

CALVIN AND THE DUAL ASPECT OF
COVENANT MEMBERSHIP:
Galatians 3:15–22
—the Meaning of “the Seed’ is Christ”—
and Other Key Texts*

by J. Mark Beach

Introduction

AMONG REFORMED churches nowadays there is a difference of opinion, of no small consequence, concerning the scope of covenant membership—that is, there is controversy regarding how best to define the parties of the covenant of grace. Some, focusing upon the essence or salvific efficacy of the covenant promise, define the parties of the covenant of grace as being God on the one hand and the elect in Christ or Christ and his elect on the other.¹ Others, focusing upon the historical manifestation of the covenant, maintain that this covenant is between God and believers and their seed, some also arguing that the question of divine election is not relevant to this issue.² As a third option, many Reformed writers de-

* A version of this essay was first presented at the Mid-America Reformed Seminary Ministerial Forum, 13 February 2008. A much abbreviated and revised version, focusing upon Calvin’s exegesis of this text as a prelude to federal theology, was presented 30 May 2009 at the Sixteenth-Century Studies Conference, held in Geneva, Switzerland.

¹ For example, Herman Hoeksema, *Believers and Their Seed*, trans. Homer C. Hoeksema (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1971), 109-113; 132-145; idem, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2004), II: 362-368; 379-381. It should be noted, however, that Hoeksema carves out his own peculiar path in treating this question, for he denies that the covenant of grace is in any sense “conditional” (see *Believers and Their Seed*, 18-19; 20-33; *Reformed Dogmatics*, II: 376-379). Note: Since the scope of covenant membership has more recently been a debate principally among Dutch Reformed churches or Reformed churches of Dutch descent, I will limit references, both here and below, to writers of that broad tradition.

² For example, W. Heyns, *Verhandelingen over het Genadeverbond* (1914), 11-12; 70-75; idem, *Gereformeerde Geloofsleer* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans-Sevensma Co., 1916), 130-131; 138-143; 152; 202-210; idem, *Manual of Reformed Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1926), 131-133; 140-147; 148-149; 209-218; idem, *Handboek voor de Catechetiek* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans-Sevensma Co., n.d.), 95-105; 139-146. Lammert J. Hulst follows Heyns in the way he defines the covenant of grace and membership in it; see his *Kenterig in de Verbondsleer* (Holland, MI: Holland Printing Co., 1917). This view is also defended by Foppe M. Ten Hoor, Professor of Systematic Theology at Calvin Theological Seminary from 1900 to 1924, in his *Compendium der Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* (Holland: A. Ten Hoor, 1922), 119-165. Klaas Schilder and those who follow in his theological trajectory are also examples of this view. Thus it is not surprising that this position is championed in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) and the Canadian Reformed churches in North America. See Schilder’s *Main*

fine membership in the covenant of grace in a manner that affirms each of the above stated positions, considered from different angles. Thus in seeking to answer the question about the scope of covenant membership, it is necessary to make certain distinctions in order to capture all of Scripture on this question. This means, then, that it is necessary to argue that in some respects it is proper to define covenant membership as including believers and their seed but in other respects it is correct to define covenant membership as comprising the elect in Christ.³

Points of the Doctrine of the Covenant: A Speech given by Dr. K. Schilder in the Waalsche Church in the Delft, the Netherlands on August 31, 1944, trans. T. van Laar (Canada: 1992); also reproduced at: <http://spindleworks.com/library/schilder/covenant.htm>; idem, *Looze Kalk: Een wederwoord over de (zedelijke) crisis in de "Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland"* (Groningen: De Jager, 1946); idem, *Extra-Scriptural Binding: A New Danger—A Collection of Articles by Professor Dr. K. Schilder published in de Reformatie during 1950-51 in connection with the Declaration of Principles of the Protestant Reformed Churches*, trans. T. van Laar, published with *American Secession Theologians on Covenant and Baptism* by Jelle Faber (Neerlandia, Alberta: Inheritance Publications, 1996), 55-167. For a fuller discussion of Schilder's conception of the covenant, see Sybrand Albertus Strauss, "Alles of Niks' – K. Schilder oor die Verbond," D.D. dissertation, University of Pretoria, 1982. Also see J. Kamphuis, *The Everlasting Covenant* (Launceston, Australia: The Publication Organization of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, 1985); C. Vander Waal, *The Covenantal Gospel*, trans. Drs. and Mrs. G. L. Bertram, revised by H. DeJong Jr. (Neerlandia, Alberta: Inheritance Publications, 1990); C. Stam, *The Covenant of Love: Exploring Our Relationship with God* (Winnipeg: Premier Publishing). Among the Free Reformed, see C. A. Schouls, who sets forth a version of this position; see his "The Covenant of Grace," at: <http://spindleworks.com/library/schouls/Covenant01.htm>. In back of this entire position, likely unbeknownst to most of these authors, stand the works of two nineteenth-century Dutch writers, K. J. Pieters and J. R. Kreulen; see K. J. Pieters, *Het Baptisme bij het Licht der H. Schrift en der Geschiedenis beoordeeld en in 't licht gesteld. Een ernstig woord van waarschuwing tegen deze gezindte aan de Chr. Afgesch. Gereformeerden, "De Vrienden der Waarheid," en allen die belang stellen in het Koninkrijk Gods op aarde* (Franeker: T. Telenga, n.d.); and K. J. Pieters and J. R. Kreulen, *De Kinderdoop volgens de Beginzelen der Gereformeerde Kerk, in hare Gronden, Toedieningen en Praktijk. Op nieuw onderzocht, beoordeeld en van vele schijnbare zwaarigheden ontheven* (Franeker: T. Telenga, 1861).

³ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. John Vriend, ed. John Bolt, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003-2008), III: 193-232; 590ff.; IV: 477-490; 514-532; idem, *De Offerande des Lofs: overdenkingen voor en na de toelating tot het heilige avondmaal*, 15th ed. (Kampen: J. H. Kok, n.d.); this work is translated into English by Rev. John Dolfin, *The Sacrifice of Praise* (Grand Rapids: Louis Kregel Publications, 1922); Geerhardus Vos, *The Letters of Geerhardus Vos*, edited with an introduction by James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2005), 153-157; 160-164; idem, *Dogmatiek*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: n.p., 1910), I: Deel 2: Anthropologie, 78-138; III: De Genademiddelen, 86-134; idem, *Systematische Theologie: Compendium* (Grand Rapids: n.p., 1916), 47-53; 119-122; also see idem, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), 19-26; and idem, "Hebrews, the Epistle of the Diatheke," in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, edited by Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1980), 161-233; and in the same volume "The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology," revision of translation of S. Voorwinde and W. Van Gemeren, 234-267, especially, 245-267; J. Van Lonkhuyzen, *Heilig Zaad: Verhandelingen over den Heiligen Doop* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans-Sevensma Co., 1916); the Westminster Larger Catechism uses the language of the covenant being made "with Christ as the second Adam, and in him with all the elect as his seed" in Q/A 3, but it also says in Q/A 166 that the infants of believing parents ought to be baptized as "within the covenant." Within the more recent history of the Dutch Reformed tradition, see also M. J. Bosma, *Exposition of Reformed Doctrine: A Popular Explanation of the Most Essential Teachings of the Reformed Churches*, 5th ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1927), 110-133; 262-272; Henry Beets, *The Reformed Confession Explained: A Popular Commentary and Textbook on the Netherland or Belgic Confession of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1929), 140ff.; 254ff.; idem, *The Compendium Explained: A Popular Exposition of the Abridgement of the Heidelberg Catechism, Known as the "Compendium of the Christian Religion," of the Reformed Churches of Holland, and of*

A brief survey of Reformed theology, even from its earliest codification, reveals that the last of these proposals—that is, what is sometimes today called the dual aspect position—is of ancient pedigree and constitutes the consensus position among the Reformed, a position that emerges from the exegesis of key texts.⁴

It is beyond the scope of this essay to tackle this entire controversy. My aim is more modest, namely, to set forth some of the biblical materials that undergird the claim that the covenant of grace is made with God and the elect in Christ or Christ and his elect. Specifically, using Calvin as a foil for this issue, our interest is to analyze how he treats these biblical materials. Our focus will be upon one principal text, Gal. 3:15-22, but we will also take a glance at Calvin's comments on Rom. 9:6ff. in order to demonstrate why Reformed theologians have vigorously affirmed dual aspects to covenant membership. This will demonstrate (again a modest claim) that it is therefore mistaken to reject the dual aspect view as out-of-bounds or as sub-Reformed or sub-biblical or un-confessional inasmuch as it is standard Reformed theology, conforms to the Reformed confessions, and most important of all, captures the fullness of divine revelation given to us in Scripture.

To proceed, first, I will present Calvin's exegesis of Gal. 3:15-22, followed by a summary presentation of his theological formulations pertaining to covenant membership. I maintain that Calvin's exegesis both presupposes and articulates a dual aspect model of the covenant of grace. Next, I will briefly examine Calvin's treatment of Rom. 9:6ff., which confirms and stands in line with his exegesis of Gal. 3, and which also explicitly sets forth Calvin's understanding of the relationship between covenant and election. Finally, in light of Calvin's exegetical discussion and theological formulations, I will set forth, and briefly make some comments upon, a set of key theological issues that must be given their

Holland Origin, 4th, revised and enlarged edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), 215-224; 237-244; William Hendriksen, *The Covenant of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1932; revised edition, 1978), 47-53; Samuel Volbeda, "An Analysis and Critique of W. Heyns on the Covenant by Samuel Volbeda," taken from the author's Course Syllabus Catechetics (Calvin Theological Seminary, n.d.), edited by J. Mark Beach and published under the article, J. Mark Beach, "The Promise of the Enigma of Unbelief: Reflections on Covenant Promise, with a Selection from Samuel Volbeda's 'Catechetics,' Offering a Critique of William Heyns' Doctrine of the Covenant and the Apostasy of Covenant Youth," in *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 15 (2004): 136-153; L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4th edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939, 1941), 284-289; 632-642. Also see the statement of the Faculty and Board of Mid-America Reformed Seminary, *Doctrinal Testimony regarding Recent Errors*, Mid-America Reformed Seminary, Dyer, IN (May 2007), which accents the testamentary character of the covenant of grace but presupposes the dual aspect sense of this covenant—namely that the covenant of grace is in one sense made with the elect in Christ and in another sense it is also properly said to be made with believers and their seed; on the latter point see, for example, 1.5; 1.8; articles 10, 11, 13, 15-17, 23, 40, 42, 54, 55-58, 60, 69, 70-71.

⁴ For example, H. Bullinger, Calvin, Musculus, Ursinus, Olevianus, Perkins, Ames, Wollibus, Alsted, Maresius, Turretin, Witsius, Lekdekker, Marckius. See especially, Herman Witsius, "On the Efficacy and Utility of Baptism in the Case of Elect Infants Whose Parents Are under the Covenant," revised translation and "Introduction" by J. Mark Beach, *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 17 (2006): 121-190.

due if we are to capture the testimony of Scripture concerning membership in the covenant of grace. This will further demonstrate that a dual aspect model is biblically presupposed and necessitated.

1. Calvin's Exegesis of Galatians 3:15-22

In setting forth Calvin's exegesis of this text, we will be using chiefly his commentary on Galatians. We will also use his sermons on this book, as well as those other places in his corpus where this text (or related texts) is treated in a manner relevant to our purpose.

For Calvin, the focus of the apostle's argument in Gal. 3:15ff. has to do with "the substance of the covenant" (*substantia foederis*), for the covenant, in its substance, "rests on Christ alone" (*solo Christo suffultum esse*).⁵ Calvin makes this assertion in expounding the words of Gal. 3:16 ("Now to Abraham and his seed"). The apostle Paul begins the argument of this section at verse 15. In the previous section the apostle has set forth the inability of the law to justify a person, showing how in fact the law curses us and consequently how Christ redeems us from that curse by suffering that curse upon himself. All of that culminates in the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant coming to fruition among the Gentiles through Jesus Christ in the way of faith. Thus the apostle next takes up a defense of this claim—that is, the claim that the promise to Abraham is inclusive of Gentiles, and more importantly, inclusive of Gentiles because it is through Christ, Christ being the substance of the covenant.

Thus in verse 15 he states (AV: "Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though *it be* but a man's covenant, yet *if it be* confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto.")⁶ According to Calvin, Paul uses the phrase, *after the manner of men*, in order to embarrass the Galatian Christians. Inasmuch as we should simply take God at his word, such that what he says should be testimony enough for us, Paul, in order to drive home this important point, uses a human analogy—speaking after the manner of humans—namely that what holds for human covenants holds all the more for God's covenant with humans. The apostle's point, says Calvin, is that God's "sacred covenant" should not receive "less deference than is commonly yielded to ordinary human transactions."⁷ As Calvin observes, "This is an argument from the less to the greater."⁸ And so the point being made comes by way of a human analogy or example: just as it is a commonly held conviction that "human contracts" (*hominum contractus*) are binding, all the more the divine covenant established

⁵ Calvin, Comm. Gal. 3:16 (CTS). Quotations from the English translations of Calvin's commentaries are taken from the Calvin Translation Society edition (Edinburgh, 1843-1855), cited as CTS, and from *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, 12 volumes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963-74), cited as CNTC. All references to the Latin edition of Calvin's works are taken from *Ioannis Calvini Opera quae supersunt omnia*, ed. J. W. Baum, A. E. Cunitz, and E. Reuss, 59 volumes, Corpus Reformatorum (Braunschweig: Schwetschhke, 1863-1900); hereafter cited as CO.

⁶ Ἀδελφοί, κατὰ ἄνθρωπον λέγω ὅμως ἀνθρώπου κεκυρωμένην διαθήκην οὐδεὶς ἀθετεῖ ἢ ἐπιδιατάσσεται.

⁷ Comm. Gal. 3:15 (CTS).

⁸ Comm. Gal. 3:15 (CTS). CO 50, col. 211: "Argumentum est a minori ad maius."

with Abraham. “Moreover, where the Latin version reads *testamentum*, Paul’s Greek word is διαθήκη.”⁹ The term can be rendered either as *testament* or as *covenant*; and, for his part, Calvin does not think it really matters that much which term we choose, though he prefers the translation *covenant* because it fits better the analogy that the apostle is presenting. In any case, Paul’s point is to move us from “human bargains” (*humanis pactionibus*) to God’s solemn “covenant” (*foedus*) with Abraham. “If human bargains be so firm that they can receive no addition, how much more must this covenant remain inviolable?”¹⁰ The inviolability of the covenant of grace, of course, can only be affirmed because it doesn’t finally depend upon human beings for its success or fruition but upon the grace of God.

Before the apostle pursues the path of this argument, says Calvin, Paul pauses at verse 16 in order to make an observation about the “substance” (*substantia*) of the covenant (AV: “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ...”).¹¹ Although the apostle’s words might at first glance appear peculiar, appealing as he does to the “singular number” of the word “seed” (σπέρμα)—a word that allows a plural referent as “a collective noun”—, his reasoning is actually quite sound. The reason for this, in spite of the slander of Jews (i.e., Jewish contemporaries of Calvin), is not rooted in grammar as such but in theology—i.e., the actual history of Israel and God’s redemptive work among his people. As Calvin observes:

Among Abraham’s own sons a division had already begun, in that one of them was cut off from the family. ‘In Isaac shall thy seed be called’ [Gen. 21:12]. Ishmael is not included. Let us come to the second step. Do the Jews admit that Esau’s posterity is the blessed seed? No, they contend that their father, though the firstborn, was struck out. And how many nations have sprung from the stock of Abraham who have no share in this calling? The twelve patriarchs were in the end the twelve heads, not because they had descended from the line of Abraham, but because they were ordained by the special election of God. Since the ten tribes were carried away [Hos. 9:17], how many thousands of them have so degenerated that they no longer have a place among the seed of Abraham? Lastly, the tribe of Judah was led into great testing, so that the true succession to the blessing remained among only a few people. And this has been predicted by Isaiah, ‘Only a remnant shall be saved’ (Isa. 10:21).¹²

⁹ Comm. Gal. 3:15 (CNTC).

¹⁰ Comm. Gal. 3:15 (CTS). CO 50, col. 211: “Nam si illis constat sua firmitas, ut ne superaddere quidem liceat: quanto magis hoc inviolabile manere decet?”

¹¹ τῷ δὲ Ἀβραάμ ἑρρέθησαν αἱ ἐπαγγελίαι καὶ τῷ σπέρματι αὐτοῦ. οὐ λέγει· καὶ τοῖς σπέρμασιν, ὡς ἐπὶ πολλῶν ἀλλ’ ὡς ἐφ’ ἐνός· καὶ τῷ σπέρματι σου, ὅς ἐστιν Χριστός.

¹² Comm. Gal. 3:16 (CNTC). In his nineteenth sermon on Galatians, treating 3:13, 14, Calvin remarks that *the Seed* of verse 16 “must be considered after a peculiar fashion.” Faith alone bonds and knits the church together into one body; moreover, the only way we come to

As Calvin observes, a division is manifest among Abraham's own children, such that many nations have sprung from the stock of Abraham who have no share in this calling. The twelve tribes were whittled down to one, the tribe of Judah. Even then, the blessing remained among only a few people as Isaiah prophesied.

Thus Calvin presents a three-pronged argument here. First, within the line of Abraham God distinguishes—elects and rejects—from the outset, for Ishmael is excluded, though covenanted. Second, Esau, though covenanted, is also excluded, as is his line, yet they are of the lineage of Abraham—besides other nations and peoples that have Abrahamic bloodlines; nonetheless, they are not the “blessed seed,” for they are not chosen by God. And all of this can be further illustrated in that even the twelve patriarchs cannot congratulate themselves—that is, they may not say that they became the twelve heads, forming the twelve tribes and composing God's own people, because they are descended from the Abrahamic family tree; no, says Calvin, it is because of divine ordination and God's special election. Likewise in subsequent history thousands of descendants from the twelve heads have been cut off and expelled, no longer counted among the seed of Abraham. And, third, even the tribe of Judah can only count a remnant who are saved, for concerning the twelve tribes the true succession of blessing extends finally to only a few.

We must remember that, in making these observations, Calvin is speaking of the “substance”¹³ of the covenant, which means he is not talking about the merely formal or outward administrative aspects of it, but he is talking about the essential salvific content and purpose of the covenant, for Christ and all his saving benefits constitute the *substance* of the covenant.¹⁴

assurance that we belong to Abraham's seed is by “resorting to the head, that is to wit our Lord Jesus Christ.” For union with the body of Christ depends upon “one man.” It is not many seeds of Abraham that are the source and foundation of the blessing of this covenant; only one; all must be gathered to this Seed, Christ, and cleave to him by faith; and thereby they too may be reckoned “the seed of Abraham.” Without faith, one is the seed of Israel after the flesh. “For there was but one promised child, which was Isaac. So then we must come to our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom all God's promises are Yea and Amen [2 Cor. 1:20], and in whom they have their substance. For without him there is nothing else but scattering” (pp. 411-12).

¹³ Calvin's use of this term refers to the real essence of a thing—that without which a thing could not be what it is and would be something else; i.e., the primary and the most important aspect of a thing; or the essential nature of a thing in terms of which a thing is recognized and defined and without which it could not exist as that thing.

¹⁴ See below for a further defense of this claim, but especially see Calvin's comments on Isa. 42:6; 48:9; and Rom. 9:6ff. Calvin, like his Reformed predecessors and contemporaries, distinguished between the substance and the administrative features of the covenant of grace. But even more he distinguished between those who participate in the substance of the covenant and those who enjoy only a formal relationship to it, cf. Comm. Rom. 9:6ff. Cf. Calvin's colleague and contemporary, Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575). My colleague, Dr. Cornelis P. Venema, pointed me to the following reference in Bullinger's *A Brief Exposition of the One Eternal Testament or Covenant of God* [Zürich, 1534]. In treating the conditions of the covenant of grace, Bullinger says that the promises and conditions offered us in the covenant are not only material but also spiritual. “Most important, as explained to the Galatians [3:16] by the apostle, Abraham was promised the Lord Jesus, in whom is all fullness, righteousness, sanctification, (14a) life, redemption, and salvation (1 Cor. 1 [30]), of whose fullness we have all received, grace for grace (John 1 [16]), because it pleased the Father that all fullness dwell in him, and through his blood on the cross he has made peace with everything that is in heaven and on earth (Col. 1 [19-20]). And this same Jesus is the inheritance itself which has

Of course, notes Calvin, Jews (i.e., those who practice Judaism) are aware of their own history. They would not dispute these observations as facts. But following the apostle's argument, they—along with the “imposers”/Judaizers—have failed to trace out the implications, yes, the theological implications, of these observations. For although these Jews would not reckon Ishmaelites or Edomites as genuine covenant seed but as “spurious seed,” they have dubious reasons for reckoning them as such. It will not suffice to point to their disobedience—if that were a sufficient answer then human obedience likewise suffices to explain why they, the Jews, are genuine seed. Calvin rejects this explanation as boasting in one's own obedience—that is, what Calvin calls “merit,” for the covenant is not a matter of merit; rather, it is a matter of “calling”—“the calling of God.”¹⁵ And here Calvin is not using the word “calling” as something ineffectual or directed to all the covenanted in general, otherwise his own exegesis fails. No, calling here is the work of divine election and salvation, the work of selection from among the covenanted, and this is God's prerogative.¹⁶ For Calvin, if we are to understand the holy apostle's argument, we must ever return to this fundamental and undeniable reality: God sets forth a privilege or prerogative from among the covenanted when he says, “In Isaac shall thy seed be called” (Gen. 21:12).¹⁷ That is not a matter of good works or of obedience or of covenantal faithfulness or anything else that finds its origin in a human obligation to

been bequeathed to those who trust in the one and eternal covenant of God....” (p. 110). As for man's duty, what is central is this: “... to adhere firmly by faith to the one God, inasmuch as he is the one and only author of all good things, and to walk in innocence of life for his pleasure.” (p. 111). Bullinger makes it clear that we have a covenantal responsibility to respond in faith and obedience to God's covenant promises; but in his *Decades*, as Bierma points out in his *German Calvinism in the Confessional Age: The Covenant Theology of Caspar Olevianus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), Bullinger also makes clear that “it is God who fulfills that responsibility in and through us.” Circumcision and later baptism are signs that God, “solely by His grace and goodness bound Himself” in a covenant (*Decades*, II, 3.6:174). “Faith is entirely a gift of God bestowed on His elect” (Bierma, p. 38, referencing the Second Helvetic Confession, XVI:71-2; and then quoting the *Decades*, II, 3.8:251). “For Bullinger, therefore, as for Zwingli, the benefits of God's covenant of grace do not ultimately depend on faith and obedience; they include faith and obedience” (Bierma, p. 38).

¹⁵ Comm. Gal. 3:16 (CTS).

¹⁶ Calvin treats divine calling, distinguishing between a general calling and special calling, in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* [1559], 2 vols., edited by John T. McNeill, translated by Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), III.xxiv.8. In his words: “[T]here are two kinds of call. There is the general call, by which God invites all equally to himself through the outward preaching of the word—even those to whom he holds it out as a savor of death [cf. II Cor. 2:16], and as the occasion for severer condemnation. The other kind of call is special, which he deigns for the most part to give to the believers alone, while by the inward illumination of his Spirit he causes the preached Word to dwell in their hearts.” The phrase “for the part” is added because Calvin also see God's special call reaching those who have a temporary sort of faith: “Sometimes ... he communicates it also to those whom he enlightens only for a time, and whom afterwards, in just punishment for their ingratitude, he abandons and smites with greater blindness.” Also see IV.i.2. Note: all quotations from the *Institutes* are from the Battles translation unless otherwise indicated.

¹⁷ Comm. Gal. 3:16 (CTS); CO 50, col. 212: “Nam semper ad illam praerogativam redeundum, In Isaac vocabitur tibi semen.”

God or a right response to his law. No, for humans faithfully respond to God only because God first does a gracious work in them. It is a matter of the divine call. Hence, the covenant, in its substance, is made with the elect in the Seed, Christ.

Calvin sees Paul's argument as unfolding in this way: that the grammatical "singular" to which he appeals is governed by the theological reality that "the word 'seed' denotes one who was not only born of Abraham according to the flesh but had also been ordained for this by the calling of God."¹⁸ Thus the covenant promise applies to a single individual, *the Seed*, to whom the saving blessings of the covenant are found and therefore in whom the saving blessings of the covenant are bestowed. This, to Calvin's mind, is indisputable. "[T]hat covenant was made too Jesus Christ," though he "had no neede of any of the promises," yet he received them "as head of the Church." Therefore, "... God had not an eye simply vnto Abraham, nor too the worthiness that was in him, but that Abraham was a member of the Church, whereof Iesus Christ was alwayes the head." For Christ is God's only "beloved" (*aimé*).¹⁹ He is "the person in whome wee receiue the promises." "[T]he promises are made vnto vs by the meanes of our Lord Iesus Christ..." There is only one *Seed*, for there is only one mediator. Calvin therefore bids us to "leane wholly vnto him, and assure our selues that if we be once engrefed into his body by fayth, and made one with him, the promises belong vnto vs. Why so? For they were giuen vnto him, not for his owne comoditie, as I haue sayd alreadie (for he had no neede of them) but for our behoofe that we might be made partakers of them."²⁰

Next, if we are to follow the apostle's argument, Calvin says that it is necessary to take up the force of the words, "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 22:18), which form the content of the promise. These words cannot mean that all of Abraham's seed bless all the nations of the earth, for Calvin has already shown that the seed of Abraham isn't indiscriminately all the covenanted or all who can trace their bloodlines back to Abraham. Rather, the seed refers to a single individual who is called of God—the Messiah. Likewise not all persons of all nations indiscriminately receive this blessing but only those who are "gathered" (Isa. 56:8). This is why "Paul had good ground for saying, that the covenant was made in Christ or in reference to Christ."²¹

From here Calvin is in position to proceed to verse 17. We do not need to examine every detail of Calvin's exposition of verse 17 inasmuch as the point is not difficult to grasp: the law, coming after the promise—a promise that predates the law by 430 years—cannot disannul the prom-

¹⁸ Comm. 3:16 (CNTC).

¹⁹ John Calvin's twentieth sermon on Galatians, 3:15-18, in *Sermons of M. Iohn Calvine vpon the Epistle of Sainte Paule to the Galathians*, trans. Arthur Golding (London, 1574), pp. 151-152. CO 50, cols. 525-526: "Ainsi donc quand il est dit que c'est par le moyen de nostre Seigneur Iesus Christ que les promesses s'adressent à nous, il faut que nous baissions la teste, cognoissans que Dieu a seulement son fils unique qui luy est bien aimé, et que c'est en luy que nous luy sommes agreables."

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 151-152.

²¹ Comm. Gal. 3:16 (CTS); CO 50, col. 213: "Unde sequitur, Paulum non immerito dicere, pactum fuisse initum in Christo, vel respectu Christi."

ise. The imposters, however, states Calvin, deny salvation through the free promise by faith, and instead posit “the necessity of good works in order to merit salvation.” But this won’t do, “for a covenant once sanctioned must remain perpetually binding.”²² The promise is “free”; it is critical to grasp this in order to follow the apostle’s argument. As Calvin states: “for the law and the promise are not at variance but on this single point, that the law justifies a man by the merit of works, and the promise bestows righteousness freely.” Then Calvin adds, “This is made abundantly clear when he [the apostle Paul] calls it a *covenant* founded on Christ.”²³

In order to drive home the point and apply it to his context and times, Calvin contends against the Papists and their claim, namely that since the creation law predates the covenant here Paul must only be opposing the ceremonies of the law and therefore contrasting the ceremonies of the law with the promise of the covenant to Abraham and to his seed. For Calvin, this won’t suffice:

I reply, that Paul took into account this fact, that no reward is due to works except through the covenant with God. Thus, even though we were to grant that the law justifies, yet before the law men could not merit salvation by works since there was no covenant. I affirm nothing but what the scholastic theologians allow. They do not teach that works are meritorious of salvation through their intrinsic worth but by the acceptance of God (as they say) and by reason of the covenant. Consequently, where no divine covenant, no testimony of acceptance occurs, no works will suffice for righteousness. Therefore Paul’s argument is perfectly logical. He says that God made a twofold covenant with men, the first through Abraham, the second through Moses. The former was founded on Christ and so was free. And therefore the law, which came after, could not bring salvation to men apart from grace, for else it would make the promise of none effect. That this is the meaning appears clearly from what immediately follows.²⁴

²² Comm. Gal. 3:17 (CTS); CO 50, col. 213: “Nam pactum semel sancitum inviolabile manere debet.”

²³ Comm. Gal. 3:17 (CTS); CO 50, col. 213: “Nam lex et promissio non pugnant, nisi in causa iustificationis, quod ilia hominem iustificat operum merito, haec gratuito iustitiam donat. Et clare etiam se exponit, quum pactum vocat in Christo fundatum.”

²⁴ Comm. Gal. 3:17 (CNTC); CO 50, col. 213: “Respondeo, Paulum considerasse id quod erat, nullam mercedem operibus deberi nisi ex Dei pacto. Ita etiamsi fateamur legem iustificare: tamen ante legem non poterant homines salutem promereri operibus, quia nullum erat pactum. Nihil affirmo quod non concedant scholastici theologi. Neque enim opera docent intrinseca dignitate meritoria esse salutis, sed acceptatione Dei (ut loquuntur) et ratione pacti. Ergo ubi nullum Dei pactum, nullum acceptationis testimonium intercedit: nulla quoque opera ad iustitiam sufficient. Quare belle procedit Pauli ratiocinatio. Duplex, inquit, pactum fuit Dei cum hominibus. Prius percussum in manu Abrahae: secundum, in manu Mosis. Illud fundatum in Christo fuit: ideoque gratuitum. Ergo lex superveniens efficere non potuit ut salutem habeant homines extra gratiam: quia hoc modo irrita fieret promissio. Talem esse sensum demonstrat id, quod proxime sequitur.”

Thus Calvin here reasserts that this covenant, the covenant made with Abraham (in distinction from the covenant established with Moses), was free, given that God makes all the provisions for its fulfillment and bestows the blessings of it upon those whom he chooses. Indeed, that is why it is free, for we do not earn or merit or work for righteousness; righteousness is bestowed freely in Christ. What is more, our works as such never merit anything in any case, not without God's prior covenant arrangement, wherein he condescends and graciously accepts our works and places a reward or blessing upon their performance—"no reward is due to works except through the covenant with God" (*nullam mercedem operibus deberi nisi ex Dei pacto*).²⁵

As Calvin sees it, in verse 18 ("For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise"), the apostle Paul reinforces and makes even more explicit the contrast between promise and law—and Paul does that by setting forth the complete inconsistency between salvation by the law and salvation by the promise of God; these are "contraries," says Calvin. Moreover, the law at this point may not be reduced to its "ceremonies," though the ceremonies are included, since, for Paul, anything that interferes with the free promise of God, which means the whole law, stands under the rubric of *works against faith* (here Calvin quotes Rom. 4:14, 16). However, this contrast between law and promise is really, says Calvin, a contrast between *faith and works*, for the promise is connected with faith; the law is connected with works. The contrast is clear: the promise is bestowed and received; the law is set forth and a reward is paid to its fulfillment. Abraham received the promise from God freely, and this "not by requiring some sort of reciprocal compensation." "For if you take it as conditional, the word *gave* [κεχάρισται] would be utterly inapplicable."²⁶ The import of that word must not be missed, for it is as if to say that no bargain exists between God and man as between "partie & partie," with stipulations of "I will do this" and "you shall do that." No, rather God freely gives and man "doth but only receive."²⁷ Likewise, the word *inheritance* should not be underestimated, for if we are separated from Christ, we are cut off; indeed, in ourselves we have nothing to bring;

²⁵ Though Calvin doesn't argue it here—implicit in his comments is that even creation-law and the performance of the law prior the covenant of grace requires a covenant with God if such obedience is to issue forth unto blessing and reward. In this sense, Calvin anticipates the words of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, when it says: "The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant" (VII.1). On the question whether Calvin explicated any sort of doctrine of the covenant of works, it is best to argue that he anticipated the doctrinal development of it, see *Institutes* II.i.1, 4; I.xv.8. Also see Peter A. Lillback, *The Binding of God: Calvin's Role in the Development of Covenant Theology*, Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought, ed. Richard A. Muller (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 276-304.

²⁶ Comm. Gal. 3:18 (CNTC).

²⁷ Twentieth Sermon on Galatians, 3:15-18, pp. 154-155; CO 50, col. 532: "mais ici il use du mot de donation: comme s'il disoit qu'il n'y a point ici un contract mutuel, pour dire, le feray cela, et tu feras ceci: ie vens, et tu payeras: rien: mais c'est Dieu qui donne, et l'homme accepte tant seulement."

“man is able to deserve nothing of himself.” We deserve no favor or blessing. The heritage of salvation, along with all the benefits that God bestows on us in this world, must proceed from our faith. And this does not mean we bring faith itself as our contribution; rather, the heritage comes by faith and faith is God’s gift, for all blessings are found in Jesus Christ.²⁸

Next Paul shows what purpose the law fulfills inasmuch as it does not serve to bring us to righteousness before God—righteousness before God is what God does by his free promise, in *the Seed*, through faith.

While recognizing that the apostle sees multiple uses of the law, in verse 19 the focus is upon the law in its ability “to make known transgressions,” and so “to compel men to acknowledge their guilt.” Its instruction, pointing out true righteousness, increases transgressions, given our corrupt nature. The Spirit, who writes the law on our hearts, is not given by the law but by the promise;²⁹ and the promise isn’t given by the law but by God’s free grace. And God’s free grace is received by faith.³⁰ Thus the law is an interim measure *till the seed should come*. The law serves a positive purpose, then, until Messiah arrives—the seed of the promise, the one to whom and in whom the promise is made and reaches fulfillment. That positive purpose was to make men despair of themselves and rouse them “to the expectation of Christ” (cf. verses 23, 24, and the apostle’s language of “kept under the law” and “the law was our schoolmaster”). That particular and specific “mode of administration” of the law was temporal, and is accomplished or finished with “the fulfillment of the promise” in Christ’s coming.³¹

At this point the apostle again contrasts the law with the promise in that the law was *ordained through angels by the hand of a mediator* (cf. Acts 7:53)—angels standing as witnesses at the promulgation of the law. The mediator, says Calvin, refers not to Moses but to Christ, for he is finally the definitive mediator who stands between God and the people, meaning in this context not that Christ is the mediator who brings peace and reconciliation but “the Mediator of all teaching, because by Him God has always revealed Himself to men.”³² Paul shows us, then, notes Calvin, that Christ is not only “the foundation of the free covenant” but also that Christ has “the primacy in giving the law.”³³

As for the words of verse 20 (“Now, a mediator is not a mediator of one; but God is one”), Calvin takes the phrase to refer to the mediation that is provided for both Jews and Gentiles. Christ is mediator of the Jews, and now also of the Gentiles. Whereas the ceremonies of the law,

²⁸ Twentieth sermon on Galatians, 3:15-18, pp. 154-155.

²⁹ Comm. Gal. 3:19 (CTS).

³⁰ Comm. Gal. 3:19 (CTS).

³¹ Comm. Gal. 3:19 (CTS).

³² Comm. Gal. 3:19 (CNTC).

³³ Comm. Gal. 3:19 (CNTC); CO 50, col. 217: “Et hoc nominatim exprimere voluit, ut discerent, Galatae, eundem, qui fundamentum sit gratuiti foederis, primas etiam tenuisse in lege promulganda.”

with circumcision, made them to differ and erect a barrier, now Christ unites them into one body. “God is one because He always remains like Himself and in a settled course holds fixed and unalterable what He has once decreed.”³⁴

Verse 21 makes clear that there is no opposition or disagreement in the divine purpose between the law and the covenant of grace with its promise, for the law’s purpose was never to justify sinners by their obedience to it—such a notion would be a contradiction and an opposition. For, Calvin avers, then God would be truly positing two ways of salvation: a promise-by-faith-route; and a law-by-obedience-route. This would make God contradict himself; and to suggest that this was part of the divine plan constitutes nothing less than blasphemy. In fact, if there was a law-path to life and righteousness—given that the law is good—God would have provided such a path. But there is no such avenue open to us; no such path exists.³⁵

This is why, strictly speaking (according to verse 22), the law does not oppose the promise, for the law serves the promise by shutting all things up under sin—that is, as Calvin understands this idea, the law “shuts up all men under accusation and therefore, instead of giving, it takes away righteousness.”³⁶ The law—the whole of Scripture—places all persons under the verdict of condemnation. It is vain to seek life by the law; the law pronounces guilt. Guilt excludes all persons from God’s fellowship. Indeed, not just all people but “all things” are shut up under sin. “All things” includes everything that persons may have or can put forward. The law passes sentence: all are guilty. But this is to the purpose of the promise. This is how the law serves the covenant of grace. “There is no remedy but to strip off the righteousness of works and flee to the faith of Christ.”³⁷ Here then is the contrast and antagonism: attempted works of righteousness which bring us into judgment versus free righteousness by faith in Christ—as Paul says, “that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.” Calvin bids us to see in that single word *promise* “a metonymy,” so that the thing containing is put for the thing contained,” which is to say, the *promise* denotes that which is promised—Christ and all his benefits.

Inasmuch as verse 22 makes explicit that the promise is given to those who believe in Jesus Christ, verse 29 serves to tie together several distinct features of this chapter, namely, Paul’s earlier remarks in verses 7-9 concerning “children of Abraham,” his argument in verse 16 concerning “the seed,” and his understanding of “the inheritance” in verse 18, for Paul writes that “And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” In Calvin’s view, these words attack certain misunderstandings of the Jews. Given that the Jews “gloried in their privilege” as covenant people, confident of their favored status as “Abraham’s seed,” Paul’s words come as a rebuke and a challenge, for without Christ they have no more standing before God than the (uncircumcised)

³⁴ Comm. Gal. 3:20 (CNTC).

³⁵ Comm. Gal. 3:21 (CNTC).

³⁶ Comm. Gal. 3:21 (CNTC).

³⁷ Comm. Gal. 3:22 (CNTC).

Gentiles. Jew and Gentile alike stand in the same place. “The conclusion rests on this argument, that Christ is the blessed seed in whom, as we have said, all the children of Abraham are united.” As proof, Paul points to “the common inheritance offered to them all; from which it follows that the promise includes them among the children.” But what is decisive here is that “faith is always joined in relation to the promise.”³⁸

Faith in Christ therefore—faith in *the Seed*—is what enables one to be included among the children of the promise and a recipient of the inheritance. To be Abraham’s seed is a matter of faith in *the Seed*. Without such faith one is excluded, for the promise is to Abraham’s *Seed*, the Messiah; and it extends to others *only in the way of faith in him*—to Jew and Gentile alike. That is why “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (v. 28). This is also why one may not *falsely* appeal to baptism *without faith*. In verse 27 the apostle appeals to baptism as a source of assurance (“For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ”). Yet Calvin’s comments in that connection are most apropos, since baptism, like circumcision, is an empty sign without faith. In fact, the bold statement that we have put on Christ if we are baptized requires comment, for (as Calvin notes) it does not mean that baptism is efficacious in all the baptized. Let it be observed that Calvin does not hold to an *ex opere operato* view of the sacraments. He therefore rejects the idea that the Holy Spirit is inexorably bound to the external sign. Thus Calvin writes, “Both the uniform doctrine of Scripture and also experience seem to be able to confute this statement.” So why does Paul make such a claim? He does so, argues Calvin, for good reason:

[I]t is customary for Paul to speak of the sacraments in a twofold way. When he is dealing with hypocrites who boast in the bare sign, he then proclaims the emptiness and worthlessness of the outward sign and strongly attacks their foolish confidence. Why? Because he considers, not the ordinance of God, but the corruption of the ungodly. When, however, he addresses believers, who use the signs properly, he then connects them with the truth which they figure. Why? Because he makes no boast of any false splendour in the sacraments, but what the outward ceremony figures he exhibits in fact. Thus, in agreement with the divine appointment, the truth becomes joined to the signs.³⁹

³⁸ Comm. Gal. 3:29 (CNTC); CO 50, col. 223: “Ideo hanc ipsam praestantiam communem facit omnibus, qui in Christum credunt. Consequentia autem hac ratione nititur, quod Christus semen illud est benedictum, in quo uniuntur omnes Abrahae filii: ut dictum est. Atque hoc probat, quia communiter omnibus offertur haereditas: unde sequitur, promissione inter filios referri. Observa autem, semper relative fidem cum promissione iungi.”

³⁹ Comm. Gal. 3:27 (CNTC); CO 50, col. 222: “Paulum de sacramentis bifariam solere loqui. Dum negotium est cum hypocritis, qui nudis signis superbiunt, tum concionatur quam inanis ac nihili res sit externum signum : et in praeposteram fiduciam fortiter invehitur. Quare? non respicit Dei institutionem sed impiorum corruptelam. Quum autem fideles alloquitur, qui rite utuntur signis, illa tunc coniungit cum sua veritate, quam figurant. Quare? neque enim fallacem pompam ostentat in sacramentis, sed quae externa caeremonia figurat, exhibet simul re ipsa. Hinc fit ut veritas secundum Dei institutum coniuncta sit cum signis.”

What is evident here is that hypocrites are precisely those who claim their status as members of the covenant and Abraham's seed without faith in Abraham's *Seed*. In such cases, though baptism still presents the grace of God—for unbelief cannot make void God's offer—the grace of God is not bestowed. The sacraments, for Calvin, never lose their "nature" and "power," but it is the nature of the promise itself that it comes in the way of faith. Thus wicked persons receive the outward sign but not the inward grace and blessing. Again, this doesn't render the sacrament of baptism invalid. As Calvin states, the sacraments do not "deceive in promising the grace of the Holy Spirit," but they don't deceive precisely because they are never offered except through faith. Thus it is only believers who receive what is offered. Unbelief makes the offer unprofitable—but God's faithfulness is not thereby destroyed. For "what is proper to God is not transferred to the sign and yet the sacraments keep their power, so that they cannot be regarded as empty and cold spectacles."⁴⁰ And, for Calvin, what is proper to God is his own sovereign choice of election, for faith is altogether a gift of God, granted through *the Seed* according to the divine call.

* * * * *

From our examination of Calvin's treatment of Gal. 3:15ff., we discover that it is not adequate to define membership in the covenant of grace as pertaining simply or only to believers and their children. While that language is permissible and biblically required, other language is needed next to it in order to follow the shape and texture of the biblical witness. Indeed, Calvin's exegetical work elicits the following theological observations, which necessitate theological formulation beyond the mere repetition of biblical phrases.

First, Galatians 3 shows us that the covenant of grace is inviolable—and that doesn't merely mean that it is unalterable (that the terms of it cannot be changed). No, this covenant as a covenant *of grace* is inviolable in saving sinners because of *the Seed*, the one who makes its soteric outcome certain—that is, this covenant rests in Christ, who has fulfilled the whole promise, being himself the content of that promise, and he bequeaths the inheritance to the very ones he came to save.

Second, it won't suffice to point to human obedience and faithfulness as securing covenant blessing, since that, for Calvin, bears the aroma of merit and would imply that our obedience is what makes the covenant salvifically successful. This is not permissible, for *the Seed*, Christ, is the source of every blessing and he makes the covenant soterically successful by his work which he imparts as a divine gift.

Third, God distinguishes between the covenanted by electing some as the seed of promise.

Fourth, for Calvin, the covenant was made with and to Jesus Christ, yet not because he needed its promises for himself. Rather, as head of his people he undertakes its stipulations on their behalf and bestows his work unto them, such that even Abraham receives the blessing of the

⁴⁰ Comm. Gal. 3:27 (CTS).

covenant only through *the Seed* to whom the promise is made and who is himself the content of the promise.

Fifth, there can be no “law-route” to blessing since there has always and only been a “faith-route” to the blessings of the covenant of grace, faith in *the Seed*.

Sixth, for Calvin, conditionality within the covenant of grace must be treated with care, since the covenant itself is a free gift wherein man only receives what God gives—after the manner of Augustine’s prayer: *Lord grant what you demand, and demand what you will*.

Likewise, seventh, inheritance bespeaks the testamentary character of the covenant of grace, which means that there is no blessing, no soteric blessing, except through union with Christ by faith.

Eighth, Christ is the foundation of the covenant of grace and its substance, and thus the covenant is all about what Christ does *for us* as *the Seed* and our faith in him as *the Seed*. In short, the word “promise” means Christ and all his benefits; and it means obtained by faith.

Ninth, to boast in being a covenant child of God without faith in the Christ, *the Seed* of the covenant, is utterly vacuous.

And, tenth, Calvin therefore speaks of covenant membership in a twofold kind way: those who are in the covenant and privileged to certain blessings (thus not wholly alienated from God); and others who are strictly children of promise in whom the power and effect of the covenant promises are found, not because they make themselves to differ but because God makes them to differ—this according to divine election.

2. Calvin’s Exegesis of Galatians 3:15–22 Confirmed from Romans 9:6ff.

Another passage that has bearing on the scope and nature of membership in the covenant of grace is Romans 9:6ff. In fact, this text is particularly relevant since the problem posed in this passage is precisely how God’s covenant promises in Christ have failed to find fruition in God’s covenant people, the Jews or the nation of Israel. At the end of chapter 8 the apostle had poured out a melody of celebration pertaining to the believer’s security of salvation in Christ Jesus. Indeed, nothing shall be able to separate the believer from God’s love in his Son, and the believer can rest assured, as we are reminded in another place in Scripture, that he who is in us is greater than he who is in the world. However, if nothing is able to separate the believer from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, how is it that the covenant people, Israel, have for the most part and by large majority rejected Jesus Christ? In their failure to believe are they not separated from God’s love in Jesus his Son? How can the people with whom God enters into covenant reject God’s Christ? Is God unable to make effective his sovereign and covenantal grace in them, to move them to faith, to bring them to love the Anointed of the Lord? Thus the apostle’s anguish, which introduces a new topic of discussion

in the epistle to the Romans: chapters 9-11. Here the apostle explains that in spite of Israel's unbelieving response to God's promises in Christ Jesus, the divine promise of blessing and salvation has not failed. Indeed, "the truth of the covenant remained firm."⁴¹

Calvin presented an exposition of these matters early in his career with his commentary on Romans [1540]. Commenting on the covenant promise, he writes: "the promise was so given to Abraham and to his seed, that the inheritance did not belong to every seed without distinction...."⁴² In this connection, Calvin shows us the two aspects of the covenant relative to the elect and the reprobate, calling us to keep in mind two things: "The first is, That the promise of salvation given to Abraham belongs to all who can trace their natural descent to him; for it is offered to all without exception, and for this reason they are rightly called the heirs of the covenant made with Abraham...."⁴³ Thus Calvin notes how the covenant is sealed to Ishmael and Esau, along with Isaac and Jacob. The former are not "wholly alienated" from God; they are children of the covenant. But Calvin bids us to pay close attention to a second matter, when he writes: "The second point to be considered is, that the children of the promise are *strictly* those in whom its power and effect are found. On this account Paul *denies here that all the children of Abraham were the children of God*, though a covenant had been made with them by the Lord, for few continued in the faith of the covenant...."⁴⁴ Even more explicitly he observes that among the covenanted, not all of them are to be regarded as "the seed," though they are all natural sons of Abraham, for "the promise is specially fulfilled only in some";⁴⁵ and so with the apostle Calvin reminds us that the promise "does not belong commonly and equally to all [in the covenant]."⁴⁶ Among the covenanted, there are those who are elect and those who are reprobate. The latter are children of the flesh. Only the children of promise, not the children of the flesh, "are peculiarly selected by the Lord."⁴⁷

Thus in saying, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called," Paul shows that "the hidden election of God overrules the outward calling [of being in the covenant], and that it is yet by no means inconsistent with it, but, on the contrary, that it tends to its confirmation and completion."⁴⁸ Calvin's point is simple: Corporate election is not the same as saving election. Outward calling is not the same as inward calling. The offer of salvation, in the way of covenant membership, is not the same as the bestowal of salvation upon the children of promise in the covenant.⁴⁹ According to his "hidden counsel," God chooses those whom he pleases even from

⁴¹ Comm. Rom. 9:6 (CTS).

⁴² Comm. Rom. 9:6 (CTS).

⁴³ Comm. Rom. 9:6 (CTS).

⁴⁴ Comm. Rom. 9:6 (CTS).

⁴⁵ Comm. Rom. 9:6 (CTS).

⁴⁶ Comm. Rom. 9:6; 9:11 (CTS).

⁴⁷ Comm. Rom. 9:7 (CTS).

⁴⁸ Comm. Rom. 9:7 (CTS).

⁴⁹ For Calvin's discussion of a corporate election on the one hand and a salvific individual election on the other, see, for example, *Institutes* III.xxvii.5-7; Comm. Ezek. 16:21.

among those circumcised or baptized.⁵⁰ For “not all natural sons are to be regarded as the seed, but that the promise is fulfilled in a special way only in some and does not belong equally and in common to all.”⁵¹

This diversity of outcome which manifests itself among the covenanted is grounded in God’s purpose according to election.⁵² The higher explanation of this diversity is only understood from this perspective. “Those ... who enjoy the benefits of God are the children of the promise,” i.e., they are the elect. “[T]he whole cause” of their salvation or their saving response to the promises of the covenant may be ascribed to “the unmerited election of God, which in no way depends on men.”⁵³

All of this fits with what Calvin writes in his *Institutes* (III.xxi.5, 7) in the treatment of the doctrine of election and how it relates to the covenant of grace. Calvin does not simply identify covenant and election. In other words, membership in the covenant of grace does not simply coincide with particular election. To be part of the covenant people—believers and their seed—is to experience a general election, that is, to be chosen as a nation and a recipient of God’s revelatory acts and the object of his special care.⁵⁴ However, election in the more restricted and salvific sense has to do with saving grace; and not all the covenanted experience that particular and special redemptive mercy. God, then, elects and rejects from among believers and their seed, even as he elects and rejects from among those who are afar off. The divine call itself is evidence of God’s work of grace and his selecting mercy.⁵⁵

Although it is now sufficiently plain that God by his secret counsel chooses whom he will while he rejects others, his gratuitous election has only been partially explained until we come to the case of single individuals, to whom God not only offers salvation, but so assigns it, that the certainty of the result remains not dubious or suspended. These are considered as belonging to that *one seed* of which Paul makes mention (Rom. ix. 8; Gal. iii. 16, &c.). For although adoption was deposited in the hand of Abraham, yet as many of his posterity were cut off as rotten members, in order that election may be effectual, it is necessary to ascend to the head in whom the heavenly Father hath connected his elect with each other, and bound them to himself by an indissoluble tie. Thus in the adoption of the family of Abraham, God gave them a liberal display of favour which he has denied to others; but in the members of Christ there is a far more excellent display of grace, because those ingrafted into him as their head never fail to obtain salvation.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Comm. Rom. 9:6 (CTS).

⁵¹ Comm. Rom. 9:8 (CNTC).

⁵² Comm. Rom. 9:11 (CNTC).

⁵³ Comm. Rom. 9:11 (CNTC).

⁵⁴ *Institutes*, III.xxi.5.

⁵⁵ *Institutes*, III.xxi.5.

⁵⁶ *Institutes*, III.xxi.7. CO 2, col. 685: “Quanquam satis iam liquet Deum occulto consilio libere quos vult eligere, aliis reiectis, nondum tamen nisi dimidia ex parte exposita est gratuita eius electio, donec ad singulas personas ventum fuerit, quibus Deus non modo salutem offert, sed ita assignat, ut suspensa vel dubia non sit effectus certitudo. Hi in semine Ulo unico

Calvin thus distinguishes two sorts of election, and God's special, salvific election is not an indiscriminate grace. In fact, Calvin explicitly explains that not all the covenanted are elect. "[W]hen God, after making a covenant of eternal life, invites any people to himself, a special mode of election is in part understood, so that he does not with promiscuous grace effectually elect all of them." The electing grace of God cuts a path through the covenant relation, for once more Calvin explicitly states:

The reason why the general election of the people is not always firmly ratified, readily presents itself—viz. that on those with whom God makes the covenant, he does not immediately bestow the Spirit of regeneration, by whose power they persevere in the covenant even to the end. The external invitation, without the internal efficacy of grace which would have the effect of retaining them, holds a kind of middle place between the rejection of the human race and the election of a small number of believers.⁵⁷

Then a little later:

In short, that common adoption of the seed of Abraham was a kind of visible image of a greater benefit which God deigned to bestow on some out of many. This is the reason why Paul so carefully distinguishes between the sons of Abraham according to the flesh and the spiritual sons, who are called after the example of Isaac ... that the immutable counsel of God, by which he predestinated to himself whomsoever he would, was alone effectual for their salvation.⁵⁸

Calvin will not deny, rather he affirms, a covenantal responsibility along the path of faith. But he will just as strongly affirm, and affirm immediately, that faith is the gift of God and is found only in those in whom God wills, according to his electing grace, to bestow this gift—i.e., it is given only to his elect.⁵⁹

censentur cuius meminit Paulus (Rom. 9, 8; Gal. 3, 16. 19. 20). Nam etsi adoptio in manu Abrahae fuit deposita, quia tamen multi ex posteris quasi putrida membra resecti sunt, ut efficax et vere stabilis sit electio, necesse est ascendere ad caput in quo electos suos coelestis pater inter se colligavit, et sibi insolubili nexu devinxit. Ita in adoptione generis Abrahae enituit quidem liberalis Dei favor, quem aliis negavit. In Christi tamen membris longe praestantior eminent vis gratiae; quia capiti suo insiti nunquam a salute excidunt."

⁵⁷ *Institutes*, III.xxi.7; *CO* 2, col. 686: "Quod autem generalis electio populi non semper firma et rata sit, in promptu se offert ratio: quia cum quibus paciscitur Deus non protinus eos donat spiritu regenerationis, cuius virtute usque in finem in foedere perseverent; sed externa mutatio absque interiori gratiae efficacia, quae ad eos retinendos valida esset, medium quiddam est inter abiectionem humani generis, et electionem exigui piorum numeri."

⁵⁸ *Institutes*, III.xxi.7; *CO* 2, col. 686: "Denique communis illa adoptio seminis Abrahae visibilis quaedam imago fuit maioris beneficii, quo Deus aliquos ex multis dignatus est. Haec ratio est cur tam sedulo discernat Paulus filios Abrahae secundum carnem a spiritualibus, qui exemplo Isaac vocati sunt; non quod simpliciter esse Abrahae filium res fuerit inanis et infructuosa (quod non sine foederis contumelia diceretur) sed quia immutabile Dei consilium, quo sibi praedestinavit quos voluit, efficax demum per se his solis posterioribus in salutem fuit."

⁵⁹ See Calvin's sermon on Deut. 10:15-17. Calvin's exegesis of Gal. 3:15ff. and Rom. 9:6ff. is also confirmed by his comments on Isaiah 42:6 and 49:8. In Isaiah 42:6 ("I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles"), the phrase "and give thee for a covenant of the people" means that "the covenant which was made with Abraham and his posterity had its foundation in Christ; for the words of the covenant are these, 'In thy seed shall all

* * * * *

It should be noted that Calvin's treatment of Rom. 9:6ff. confirms some of the themes accented in his exegesis of Gal. 3:15ff., namely that the nature of covenant membership cannot be divorced from Christ, and that while it is possible to partake of the covenant of grace and be counted among the covenanted in the way of the promise and the sign of the promise (baptism), those who enjoy the salvific outcome and content of the promise are only those found in the Mediator, i.e., the elect in him. They are the children of promise; they are the recipients of what is promised according to God's efficacious grace, for all that is promised is only found in Jesus Christ, the promised Seed. Moreover, this text shows itself to be of great import as it pertains to membership in the covenant of grace since it brings together two important theological motifs given to us in Scripture: covenant and election. By way of an itemized summation of Calvin's treatment of this passage we note the following:

First, the promise, in being given to Abraham and to his seed, does not mean that the inheritance belongs to every covenant member without distinction. Second, the children of the promise are *strictly* those in whom the power and effect of the covenantal promise are found. Third, in this respect, then, the promise does not belong commonly and equally to the covenanted, for among the covenanted, there are those who are elect (the children of promise) and those who are reprobate (the children of the flesh), according to God's own inscrutable and sovereign selection. Fourth, this means that the hidden election of God takes precedence over the outward call of the covenant, yet the outward call of the covenant is commandeered and becomes an efficacious (inward) call of God for the elect. Fifth, the salvation of any fallen human being is from God alone

nations be blessed.' (Gen. xxii. 18.) And the covenant was ratified in no other manner than in the seed of Abraham, that is, in Christ, by whose coming, though it had been previously made, it was confirmed and actually sanctioned." In Isaiah 49:8 ("Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages"), the words "I will give thee to be a covenant" refers to no other than Christ, says Calvin. Though addressing the body of God's people, the church, the prophet begins with Christ, who is the head of the church. Christ, of course, did not come for the sake of himself, but for our sakes; he didn't come, die, and rise from the dead for himself, but for us. He seeks the church's salvation. "God makes promises to the whole body of the Church. Christ, who occupies the place of Mediator, receives these promises, and does not plead on behalf of himself as an individual, but of the whole Church, for whose salvation he was sent. On this account he does not address Christ separately, but so far as he is joined and continually united to his body." The Father listens to us on account of his Son. These words then help us to see "how close is the connection between us and Christ. He stands in our room, and has nothing separate from us; and the Father listens to our cause." Moreover, here Isaiah makes it manifest that "all that had formerly been said was promised to Christ, not for the sake of his personal advantage, but on our behalf; for he has been appointed to be the Mediator of the covenant, because the Jews by their sins had revolted from God, who had made an everlasting covenant with them. The renewal of that covenant, therefore, which had been broken or dissolved, is ascribed to Christ." "Christ was therefore 'given to be a covenant of the people,' because there was no other way to God but by him."

and entirely unmerited. This applies to those in the covenant of grace as well. Salvation does not depend on the human party of the covenant achieving, in his or her own strength, the obligations or conditions imposed by the covenant—such as being faithful or obeying the demands required. While faith is requisite, it must also be bestowed as a gift from God. Part of the blessings of promise in Christ include that gift. That some covenant members receive this gift according to the promise, while others do not, must be ascribed to the unmerited election of God, for the elect are the children of promise. Sixth, Calvin distinguishes two kinds of election: (1) corporate election through the covenant which calls all to repent and believe; and (2) a special, soteric election, which creates a divide among the covenanted—i.e., those whom God will save and those whom God passes by. Last, the external call and invitation of the covenant, unless it is joined with the internal efficacy of the Spirit's enlivening activity, will not issue forth in faith, for faith is the gift of God and is granted to the elect alone.

We see, then, that the ultimate explanation why some of the covenanted do not come to faith and do not receive Christ is grounded in God's own sovereign, inscrutable good pleasure, expressing his justice in the way of eternal rejection and his love in the way of eternal election. In fact, Paul affirms that God's covenant has not failed in the face of the unbelief of his Christ-denying kinsmen. In saying that, the apostle does not mean that the covenant succeeds because some of the covenanted get the penalty side of that arrangement. No. In the face of Israel's unbelief the word of God (his covenant) has not fail since not all the covenanted are soterically covenanted—i.e., children of promise—according to divine election. That is the apostle's instruction in Romans 9.

3. Theological Topics Necessitating the Dual Aspect Model

It was these sorts of exegetical and theological conclusions—the making of biblically derived distinctions—that in part paved the way for a dual aspect formulation of covenant membership in subsequent Reformed theology. Calvin's seventeenth-century successors used this exegetical tradition to explore the intratrinitarian *pactum* or the covenant of redemption. This *pactum* was understood to ground and guarantee the salvific outcome of the covenant of grace in its historical unfolding. Other factors have played a role as well—both biblical texts and theological formulae—which are highly significant. Concerning these matters we offer some comments below. Indeed, these matters taken together and in tandem necessitate a dual aspect formulation of covenant membership. Our laconic remarks are only intended to demonstrate the theological issues that must come into play if we are to understand the full ramifications of membership in the covenant of grace according to Scripture. It should also be noted that these issues were developed to varying degrees by subsequent Reformed theologians, building on the exegetical foundation Calvin provided.

3.1. Covenant and Testament

It is important to consider the meaning of the chief biblical term for covenant. Indeed, the Reformed have not lost sight of the reality that *διαθήκη*, though legitimately translated as “covenant,” is principally and normally translated as “testament.”⁶⁰ Thus even when the term is properly translated as “covenant,” the testamentary character of the word is never altogether lost from view. This means that the covenant of grace, which is a covenant between God and believing sinners and their seed, between the Almighty and the impotent, between the Holy One and corrupted humans, cannot be a covenant exactly like that which exists between equals—as one person with another. The mutual stipulations cannot apply strictly to the relationship between God and humans, for humans have nothing that they do not receive. In the covenant of grace, given that God is dealing with corrupt sinners, he needs to provide what he demands so that they can fulfill their covenant obligations. Whatever they render to him he has first enabled them and bestowed to them to give. Indeed, unless God gives what he demands, the blessings of this covenant can never come to fruition. Left to themselves, sinful humans would never fulfill the conditions or demands of this covenant—starting with faith. Thus unless God bestows or bequeaths to us what he demands, the covenant fails. Yet precisely because God in fact gives what he demands—and graciously so—we see the testamentary character of the covenant of grace wonderfully exhibited. In this connection the words of Christ to his disciples in Luke 22:29 have played a role in theological formulation, where Jesus says, “And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me.” [κἀγὼ διατίθεμαι ὑμῖν καθὼς διέθετό μοι ὁ πατήρ μου βασιλείαν] The key word there is *διατίθεμαι* = *to make covenants or wills, to give by way of a covenant or will*. Hence the verse can be translated “And I give to you a kingdom by covenant/testament as my Father by covenant/testament has given to me.” This, in part, is why Reformed writers refer to the covenant of grace as a *testamentary* covenant or a *covenantal* testament. For the substance of the covenant of grace is Christ.

In light of these observations, it is simply mistaken to ignore the *efficacious grace* character of the covenant of grace—unless one wishes to deny the efficacy of divine grace. That is a move no confessionally Reformed theologian has been willing to make. Therefore it is likewise mistaken to impugn the dual aspect portrait of covenant membership, for

⁶⁰ See chapter 2 of Geerhardus Vos’s book, *The Teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, edited and re-written by Johannes G. Vos (1956; reprint, Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, n.d.), 27-45. This material forms part of a larger essay originally published under the title “Hebrews, the Epistle of the Diatheke,” in *The Princeton Theological Review* XIII (1915): 587-632; XIV (1916): 1-61. It can also be found in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: the Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1980), 161-233.

that formulation simply aims to capture the whole teaching of Scripture on this matter.

3.2. Covenant and Election

Since the covenant of grace is a covenant *of grace*, not surprisingly it depends upon grace. Grace refers to gift—blessings as gifts of grace. Gifts of grace bring us to Christ and his work; and Christ’s work is not ineffectual and impotent but effectual and life-giving. Therefore the covenant of grace depends upon the work of Christ. That is why, as Paul demonstrates so clearly in Gal. 3:15ff., salvation is by faith, not our works, for Christ’s work alone suffices. In fact, Christ lays down his life for his people, but it is *for his people* that he lays down his life. He did not purchase a hypothetical universal redemption *à la* Amyraut that is accomplished for all but not applied to all, nor is it the case that Christ achieved a hypothetical covenantal redemption that is accomplished for all the covenanted but not applied to all the covenanted, unless one wishes to deny the definite and efficacious work of Christ’s atonement. Reformed writers who hold to the tenets of the Canons of Dort have not been willing to take that route. Divine election stands, and it stands not as threat but as certainty; not as menace but as blessing; not as an obstacle to the fruition of the covenant of grace but as the only possibility and security for the fulfillment of the covenant of grace.

As Calvin made clear from Rom. 9:6ff., as would his successors demonstrate, election cuts through the covenant according to God’s divine good pleasure. Human volition and actions, faith and unbelief have a place—for God does not treat us as blocks and stones—but these do not have the first and decisive place. Election is according to God’s own good pleasure, not according to our covenantal faithfulness or unfaithfulness. In the words of Acts 13:48: “And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.” Similarly Ephesians 1:4: “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him.” Again, as Paul instructs us in 2 Thessalonians 2:13: “But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.” Or as Jesus announces in John 6:44: “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.”

These texts demonstrate that even for those who are circumcised or baptized the sovereign work of God’s saving grace, according to his electing love, is entirely requisite, for the covenant is in the way of faith and faith is the gift of God, purchased for us by Christ, the Seed of the covenant of grace. All of these divine gifts are bestowed according to divine election. Therefore, once more it is mistaken to insist that all in the covenant participate in the promise of the covenant in the same way, for only the elect are the children of promise in the *Seed* and only the elect are moved to faith by God’s sovereign working. They are the ones counted as co-heirs with Christ.

3.3. Christ's Suretyship

Related to the above, the Reformed, following in Calvin's exegetical trajectory, also thought through the implications of such passages as John 17:3, 18, 21, 23, 25; as well as 3:17; 4:34; 5:23, 24; 5:30, 36-38; 6:29, 38-40, 44; 15:2; 16:5, that the Son is sent from the Father in order to fulfill his task as Redeemer of his own. He is the Mediator, Savior, and Head of the people of God, the church. They also thought through the implications of texts that teach us that our eternal election is in him (Eph. 1:4), that the blood of the eternal covenant is the blood of Christ (Heb. 13:20), that the eternal inheritance is through Christ's mediation; and texts that show us that Christ will not vanquish or forfeit his cup of suffering, for he comes to fulfill the Scriptures in the way of his suffering and death (Matt. 26:54). Likewise, there are the texts that teach us that the Son is sent of the Father to save *his people*. He is God's chosen and beloved Son who is also the Lamb of God, baptized in our place in order to fulfill all righteousness (Matt. 3:15). Indeed, for this purpose he came into the world, to save his people from their sins (Matt. 1:21).

All of this is tied to Christ's Suretyship: "By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament" (Heb. 7:22). Thus covenant membership cannot ultimately be divorced from Christ as our Surety, i.e., the Guarantor. Christ is the substance or content of the promise—Christ as Savior, Christ as Surety. It is not an abstract or impotent Christ promised to us. In Calvin's words, as Surety Christ "imparts eternal sanctifications once and for all to the elect, blotting out their transgressions...."⁶¹ This is according to the promise of the covenant of grace. The *covenant of grace* is a covenant *of grace* precisely because Christ is the Surety or the Guarantor of the covenant of grace. He is a party in this covenant, not just an instrument or an object, for he is a person, a moral agent with volition and purpose. Moreover, union with Christ is union with a person, which further demonstrates that he cannot be reduced to a role of mere instrumentality. In fact, as the *Seed—the only Seed that brings the Abrahamic blessing to fruition, the only Seed of the woman who is the seed of salvation*, Christ fulfills all covenant obligations in our stead. He bestows to us what we need to participate in all his faithfulness and meet the obligations of the covenant of grace. He is the one who has purchased every blessing for us, including the gift of faith. He fulfills all righteousness. As one Reformed dogmatician has written, the covenant of grace, "insofar as it was made with Christ, was essentially a covenant of works."⁶² Christ has done this for his own, i.e., the elect. He fulfills all righteousness *for his own*.

Thus we do well to remember that the covenant of grace, as it is manifest in history, is grounded in God's eternal plan and thus in the person and work of his eternal Son. He is engaged in the covenantal

⁶¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, II.xi.4.

⁶² Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, III, 227.

work of salvation, according to his own divine volition and love. Therefore the Son of God is active in the covenant of grace as a person, as a party in that covenant. As Bavinck's observes: "So then, when it is said in Scripture that the covenant of grace was made with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Israel, and others, this must not be understood to mean that they were the actual parties and heads in this covenant. On the contrary, then and now, in the Old and the New Testaments, Christ was and is the head and the key party in the covenant of grace, and through his administration it came to the patriarchs and to Israel."⁶³ In short, the eternal intratrinitarian *pactum*—the pact of salvation—which undergirds and makes certain the covenant of grace in history, cannot be sliced off the covenant of grace without either making Christ into an mere object or rendering that covenant uncertain and doomed to failure, being now grounded in human volition instead of God's sovereign and effectual impartation of the salvific blessings.

Once more, we see that it is misguided to conceive of covenant membership as having no relation to divine election, or to Christ's redemptive work for his own (an effectual work at that), or to the Father's promise to his Son: to give to him all that belong to him (John 17:2-3, 6, 8, 10, 12).

3.4. Covenant Membership and the Divine Call

All of the above is not to denigrate or even minimize speaking of the covenant as made between God and believers and their seed, but it does remind us to pay attention to the second part of Acts 2:39 when it says that "the promise is ... [also] to all that are afar off, *even* as many as the Lord our God shall call." The divine call is decisive. It is an effectual, saving call, a faith producing call. Will we now conclude that the divine call and the response of faith is unnecessary for the seed of believers? Scripture reveals that without union with Christ, the Seed, in the way of faith, to plea God's covenant promises is pure hypocrisy. Jesus called such "covenant pleading" of the devil and called those who do it "children of the devil" (John 8:44). But why deny sovereign grace when speaking of "calling"? Without election and God's efficacious call, no one—not one sinner, not one covenant sinner—comes to salvation. God's electing love is manifest in effectual calling. Faith and repentance testify of this divine blessing. Again, this is why it is foolhardy to plead the promise of the covenant of grace if one is not pleading the Christ of the covenant, if one is not repenting and believing, if one is not calling on the name of the Lord to be saved. Covenantal presumption is a sin sprinkled across the pages of the Old Testament. Gal. 3:15ff. and Rom. 9:6ff. show us that if persons appeal to their baptism, without faith in Christ, their appeal is vacuous. Minus Christ the promise is null and void. Anyone who appeals to the covenantal promises without appealing to the Christ of the covenant pleads an empty shell. Christ is the content, the substance of the covenant—the *sine qua non*—since without him there is no grace and there is no covenant of grace. The error of covenantal formalism will in-

⁶³ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, III, 228.

fect all who ignore *the Seed* to whom the promise comes, for no one is counted as seed of promise without the *promised Seed, the Messiah, the Savior*.

That some baptized persons, notwithstanding being members of the covenant of grace, walk in unbelief—maybe in undetected unbelief—led some Reformed writers to offer this formulation about covenant membership: some are *not of* the covenant though they are *in* the covenant, for they are *not of the Seed*.

The nature of divine calling, with the other topics mentioned above, demonstrates that the dual aspect formulation of covenant membership is required by Scripture. It is a serious mistake to reject this formulation. Scripture testifies that covenant membership is properly defined as consisting of believers and their seed but it also may be properly defined as consisting of the elect in Christ. Each formulation has its place and its necessity. Indeed, without the former definition we easily look away from God's revealed word in Scripture and to the promises revealed to us in the Word and the sacraments. Without the latter definition we are vulnerable to some sort of Pelagianizing theology wherein the covenant of grace ceases to be a covenant *of grace*, which in turn contravenes the words of Rom. 9:6 ("It is not as though the word of God had failed"). Calvin, his Reformed successors following him, paved the way for the dual aspect formula of covenant membership—in some cases implicitly and in other cases explicitly. They did this in an effort to account for a diverse set of biblical texts.

Conclusion

Calvin's exegesis of such texts as Gal. 3:15-22 and Rom. 9:6ff. shows us the complexities of speaking with the whole testimony of Scripture on the question of membership in the covenant of grace. His exegetical insights and theological formulations present us with the materials to treat this question with care. It is not enough simply to quote certain passages of Scripture wherein the covenant is defined as being established between God on the one hand and believers and their seed on the other. As Calvin's exegesis of key texts demonstrates, a whole set of theological motifs, themes, and formulae, alongside a set of distinct and weighty biblical texts, focus membership in the covenant of grace upon Christ, *the Seed*, and in him it is extended to the children of promise, to the effectually called, to the ones whose sins are atoned for, and to the ones who call upon him in faith, i.e., the elect. We must let Scripture speak both ways about covenant membership, as Calvin does. We must therefore affirm the necessity of the dual aspect model of covenant membership in seeking to adhere to the full teaching of Scripture.