

Institutes of the Christian Religion by John Calvin
(Translation by Henry Beveridge)¹
Men's Theology Study – September 1, 2021 – 6:30 pm

Book 2 – Of the knowledge of God the Redeemer, in Christ, as first manifested to the fathers, under the law, and thereafter to us under the gospel.

Chapter 10 – The Resemblance Between the Old Testament and the New

The Continuity of the Covenant in Chapter 10²

1. The old and new covenants are the same in substance: the same law and same doctrine since the beginning of the world.
2. Christ is mediator of the covenants.
3. Both have the grace of justification.
4. Sacraments have equal significance in both.
5. Both have the Word of God, which is to have eternal life.
6. The formula of the covenant common to both includes eternal life.

What's a stake? "If infant baptism is to be overturned, then the continuity of the old and new covenants must be denied. But this makes the Old Testament saints nothing more than recipients of material blessings at the expense of their salvation.... This rejection demanded that the old covenant be a material or carnal covenant and circumcision be considered a non-spiritual symbol. As a result, several important doctrines associated with the covenant were severely injured."³

- I. Introduction (s. 1) – One Covenant of Grace
 - a. "...all whom, from the beginning of the world, God adopted as his peculiar people, were taken into covenant with him on the same conditions, and under the same bond of doctrine, as ourselves..."
 - b. "...the fathers were partakers with us in the same inheritance, and hoped for a common salvation through the grace of the same Mediator..."
- II. The Covenant in the OT Really the Same as That of the NT (s. 2-6)
 - a. Three Points to Consider (s. 2)
 - i. The hope of the Jews before Christ was immortality and assurance of adoption, not material blessings.
 - ii. The covenant with the Jews was solely on God's mercy, not of their own merits.
 - iii. The Jews knew Christ, by whom they were united to God, and were made capable of receiving his promises.
 - b. Comparing the Testaments (s. 3-4)

¹Supplemental Material from *Analysis of the Institutes of the Christian Religion of John Calvin* by Ford Lewis Battles (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2001 Reprint) and *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes* edited by David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2008).

²Hall and Lillback, 189-190.

³Ibid, 186, 190.

- i. The Gospel Hope is Future (s. 3)
 - In the NT: "...the gospel does not confine the hearts of men to the enjoyment of the present life, but raises them to the hope of immortality; does not fix them down to earthly delights, but announcing that there is a treasure laid up in heaven..."
 - In the OT: "Let no one here quibble and say, that the promises concerning the gospel, which are contained in the Law and the prophets, were designed for a new people." "...the OT had special reference to the future life..."
- ii. The Gospel is from God's Free Mercy (s. 4)
 - Begin with Christ in whom the entire Gospel is summed up.
 - If, "...the preaching of the gospel declares nothing more than that sinners, without any merit of their own, are justified by the paternal indulgence of God."
 - Then, "...will (one) presume to represent the Jews as destitute of Christ, when we know that they were parties to the gospel covenant, which has its only foundation in Christ?"
 - Then, "Who will presume to make them aliens to the benefit of gratuitous salvation, when we know that they were instructed in the doctrine of justification by faith?"
- iii. Similar Signs of the Covenant (s. 5)
 - The Corinthians had no right to claim exemption from the same vengeance God inflicted on the Jews.
 - "If you think you are out of danger, because the baptism which you received, and the supper of which you daily partake, have excellent promises, and if, in the meantime, despising the goodness of God, you indulge in licentiousness, know that the Jews, on whom the Lord inflicted his severest judgments, possessed similar symbols."
 - Similar signs, same food (see 1 Cor 10:3-4).

DQ: How do sacraments simultaneously convey blessings and curses?

- III. Part One: Argument Concerning the Hope of Eternal Life – The OT Patriarchs Looked for Fulfillment of Promises in the Life to Come (s. 7-14)
 - a. The OT patriarchs received salvific, special revelation (s. 7).
 - i. "I refer to that special mode of communication by which the minds of the pious are both enlightened in the knowledge of God."
 - ii. "They had that solid participation in God which cannot exist without the blessing of everlasting life."
 - b. In the OT, fellowship with God included the blessing of salvation (s. 8).
 - i. Lev 26:12, "And I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be my people." Calvin, "These words...comprehend life and salvation, and the whole sum of blessedness."
 - ii. For God to reveal himself is to bring one in fellowship with him, including the blessing of salvation.

- c. In the OT, God’s goodness was stronger than death (s. 9).
 - i. Gen 17:7, “And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.”
 - ii. The Point: Future and present faithfulness. If God was going to manifest his favor to the dead by goodness to their posterity, then he certainly would not deny his favor to them presently.
 - iii. By the name “I Am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” God is projecting his covenant faithfulness from the past onto the present and future.
- d. In the OT, for many of the patriarchs their only solace in life was the future promise of salvation (s. 10).
 - i. **DQ: How did Adam, Abel, and Noah experience misery in their earthly life?**
- e. The Examples of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (s. 11-14)
 - i. “Abraham alone ought to be to us equal to tens of thousands if we consider his faith, which is set before us as the best model of believing, to whose race also we must be held to belong in order that we may be children of God (s. 11).”
 - ii. If Abraham is the father of the faith, would it not be absurd, then, for him to lack even a humble place among them?
 - iii. **DQ: Abraham received God’s covenant promises, but was his life a picture-perfect example of receiving and living in them? What sort of suffering and afflictions did Isaac and Jacob experience?**
 - iv. Conclusion: The Land was Never the Land
 - The patriarchs’ hope “could not have been fixed on earthly objects (s. 12).”
 - “If these holy patriarchs expected a happy life from the hand of God (and it is indubitable that they did), they viewed and contemplated a different happiness from that of a terrestrial life (s. 13).”
 - Heb 11:9-10, “By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.”
 - Heb 11:13a, “These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar...”
 - Heb 11:16a, “But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one.”

IV. Part Two: Argument Concerning the Hope of Eternal Life – Support from David, Job, Ezekiel, and Others (s. 15-22)

- a. Examples from David and the Psalms (s. 15-18)
 - i. Concerning David, “He who confesses that there is nothing solid or stable on the earth, and yet firmly retains his hope in God, undoubtedly contemplates a happiness reserved for him elsewhere (s. 15).”
 - Ps 103:17, “But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children’s children...”

- ii. David and the Psalms confess the fulfillment of God’s promises were future to him, and cautions believers against looking for blessing in the present life (s. 16).
 - Ps 73:2-3, “But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.”
 - Ps 73:16-17, “But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end.”
 - iii. The hope of the godly must rise above this present life to heaven and the final judgment (s. 17-18).
 - “...let us learn that the holy fathers under the OT were not ignorant that in this world God seldom or never gives his servants the fulfillment of what is promised to them, and therefore has directed their minds to his sanctuary, where the blessings not exhibited in the present shadowy life are treasured up for them (s. 17).”
 - Ps 92:12-15, “The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. They are planted in the house of the LORD; they flourish in the courts of our God. They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green, to declare that the LORD is upright; he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.”
 - “Had they clung to earth, they could not have found nothing of the kind; but looking to heaven, they saw that the period during which the Lord afflicted his saints was but a moment, and that the mercies with which he gathers them are everlasting; on the other hand, they foresaw that for the wicked, who only dreamed of happiness for a day, there was reserved an eternal and never-ending destruction (s. 18).”
- b. The Example of Job (s. 19)
- i. Job suffered immensely, yet he declared...
 - Job 13:15a, “Though he slay me, I will hope in him...”
 - Job 19:25-27a, “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.”
 - **DQ: Was this private, hidden wisdom revealed only to Job?**
- c. The Witness of the Prophets (s. 20-22)
- i. The light of the Gospel, which began as a spark for Adam, gradually increased until “all the clouds being dispersed, Christ the Sun of Righteousness arose, and with full refulgence illumed all the earth (Mal 4) (s. 20).”
 - ii. When the prophets mention the happiness of believers, they commend divine goodness by making use of temporal blessings to shine light above the earth to the blessings to come.
 - The Valley of Dry Bones (Ezek 37) corrected, “...the unbelief of the Jews at the time, but it also reminded them how much farther the power of the Lord extended than to the bringing back of the people (s. 21).”

V. Conclusion (s. 23)

- a. The patriarchs and prophets “had Christ as the pledge of their covenant.”
 - i. “...the OT, or covenant which the Lord made with the people of Israel, was not confined to earthly objects, but contained as promise of spiritual and eternal life, the expectation of which behooved to be impressed on the minds of all who truly consented to the covenant.”
 - ii. The only “Kingdom of Heaven” Jesus promised to his followers is the one in which they “recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Matt 8:11).”
 - The saints who arose from their tombs and walked Jerusalem was a way of giving them assurance that they shared in salvation as much as we do.