a specific moment when the covenant was made: "*in the same day* the Lord made a covenant with Abram" (Gen.15:18). As Howard A. Snyder rightly observes concerning the appearance of the "covenants" in Scripture:

The covenant implies a covenant occasion in which the contract between God and man was actually established in space and time....The covenant is established in historical occurrences that can be recorded, commemorated and renewed (*The Problem of Wineskins*, Inter-Varsity Press, p.104).

But can this be said about the "covenant of grace"? No, for it is never manifested *in history*. Rather, it is always above history, being, as covenant theologians put it, administered in different ways in history (*Westminster Confession*, 7:6).

The core of Covenant Theology, then, boils down to their position that :

This one Covenant of Grace is administered in different ways during different periods in the Bible....these are simply different methods of administering the same Covenant of Grace. The character of the covenant is not changed by these different methods of applying it....So there is one Covenant of Grace but different ways of administering that covenant (Cummings, *The Covenant of Grace*, pp.12-13).

But, it must be asked, where is "covenant of grace" revealed in the Bible? Romans 9:4 and Eph.2:12 indicate that a *plurality* of covenants are fulfilled in a better covenant, not that the historic covenants are administrations of *one* covenant which stands above history. The historic covenants are progressive revelations of the heavenly purpose to seal the New Covenant.

If the Bible reveals that a "covenant" must be an event in history, then this calls into question the use that is made of the "covenant of grace" to unify redemptive history. Should we not stay within the realm of Biblical language and assert that God has *one purpose* in Christ prior to history and has "cut" a plurality of covenants in history? The "one covenant/various administrations" idea certainly does not jump out at you from the pages of Scripture. Although Charles Ryrie is mistaken in his Dispensational approach to the Bible, I do believe he has rightly discerned that:

there still remains the stark reality that nowhere does Scripture speak of a covenant of works or a covenant of grace as it speaks of a covenant with Abraham or a covenant at Sinai or the new covenant (*Dispensationalism Today*, Moody Press, p.186).

### **The "Covenant of Grace" and Infant Baptism**

If one reads the Reformed arguments for infant baptism, he will readily see that this "covenant of grace" concept stands at the center of their apologetic (see Berkhof, pp.276,

634; John Calvin, *Institutes*, IV, 16, 5; Cummings, p.16; Hodge, Vol.3, p.555). John Murray, one of the most articulate covenant theologians, states the matter like this:

It is because there is such evidence of the perpetual operation of this gracious principle in the administration of God's covenant that we baptize infants. It is for that reason alone that we continue to baptize them (*Christian Baptism*, Pres. & Ref. Pub. Co., p.71).

Their reasoning is simply this: since infants were included in the Old Covenant administration of the "one" covenant of grace, we must suppose that infants are also included in the New Covenant administration of this same covenant of grace.

But I suggest that this reasoning is invalid. It does not allow for real *progress* in redemptive history (see Kingdon, pp.74-75). Again, I think Ryrie has rightly observed:

Covenant Theology, then, because of the rigidity of its unifying principle of the covenant of grace can never show within its system proper progress of revelation (*Dispensationalism Today*, p.19).

With the "one covenant/different administrations" starting point, justice can be done neither to the diversity and progress of history leading up to the "fullness of time," nor to the completeness and finality of the New Covenant manifested in the "last days." Remember, there was a radical *difference* prophesied between the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant: "*not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers....But this shall be the covenant*" (Jer.31:32-33). But covenant theologians must *level* the historic covenants so that they all - including the New Covenant - are just reflections in different ages of "one" covenant of grace standing above history.

### **The Place of "Law" in the New Covenant**

An example of how important it is to do justice to the finality of God's purposes in the New Covenant can be illustrated in the way that the concept of "law" is handled. Now this is a very involved subject, and here I wish only to suggest some foundational thoughts. The Dispensationalists have posited that law and grace are opposites: where law is in force, grace is not operative; where grace is in force, law is not operative. But Reformed Theology has sought to take seriously the fact that there is indeed grace present in the administration of law, and law present in the administration of grace (see E. Kevan's *The Grace of Law*, Baker Book House, 1965). However, there is in this matter a crucial area where, it seems to me, our thoughts must be more Biblically shaped. This area is the relationship of the Mosaic administration of law to the New Covenant administration of grace. One gets the impression, in varying degrees, from reading covenant theologians that we are still in some sense "under Moses." Let me briefly explain what I mean.

They tell us that the Mosaic age consisted of three kinds of law: civil, ceremonial and moral. The first two, it is said, were abolished in Christ. But the third, the Ten

Commandments, continue on as the standard of Christian conduct. Thus, in line with this three - fold distinction of the Law, many Reformed churches read the Ten Commandments every Sunday. A few such theologians, seeing the inconsistency of separating the Ten Words from the rest of the Mosaic code, would maintain that *all* of Moses is still binding - with some modifications - on the church and society.

However, the manner in which Law is handled in this system does not seem to sufficiently communicate the fact that the Mosaic era is "done away" with the establishing of the New Covenant (2 Cor.3:11,13). The history of the Reformation reveals a consistent tendency of its leaders to resurrect the Old Covenant theocracy (see Leonard Verduin, *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren*, Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1964, esp. pp.63-94). They sought to establish situations where church and state were joined together, using the Israelite theocracy as a model.

But the New Covenant makes it clear that the "house of Moses" is finished, and now we are in a house whose Head is Christ (Heb.3:5-6). The Kingdom with Christ as its Mediator is "not of this world"(John 17:14; 18:36). It can never be identified with any secular political order. The church in this "evil age" is *always* a separate entity in society, and never equated with the geographical boundaries of a society. The Mosaic era was inferior and preparatory, and it was never intended to be an "eternal" political model. The course of redemptive history was ordered so that the national theocracy and its shadows gave way to a Kingdom whose subjects would experience the realities promised, and offer "spiritual sacrifices" (1 Pet.2:5; Heb.13:15-16).

In light of this New Covenant finality, is it valid to push old-era practice into the New Age (see Kingdon, pp.46-47)? It seems to me that the three-fold breakdown of the law is helpful in teaching the kinds of Old Covenant laws. But I question its validity as a rationale for getting the "law of Moses" into the New Covenant. Christ, not Moses, is our Mediator. The commandments on "tables of stone" (2 Cor.3:3) must always be connected with a *specific covenant*. The "law of Moses" was that code which specifically constituted Israel as a special nation (Deut.4:7-8; Neh.9:13). But this "law of Moses" was *always* thought of as a *totality*. The three-fold distinction would have been very artificial to the Israelite, to say the least. He could not separate the Ten Words from the "civil" and "ceremonial" laws. Arnold Fruchtenbaum observes:

The Mosaic law is viewed by the Scriptures as a unit. The word torah ("law") when applied to the law of Moses is always singular, although it contains 613 commandments (*Hebrew Christianity: Its Theology, History, and Philosophy*, Canon Press, Wash. D.C., 1974,p.82).

Thus, the division of Moses' law into three categories is a "totally arbitrary distinction between aspects of the law" (Walter Martin, "The Christian and the Law," *Eternity*, June, 1958,p.18).

Rather than trying to get the "moral" aspect of Moses into the Messianic age, we do well to submit ourselves to the progress of redemptive revelation. New Covenant subjects are

under the "law of Christ" (Gal.6:2). Whatever "law" binds the Christian is in the hands of Christ, not Moses. The covenant of which Moses was the mediator is abolished. We are now under the law of a "better" covenant. Obviously, there is no place for "antinomianism" (anti-law; lawlessness) in the New Covenant. In it, the "law will be put in the heart by the operation of the Spirit. Those in the New Covenant obey the words of Christ (Matt.28:20; 1 John 2:3-4; 5:3). But Paul makes his position clear in 1 Cor.9:19-21:

To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under *Christ's law*), so as to win those not having the law (*New International Version*).

Paul's liberty in Christ, as Martin Luther put it, made him "a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none....[and] a perfectly dutiful servant of all" (*Christian Liberty* (1520), Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1957, p.7). While Paul was around Jews he became like one under the law. But what was the reality Paul kept in view in these circumstances? "Though I myself am *not under the law*" [of Moses]. When Paul was around Gentiles, he became like one without the law. But, in this situation, Paul always remembered that he was "*under Christ's law.*" We can diagram the matter like this:

### **Paul's Example for Christians**

Not under Moses' Law.....**Jews:** Have the Law of Moses  
(Rom.2:17-18; 1 Cor.9:20)

In-Law to Christ (*ennomos*).....**Gentiles:** Do not have the Law of Moses  
(Rom.2:12,14; 1 Cor.9:21)

We must remember that Moses' law was the center of Paul's existence prior to his conversion (see F.F. Bruce, "The Grace of God and the Law of Christ," *God and the Good*, Clifton Orlebes and Lewis Smedes, eds.; Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1975, pp.22-24). After his conversion, the Mediator of the New Covenant became the focus of his life (Phil.1:21). This ardent disciple of Moses, indeed a "Hebrew of Hebrews" (Phil.3:5), was transformed into a "servant of a new covenant" (2 Cor.3:6).

Thus we must come to grips with the fact that redemptive history moves *away from Moses* to Christ (Matt.11-13; John 1:17). With a change in covenants (old to new) comes of necessity a change in the law (Heb.7:12, 18-22). We can illustrate the changes involved in the following manner, using 2 Cor.3 as our main reference point.

<b>Old Covenant (2 Cor.3:14)</b>	<b>Gives Way To</b>	<b>New covenant (2 Cor.3:6)</b>
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Mediator, Moses	Gives Way To	Mediator, Christ
Law of Moses	Gives Way To	Law of Christ
Ministry of Death	Gives Way To	Ministry of Life
Ministry of Letter	Gives Way To	Ministry of Spirit
Writing on Stones	Gives Way To	Writing on Hearts
Fading Glory	Gives Way To	Abiding Glory
Ministry of Condemnation	Gives Way To	Ministry of Righteousness
Disobedient People (Heb.10:9)	Gives Way To	Obedient People (Heb.10:10)
People Who As a Whole Do not "Know the Lord" (Jer.2:8; 4:22; 9:3)	Gives Way To	People Who As a Whole "Know the Lord" (Jer. 31:34; 24:7)
Theocracy Where Church and State Are United	Gives Way To	Spiritual Nation Which Cannot Be Identified with any Political Order

It is interesting to note that when most paedobaptists comment on 2 Cor.3 they must say that Paul's comparison is between the New Covenant and the Jewish *perversion* of the Old Covenant. But this is a forced, unnatural interpretation of the passage. Paul is simply comparing the essence of the Old Covenant with the essence of the New Covenant. Again, this shows that many covenant theologians must hedge when it comes to the *implications* of progress toward a new order which takes the place of the old theocracy.

In summary, then, we must see the books of the Old Testament as that body of literature which was associated with the Mosaic Covenant. Those books were absolutely binding and not to be tampered with (see Joshua 1:6-8). Likewise, with the coming of a New and better covenant, a new body of inspired literature arose. This New Testament literature is binding on the New Covenant community (Rev.22:18-19; see Meredith Kline's *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1972, pp.68-75). The use of the Old Testament by the Apostles in Acts and the Epistles is primarily to unfold, as Christ Himself did, from Moses, the prophets and the Psalms "the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27,44). Their use of the Old Testament was *Christocentric* (Christ-centered), *not nomocentric* (law-centered).

It is significant that in the council at Jerusalem (Acts 15) the conclusion reached was not that the political and ceremonial aspects of the law were abolished, and now all the Gentiles needed as a rule of life was the "moral" aspect of Moses. The issue was clear: "It was needful to circumcise them [Gentiles], and to command them to keep the law of Moses" (15:5). The conclusion is also unmistakable: "Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you [Gentiles] with words, subverting your souls, saying, You must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave *no such commandment*" (15:24). Says F.F. Bruce:

Paul's way was not to impose the Mosaic law on them [Gentiles], but to emphasize the law of Christ - to insist that the gospel which had brought

them salvation had ethical implications, and to spell out in detail what those implications were ("The Grace of God and the Gospel,"p.29).

We must, therefore, be leery of any "Christian" movement which exalts the law of Moses inordinately, and desires the implementation of a theocracy in contemporary society. We have no warrant to be essentially expositors of the Mosaic law as ministers of the New Covenant. We are living in the age of promise. Remember, we cannot isolate the Law from its context and purposes in the history of redemption. Paul's order of salvation history is first *promise* to Abraham and his seed (Gal.3:16); secondly, the parenthesis of the Mosaic Law (3:17,23,25); and thirdly, the coming of the promised Seed (Christ) in the incarnation (3:19,23; 4:4). This inspired order of redemption must be maintained at all costs: (1) promise; (2) law; (3) promise (3:23,25; see H. Carl Shank, "Gospel Preaching and Orthodox Preaching," *Baptist Reformation Review*, Summer, 1976,p.17, footnote 10). A consistent emphasis on Moses as "law" and not as "testifying" of Christ (John 5:39,46-47) has caused some to be deflected from the gracious message of the gospel. Do we see Paul in Romans 13 exhorting Christians to expend energy to see the Mosaic law implemented in the Roman state? No. Christians were told to submit to the magistrates, not to *subdue* the government with the Mosaic code. If the progress of redemption was taken seriously, these injurious attempts to perpetuate what has been set aside by the New Covenant would cease.

### **Each Covenant Defines Its Subjects**

Along this line of thought, Covenant Theology does not allow each covenant to be *self-defining*. Each oath has specific parties involved in it, and certain ordinances attached to it. The Noahic covenant includes all of creation as subjects. The Mosaic covenant includes only the nation of Israel. But the crucial point is that the new Covenant defines its subjects as only those who "know the Lord: for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to greatest" (Jer.31:34).

Covenant Theology rules out the possibility that New Covenant Church may consist of only a believing community - the remnant who "know the Lord" - by the use of their "covenant of grace." This ensures, as Murray puts it, "the perpetual operation of this gracious principle" of including infants in the new administration of the "covenant of grace." Thus infants, who do not "know the Lord" because by birth they are spiritually dead "in Adam" (1 Cor.15:22), are by this rationale allowed to fill the ranks of the New Covenant community.

Indeed, then, if the "one covenant/different administrations" concept is Biblically unacceptable, then the paedobaptist superstructure begins to crumble. It is at this point that I feel Kingdon's concession to paedobaptists is unnecessary and incorrect. He says in *Children of Abraham*:

Their basic contention is correct - the covenant of grace is one in all ages. In my view Baptists will never seriously disturb Reformed paedobaptists until they see this (p.21)

I believe Baptists can challenge Reformed paedobaptists on many exegetical grounds. But, in light of the prominence they give to this "one covenant of grace" idea, I feel that we need to disturb them by *rejecting* this elusive "covenant of grace." The use they make of it simply does not flow from Scripture.

### **Infant "Church Members"?**

The inclusion of infants as "members" in Christ's church also reflects the confusion wrought when the Reformers "reached for the Old Testament and applied the federal understanding of the sacraments to the new dispensation" (Geerhardus Vos, *The Covenant In Reformed Theology* [1893], trans. By S. Voorvinde and W. VanGemen, p.2). In the Mosaic era physical birth was sufficient to guarantee membership in the Israelite nation. As Hodge puts it, "under the old economy, the Church and State were identical" (Vol.3, 552). To apply this analogy to the new era results in the teaching that infants are constituted as Christians by birth. To even suggest this is "positively shameful" to Dr. John R. DeWitt ("Children and the Covenant of Grace," *Westminster Theological Journal*, Winter, 1975, p.247). However, paedobaptist consistently state such things as "the parents are citizens of the Kingdom, and their children are citizens due to the fact that their parents are citizens" (H. Mensch, *The Reformed Scope*, March, 1977, p.4), and "children of believers...enter the covenant by birth" (Berkhof, p.287). Even the *Westminster Confession* states that one of the purposes of child-bearing in marriage is "for the increase...of the Church with an holy seed" (24:2).

### **"Believers and Their Seed?"**

This brings up another point which needs sharpening. The paedobaptist always asserts that the principle established in the Old Covenant is that "believers and their seed" received the ordinances of the covenant (see Berkhof, p.276; deWitt, pp.250-251). If this principle was true in the old era, they say, then it surely holds true for the new era. But the phrase "believers and their seed" is wrong to start with. In the Old Covenant it was never the case that believers only and their seed received the covenant signs. Rather, it was all men in Israel - whether they were believers or not - and their seed who were circumcised. Saving belief in one or both of the parents was never in view as a "condition" for an Israelite man to have his male seed circumcised. This renders invalid the use paedobaptist make of the "believers and their seed" formula in the New Covenant.

### **Tensions In Paedobaptism**

Using the "one covenant/various administrations" as a rationale to include infants in the church creates tensions which I have yet seen to be dealt with satisfactorily by covenant theologians. For instance, Hodge states the Biblical position that:

we come into the world under condemnation. We are by nature, i.e., as we are born, the children of wrath (Vol.2,p.122).

Yet he will turn right around and posit that infants of believers are "federally" holy and to be regarded as Christians.

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church service for the "Baptism of An Infant" asks the parents:

Do you acknowledge that, although our children are conceived and born in sin and therefore subject to condemnation, they are holy in Christ, and as members of his church ought to be baptized? (*Trinity Hymnal* [Confessional Edition], Philadelphia, 1961, p.667).

The infants of believers are in some mysterious way both condemned and holy; in Adam and yet in Christ; under wrath and yet a church member. If infants are at birth concretely reckoned as condemned in solidarity with Adam (per Hodge), then what translates them from wrath to grace? Their birth from Christian parents? Their baptism? Certainly not because they have "with the heart believed unto righteousness" (Rom.10:10)!

Dr. Richard B. Gaffin, Professor of New Testament Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, exegetes Romans 6:3ff. In the course of his doctoral thesis, and concludes:

It is clear, especially in this context, that Paul understands union with Christ in a *quite concrete manner*.... Paul is here viewing resurrection with Christ not only in terms of solidarity with him at the time point of his resurrection but also as that which *takes place in the life histories of individual believers*....*The union which Paul has in view here is primarily experiential in nature*....As we have seen repeatedly, these references describe *the actual life experience of the individual believer*....What baptism signifies and seals is a *transition in the experience of the recipient*, a transition from *being (existentially) apart from Christ to being (existentially) joined to him* (*Resurrection and Redemption: A study in Pauline Soteriology*, mimeographed by the Westminster Student Service, 1971, pp.38-45).

Now I ask, how can the fruit of his careful exegesis be applied with any meaning to infants? "Again and again, when paedobaptists deal with many areas of Scripture they do a fine job. But when they move into the area of infant baptism their light grows dim. What sense does it make - without falling into heresy - to employ such strong terminology as Dr. Gaffin does with reference to infants? Dr. Gaffin's exegesis aligns him with a position that would associate the ordinance of baptism with believers only. Yet he must somehow work infants into the Romans 6 meaning of baptism. Kingdon suggests that Reformed paedobaptists avoid "baptismal regeneration" in their position, and that this constitutes part of its appeal (pp.18-19). To be sure, most deny it out of one side of their mouth; but out of the other side, they see their children as Christians. They must always face the tension: how does the child become "Christ's" when all the paedobaptists

I have read admit that infants eight days old are dead in Adam and incapable of exercising personal faith?

### **"Covenant of Grace"?**

In closing, I think it is significant to observe what happened in John Murray's booklet, *The Covenant of Grace*. His biblical-theological study led him to see in Scripture a plurality of covenants (p.26) culminating in the finality of the New Covenant (pp.28,31-32). He nowhere found in the Bible "one covenant of grace" variously administered. To be sure, in his other writings he states that such a covenant exists. But he did not find it in his Scriptural study with the title *The Covenant of Grace*. He uses only the phrase "covenant grace," but never "the covenant of grace." This again suggests the propriety of seeing "covenants" as historical manifestations, and of avoiding a "covenant of grace" which stands above history. If we stick with the Biblical presentation of one "purpose" in Christ, and a plurality of covenants in history, we will avoid the confusion of Dispensationalism's earthly-purpose-for-Israel, heavenly-purpose-for-church theory, and the unnecessary assumptions of Covenant Theology which are used to bring infants into the New Covenant church.