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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Divine Purpose

"The History of Covenant Theology - I"

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we give Thee thanks for the opportunity that is ours again tonight. We thank Thee for the privilege of the study of the Scriptures and of the history of the Christian Church and of the ways in which the Christian Church has understood the Scriptures down through the years. We thank Thee for the way in which we have profited from those who have sought to analyze and study the Scriptures under the Spirit's teaching in the centuries past, and we thank Thee for the light that has come to us as a result of their studies. And we pray, Lord, as we begin this series of studies that we may have the privilege and the blessing of further instruction from the Holy Spirit who takes of the things of Christ and shows them to us. We recognize that the Scriptures say that our Lord is really the ultimate teacher through the Spirit, and we pray that it may please him and the Father to give us further light on Thy word. May we be responsive to it as well. What an august privilege it is to read and ponder the word of God; that which is of such great concern to heaven. May our response be the response of faith and submission.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Now, our series of studies, which we're beginning tonight, and which will last for a considerable period of time is a study of the "Divine Purpose," and of course, in the study of the "Divine Purpose" that of necessity means that we will take a look at covenant theology, dispensational theology. We will seek to be properly analytical and critical when necessary in both of these particular attempts to understand the teaching of the word of God. We also will look at some who have sought to bring other viewpoints, sometimes harmonies of these two viewpoints, sometimes simply modifications of one or the other. And then the latter part of the course will be, primarily, a study of the Scriptures themselves and what they have to say concerning the covenants and by that I mean the biblical covenants. But, all of this, I think, will become clear as we continue in our series of studies.

Now, if we're going to understand anything about theology, it's very important that we look at things historically. Sometimes that for many people appears to be a rather boring task, but let me assure you it is very important. And one of the reasons that there is so much misunderstanding of certain aspects of Christian theology is simply the fact that people have not considered the history of Christian doctrine. And so the issues that the church has pondered down through the centuries have been largely issues unknown by the present generation, and so they fight over the same old things that have already been fought over and settled by the Christian church, often centuries ago. And, unfortunately, they make wrong decisions often, and that's one of the results of the arrogance of our age which is, "We don't need help from anyone else. We'll just

study the Bible for ourselves. We'll dispense with everything the Holy Spirit has done down through the centuries and let him teach us to day."

Now, that inevitably leads to weird interpretations of the word of God, to heresy often and certainly an inadequate response to the Scriptures. We're going to try to prevent that by dealing with our subjects historically, and then we'll look at the Bible in the light of that. That will enable us to have a better perspective of what we should think about when we turn to the Scriptures and look at them.

Now, when we talk about the history of covenant theology, one of the things we have to do right at the beginning is to define "covenant theology." And then since we are talking about covenant theology and the necessity to define it that makes it necessary for us to define "covenant." So let's think for a moment about "covenant" and in order to simplify this, because later on, we have a study in which we will deal with the terminology in the entire hour, I'm going to take a definition which is, if not absolutely accurate, is quite close to an accurate definition theologically, and we'll use that. And if there's some reason for modifying it later on then we will do it at the proper moment, but I'll begin by saying that "A covenant is a bond in blood sovereignly administered."

Now, if you've read any of the recent books that deal with topics like this, you'll recognize that that is a definition found in a book by Palmer Robertson entitled, *The Christ of the Covenants*. But we'll use that definition because, I think, it's reasonably accurate. Webster's definition is a bit different. He defines "covenant" in its first usage as, "usually formal, solemn, and binding agreement" or "compact." Now, you can immediately see since Webster approaches this from the secular standpoint that he thinks of covenant as a compact between two people, in which two people have equal

responsibilities. Now, that is something that is not true of the biblical covenants, as we shall see. So we're thinking about "a bond in blood sovereignly administered" and that "sovereignly administered" is the thing that distinguishes a divine covenant, a divine biblical covenant, from the world's concept of a covenant.

Now, when we think about this, "a bond in blood sovereignly administered," there are certain emphases that you see immediately by that definition. In the first place, a covenant is a bond. That's important. It is a bond; that is, it's a bond between the Lord God and his people. By covenant, the two entities are committed to one another, and the relationship that the Bible so most frequently uses to express this committal is the relationship of, "I will be your father; you will be my son." And a number of times in the Old Testament in covenant language, those terms are used. Sometimes there's a slight variation, but the idea is essentially there. Covenant is a bond between the Lord God and his people. That's the first thing.

Now, the second thing set out in this definition is that it is a bond in blood. Now, you don't have to have a bond in blood in a secular covenant, necessarily, although there might be such, but in biblical covenants, we have bonds in blood. And the fact that blood is associated with covenant emphasizes the ultimacy of this relationship. It is a relationship that involves life and death. Well, that's what you might expect when you think of a covenant between man and God, you would think of a relationship that, ultimately, involves our life or our death. It is the ultimate relationship, so it is a bond in blood. Now, that's why in the Old Testament we have the expression for making a covenant of, "to cut a covenant." In fact, you may be interested to know that in the Old Testament occasionally, just the word "cut" is used. To cut something between two people is to make a covenant and the idea involved in the cutting is the giving of life in

order to solemnly symbolize the fact that this relationship is the ultimate kind of relationship.

Now, you will find that expressed in passages like Jeremiah chapter 34, verse 18, and verse 20, where Jeremiah talks about the making of a covenant and the dividing of animals. In fact, the same kind of thing that transpired in Abraham's covenant, which we will spend some time on later on in discussing the Abrahamic Covenant. Animals are killed. They are divided. Parts of the animals are placed opposite one another, and then individuals pass between the pieces in token of their commitment to death, to life or death, to the details of the arrangement.

In the third place, a covenant is a bond in blood sovereignly administered. Now, what it is meant by the term "sovereignly administered" is simply this; that it is God who determines the outlines of the covenant. Now, he may do that even if it's a legal covenant. For example, the Mosaic Covenant is a conditional covenant, dependent upon the human response of the nation, but it is God who is, ultimately, responsible for the Mosaic Covenant. In that sense, it was sovereignly administered.

But other kinds of covenants, which are in fact more important theologically, are unconditional covenants or promissory covenants in which God sovereignly says that he will do certain things and guarantees that he will be faithful to his word. And he will say, as we will see that he will do certain things for certain people. Now, he goes on to say, "He won't enjoy this if you don't respond in faith." And one might say, "Well, that's a condition, and it, ultimately, rests upon man." But in order to forestall that kind of response, he says, "I am going to give them the faith" so that their response is something that is, ultimately, from the Lord God as well. So "a bond in blood sovereignly administered."

Now, I don't know whether you have in your reading in biblical works, come across this fact, but there is no parallel in the pagan world of covenant making to this kind of covenant making. To this point in the discoveries that we've made in Near Eastern studies, there has been no evidence, no convincing parallel, of covenants that are sovereignly administered by a God with respect to his people. In other words, it's the same old thing that we often say that, "All the religions of the world are religions of do. Christianity is a religion of done." And the same stress on grace is found in the New Testament in the making of covenants that is not found anywhere else in the pagan world to this day.

Now, tomorrow someone may discover in archeological research that such a covenant was made or understood among certain pagan peoples that there God would perform a grace covenant, sovereignly administer certain blessings to them, and then we'd have to say, "There's one illustration in the pagan world." But up to this point, there is none; just stressing the fact, that the biblical revelation is a unique revelation. Now, so when we think about covenant, we'll think for a long time about "a bond in blood sovereignly administered.

Now, we want to turn to define covenant theology because that's what we're going to study tonight and next week, so far as the history is concerned, and then we'll take up the details of covenant theology. Let me say that covenant theology refers to a type of theology that expresses the relationship between God and man in a series of covenants. I'll say that again. A covenant theology is a type of theology that expresses the relationship between God and man in a series of covenants or "bonds in blood sovereignly administered." So when we think about covenant theology as a theological term, we should think about covenant theology as an attempt on the part of godly

theologians to set out the relationship between the Lord God and his people in a series of covenants. Analyzing the Old and New Testaments, these scholars have come to the conviction that the relationship between an individual and his God is best seen in the context of an analysis of the covenants that are found in Holy Scripture.

Now, there are several features of covenant theology that might be considered important for its nature. First of all, one must distinguish between the covenant idea and covenant theology. It's very easy for people to say, "Well, the Bible mentions covenants." In fact, the Old Testament mentions covenants. We go all the way back to Genesis chapter 9, and there we have the Noahic Covenant. And while we don't have the term "covenant" in Genesis chapter 2, isn't that often referred to as the "Edenic Covenant?" We do have the term "covenant" mentioned with reference to the Abrahamic Covenant, so one might say, "Covenant theology goes back to the beginning of things." Well, that's really begging the question. We're talking about covenant theology, not about the mention of "covenant" in the Bible. "Covenant theology" is a term that refers to a theological viewpoint that arose at a certain time in history, so we need to keep these two things distinct; the covenant idea and covenant theology. The idea of a covenant is common Christian property derived from the biblical text, as I've said. Covenants with Noah. Covenants with Abraham. Covenant with Phinehas; that strange one that we studied not long ago. The Davidic Covenant. The New Covenant. Things like this and even certain covenants between men, referred to in the Old Testament.

Covenant Theology is a form of Christian thought, giving central importance to the idea, and using "covenant" as the organizing principle of the entire system of theology. So covenant theology is not the same as covenants historically set out in

Scripture. So that's one thing you need to keep in mind. And another thing, the covenant scheme was useful to its proponents since it was thought harmonious with the sovereignty of God and human assurance of salvation. The covenants set out the divine purpose to which the sovereign God has bound himself, largely unconditionally. So Covenant Theology has served to set out the relationship between the Lord God and his people.

Another point, Covenant Theology has furnished the formula for a Christian interpretation of history. The Bible sets out a number of different covenants. The relation between them has been an interesting question. The solution to the question involves a view of the divine philosophy of history. The relation of the Old Testament history of salvation to the New is one of the intriguing particular questions raised in covenant theology, and so we'll be concerned with that question, and some others as well.

Now, I hope you won't mind that when I talk about Covenant Theology, I'm going to try to present it as faithfully to its proponents as I can, and when I talk about Dispensational Theology, I'll try to present it as faithfully to the viewpoints of its proponents as I can. Now, that won't necessarily mean that I agree with everything of either one of these theologies, of course, but I will try to be as honest as I can in presenting the viewpoint in as strong a way as possible. And if some of you are partisans for one view or the other, you may get upset when I present your favorite viewpoint, or the other person's favorite viewpoint, and I hope you'll realize that what I'm trying to do, is to do what any person should do in discussing an issue. He should present all of the viewpoints in as positive a way as possible, in a way in which proponents would present it.

Now, it would be nice, of course, if we just had someone come in who was a convinced covenant theologian, and he could tell you what covenant theology is. I, frankly, think I could tell you exactly what he would say and say it at least as well and probably better. Now, there would be some that I couldn't say that of, but most I could, for the simple reason that after spending thirty-five years in the theological seminary, I have an advantage over a person who tries to stand up and express his viewpoint in a few words, unless he's had that training. If he's had that training, then that's fine. He will be able to do an outstanding job, maybe a better job than I but that's all; that's usually the exception.

So now, let's turn to Roman I in our outline, "The Antecedents of Covenant Theology" and capital A: The Holy Scriptures. Obviously, anyone who is a covenant theologian would want to begin this way. The ultimate antecedents of covenant theology are the Old and New Testaments. In them is contained the material that finally was molded into what we call "covenant theology." In the Old Testament, there are the various covenants that are given particular attention by the inspired writers. I've already mentioned most of them like the Abrahamic Covenant, the Davidic Covenant, the New Covenant. The Mosaic Covenant belongs in there as well, and among these we should mention the Noahic Covenant, a true unconditional covenant. Other minor covenants also have a part in the story in the sense that one must make a place for them in his scheme of covenant theology. I mentioned the covenant regarding Phinehas in Numbers chapter 25, Joshua and Israel, Jehoida and the people, Hezekiah, Josiah, Ezra, and the term is used of others as well.

The covenants are of two classes: One in which the purpose expressed in the covenant has been conceived by God independently of man and whose completion is

dependent on God alone. These are called unconditional covenants. Sometimes you will find them called promissory covenants, and remember that there are among covenant theologians, just as among other proponents of other theologies, differences of opinion in the same family. I know I grew up in dispensational thinking, and anyone who's grown up in that kind of environment knows if you've been in it very deeply, that there are differences of viewpoint among those who propound such a viewpoint. The same thing is true of covenant theology as you might expect. So sometimes you will have individuals say there are conditional covenants, and there are promissory covenants. We'll use the terms "conditional" and "unconditional" and we'll try to define them in due course more exactly.

In other covenants other than the unconditional one, the conduct of the people is a determining factor, such as in the covenant at Sinai, and to my mind, I regard that covenant as a conditional covenant. There are differences of viewpoint. We will discuss that in its proper place. So covenant theology has its historical beginnings in the simple statements of the word of God concerning the covenantal program reflected in the Abrahamic, well, the Noahic, the Abrahamic, the Mosaic, the Davidic, the new covenants for the primary ones.

But let's come now to some of the earlier students of the word of God. And Irenaeus is the first that I will refer to because Irenaeus was a genuine biblical scholar. Now, others in the early days were biblical scholars but Irenaeus stands out in the grasp that he had of biblical and exegetical theology. His dates are about one hundred and thirty to about two hundred. In view of the biblical emphasis on the idea of the covenant, it's surprising that it's so early and completely fell into the background. Irenaeus was the bishop of Lyon in France or in Gaul. He's the only Christian writer who

makes much of the idea of covenant in the early days. That's rather surprising because it seems that the term "covenant" should have been stressed by someone historically in this period but it was not. In his work against heresies, he distinguishes between four covenants; the covenant with Noah, the covenant with Abraham, the covenant with Moses, and the covenant with Christ, and he argues for the inviolability of the promises to Abraham. In that sense, his views of the Abrahamic Covenant reflect a view of the Abrahamic Covenant as an unconditional covenant. In other words, he argues very strongly, that the things that God says there are going to be fulfilled. Now, the way in which he argues is not precisely the way that I would argue it today, but there are many of the things that he says that, well, anyone who reads the Bible and ponders it a bit would agree he was a very good student of the word of God for his day.

In general, he thinks of the primary covenants; the Mosaic or the Law and the New or the gospel. And when discussions over the differences between Judaism and Christianity died out, unfortunately, this emphasis upon covenants found in Irenaeus died out as well. Now, let me be careful to point out, that Irenaeus did not have any covenant theology. He had not thought out in great detail covenant theology, as some of these later men that we will discuss, have thought through issues having to do with covenant theology. But he did emphasize the inviolability or the unconditionality of the Abrahamic Covenant and that's what you might expect because Irenaeus was a premillennialist. And like all of the earliest men in the Christian church of whom we have record, they were premillennial.

We must not think, however, that there were not others who had other views. So far as we know, reading the history until about the third century, everybody who speaks on the point is premillennial. But Justin Martyr says that he knew that there

were some who didn't hold the views that he was propounding. But he said, "We who are right minded in Christian things, we do hold to a premillennial viewpoint." But he expressed his premillennial viewpoint in such a way that most premillennialists that, I know, would disagree with a number of things that he said. But, essentially, he was premillennial, so you might expect him to lay stress on the unconditionality of the Abrahamic Covenant.

Now, we jump for number of centuries to discuss Johann Heinrich Bullinger. Bullinger was a very important reform theologian and due to the contention with the Anabaptists over infant baptism, the reformers in Switzerland in the sixteenth century found the idea of the covenant useful in their debates. Because you can see that believing in infant baptism and finding the Anabaptists very strong and vigorous opponents of the idea of infant baptism. And casting around for a way in which to defend infant baptism from the New Testament and finding not a whole lot of evidence from the New Testament, Bullinger and Zwingli also laid hold of the concept of covenant because associated with the Abrahamic Covenant was the practice of circumcision. And so the practice of circumcision on the eighth day for a member of the Abrahamic Covenant made it possible for them to draw an analogy between the Abrahamic Covenant and circumcision and the New Covenant and water baptism. So it's not surprising then and this is well known by all students of Bullinger and Zwingli and all students of covenant theology that this conflict with the Anabaptists over infant baptism led to a great deal of stress upon what was the beginning of covenant theology.

The first specific treatise on the "covenant" was Bullinger's *De Testamento si val foederis e deus unico et aeternus* or "Concerning the Covenant" or "Concerning the Testament or Covenant of God, One and Eternal," translating it more smoothly,

"Concerning the One and Eternal Testimony or Testament or Covenant of God." He recognized, however, only one covenant, and that was the "Covenant of Grace" which we will explain in a later study. He did not know, did not write about the Covenant of Works, did not write about the Covenant of Redemption, but laid all of his stress upon the Covenant of Grace, which he understood as a covenant made between God and the elect, in which certain benefits were guaranteed to them by the promises of God. He wrote and preached fifty sermons on Christian doctrine called, "The Decades"; later issued in German as *Das Haus Buch* or "The House Book." It was a kind of waddy makeup. something that we would carry around with you as a small compendium of Christian theology. Incidentally, that's what Calvin thought his institutes would be in the beginning; just something you could carry around with you that would help you to read the Bible. That's why he wrote his institutes, but after the years of constantly adding to it; finding people were really profiting from it, it became essentially, a very sound biblical work on Christian theology.

At any rate, Bullinger was one of the first to lay stress on the idea of covenant, but covenant theology as such, did not originate with Bullinger; that is, as we know it today. His dates are fifteen hundred and four to fifteen hundred and seventeen-five, so he lived to be seventy-one years of age. He was a very important reformer in the land of Switzerland.

Now, capital D: John Calvin. We cannot really study biblical theology without referring to Calvin, can you? John Calvin; fifteen hundred and nine to fifteen sixty-four; lived to be fifty-five years of age; suffered from disease a great bit of the time and lived without all the modern conveniences that you and I have and wrote scores of books and treatises. It's amazing and, perhaps, it can only be explained by the fact that he really

was a theological genius, and in addition, the people in Geneva and other places encouraged him and gave him the opportunity to do just that. The Reformers used the idea of the covenant principally to expound God's revelation to his people in the two Testaments or before and after Christ. The Testaments agreed in substance but they differed in administration. For Calvin, they agreed in a common hope of immortality and being established by God's mercy and in both knowing and having Christ the mediator, who united them to God. They differed, Calvin thought, in that the Old Testament, the heavenly inheritance was exhibited there under the form of temporal blessings, and the Old Testament, therefore, was typological. It gave the shadow, not the substance of the truth, and also in that the Old Testament was literal in its propagation of truth primarily. While in the New, we have stress upon the spiritual side of truth. The Old, he thought of as a covenant having to do with bondage, and the New of liberty, and in that the Old is for one people only, while the New is for all. These are expressions that come from Calvin's Institutes, and if you're interested, you can look them up under his words concerning the differences between the Testaments or the covenants, you can find this expounded.

For Calvin, the gospel differed from the Law only in respect of clearness of manifestation. In other words, the same Gospel was proclaimed in the Old Testament that is proclaimed in the New, but there is a whole lot of difference between the clarity of the unfolding of the truth. So things that we would regard as perhaps unclear, announcements of the coming redeemer, the New Testament makes clear in the life and ministry of the Lord and in the explanations of the apostles. Very few people would differ with Calvin on that point. Irenaeus tended to bring both covenants under the conception of Law, while Calvin brought them under the conception of grace. And then

one of the ones who has commented on Calvin says, "But whereas Irenaeus carries forth the idea of merit from the Law, and applies it to the Gospel, Calvin carries back the idea of free grace into the Law, and interprets the latter by the former."

Calvin's *Institutes* reflect a theology built upon the Trinity. If you read the *Institutes*, you'll see, immediately, that the way in which he has organized his *Institutes* is by the Holy Trinity. And so since he's organized theology according to the Holy Trinity, well then you would expect that the covenant idea would not be a dominant principle in it, and it is not. In fact, Calvinists debate the extent to which Calvin was a covenant theologian, and some of the outstanding Calvinists, such as John Murray, have had serious differences with Calvin over the question, "Did he have a covenant theology?" Not that he differed with Calvin and his theology, but the question of whether it was a covenant theology was something else.

It's the theologians of Zurich who are the forerunners of covenant theology or federal theology. The term "federal" incidentally, we'll use from time to time, but the Latin word *foedus* F-O-E-D-U-S, *foedus* is a word that means "covenant" or "federal," I mean it's that from which we get the adjective "federal". So when we speak about federal theology, we're talking about covenantal theology. The theologians of Zurich are the forerunners of federal or covenantal theology in the narrower sense. In them, the covenant idea becomes the dominant idea for the practice of Christian life.

Well, let's turn now to the emergence of covenant theology. Just remember this; the covenant idea and covenant theology are to be distinguished. The covenant idea is explicit in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. It's common Christian property. Anybody who expounds the Bible has to talk about covenants. Dispensationalists who are not covenant theologians, when they expound the Bible; they

have to talk about covenants because the term is a biblical term. Covenant theology, the theology that uses the covenant idea as its organizing principle surfaced later in Christian thought. And remember that in the early church, there were no partisans of covenant theology, as it is known today. Covenant theology arose centuries after the time of the apostles in the early church, but lest you who may be dispensational think, "Well, it's a new idea," remember that dispensational theology is an even newer idea in the historical development of doctrine. So covenant theology had no partisans in the early church, nor were there any dispensationalists there. In fact, it's always amusing to me to find people who are really partisans of one of or the other of these views, try to find their theology in the early church. It cannot be done, and the ways in which they seek to do it by twisting statements of Scripture form excellent illustrations of the way not to do biblical exegesis and biblical theology.

In the earliest of the Reformers, covenant theology is not found, but then that's what you might expect really. We're living in nineteen eighty-five, some of us are at least. Some of the rest of you, I don't know where you are. Maybe you're in the twentieth century. Maybe you're not. Maybe some of you are back in the sixteenth. That wouldn't be a bad way to be thinking, as a matter of fact. But what do expect in the light of biblical teaching? Well, I think, in the light of biblical teaching, you should expect to find that the kind of theology that the believing Christian church talks about today, is something that, as a theological system in its fullness, and also in its clarity and distinctness, and in its finer points, you would not find in the early church. Now, I think, we can find biblical reasons for saying that. Now, if you have your Bible with you and I hope you will bring it even in these few earlier studies when we won't be referring to

Scripture quite as much as we will later on. Turn with me to John chapter 16. John chapter 16.

Incidentally, in our studies, what I'm going to do is to stop after forty or forty-five minutes at a proper point, and then I'm going to give you a chance to ask your questions if you'd like to. So if you have some questions you'd like to ask, write them down or have them prepared if you like and you can spring them on me. I will either answer them or tell you I don't know them, the answer to them, or occasionally I'll try to fool you and make you think that I do when I really don't. All teachers have to do that.

Now, John chapter 16, and I want to read for you verse 12 through verse 15. Now, you won't find this in any of your translations because I'm reading from the original text. This is the inspired text in the final analysis, and I'm reading you a half-inspired translation, one that I did or I do. "'Yet many things I have to say to you,' the Lord Jesus said to the apostles in the Upper Room, 'but you are not able to bear them at this moment.'" That little adverb that is used there is an adverb that means "this moment" as over against some other time; that is, at their period of time in the unfolding of the divine revelation in the Upper Room. "When that one shall come, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you in all the truth." Now, notice he says, "He will guide you in all the truth." That would indicate itself, that the progress into the truth is a gradual experience. "He will guide you in all the truth."

Now, there is a question of the text at this point and many of the manuscripts have, "He will guide you into the truth" or "into all the truth," and others have, "He will guide you in the sphere of all the truth." Now, the text that I'm reading has the latter and, therefore, if that is the correct text, I think, there is reason for thinking that it is

then what he's saying, "Within the sphere of all the truth, he will guide the apostles." Not that he's going to give them all the truth, but he's going to guide them within the sphere of all the truth. "For he shall not speak from himself." Now, he doesn't mean, of course, he will not speak of himself, as if the Holy Spirit is never the object of the divine teaching because the Holy Spirit does cause men to write of him. Paul and others write about the ministry of the Holy Spirit. He means, "For he shall not speak from himself." That is, the teaching the Holy Spirit gives us does not originate with him. "He will not speak of himself, but as many things as he shall hear, he shall speak." As many things as the Spirit shall hear, from whom does he hear them? Well, as the text makes plain, he hears them from the Lord, the Lord Jesus. So it's the Lord Jesus who is the ultimate teacher of Scripture through the Holy Spirit. "For as many things as he shall hear, he shall speak, and he will report or announce to you the coming things."

What are the coming things? Well, there are books that take this term and make it a reference to "coming things" from the standpoint of the Church Age; that is, eschatological things. It's a possible interpretation. But if you think of the Upper Room Discourse and "coming things" from that standpoint, included are not simply the things of the future, but the things of the present age in which we find ourselves. So the Holy Spirit will report coming things. "That one shall glorify me, for he shall receive from me and report to you. All things, as many as the Father has are mine. For this cause, I have said that from me he takes and reports back to you." So the Holy Spirit engages in listening to our Lord, and then bringing what he hears at the proper point in time, back to the church. It's really the Lord who's the teacher of the church, and who teaches through the Spirit.

Now, what do you expect? The Holy Spirit's been teaching for nineteen hundred years, nineteen hundred plus. What do you expect? Well, I expect that the church should grow in the knowledge of the truth. I expect that after nineteen hundred years of the Holy Spirit's teaching, we should see some developing maturity. Therefore, it's strange isn't it that we call the early members of the Christian church after the age of the apostles, what do we call them? The apostolic fathers. Isn't that strange? Well, in one sense you can say they are "fathers" in the sense that they we're members of the Christian church nineteen hundred years ago. In that sense, they came on history nineteen hundred years before we did, more or less. So we are young, now on the scene. They were on the scene nineteen centuries ago. They're fathers. Well in that sense, yes, chronologically you could call them that, but biblically it's we who are the fathers, and they are the children. They had the initial teaching of the Holy Spirit, but we have the products of his teaching for nineteen hundred years, and the thing that the Christian church has been, the things that the Christian church have been learning down through the years are available to us in the writings of the Christian church in the councils, in the creeds. That's why those things are important. They are things that the Christian church has been thinking over for generations and ages and centuries, and we are the benefactors of very serious study of the word of God.

Now, what kind of person do you think it is who says, "I don't pay any attention whatsoever to what others have said about the Scriptures down through the years. The Holy Spirit is my teacher, and I follow only him." Now, do you know what I think about that person? He's a dumkomph. He is dumb. He doesn't have any sense at all. Worse than that, he is arrogant and a slanderer of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has been teaching the church for centuries. If we have an interpretation of the

word of God that differs from the consensus of the Christian church, I'm talking about the Christian church now, I'm not talking about a person who's in a theological seminary who doesn't believe the Bible and has theories about the word of God that make it not the word of God at all. I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about the godly men down through the years, anyone who comes up with a unique interpretation that no one else has or has had that interpretation should be suspect. It might be right, but first of all, it should be suspect. That's a very important principle to bear in mind. That's why it's important for us to pay attention to what the Holy Spirit has taught the whole of the Body of Christ. I think that's so important. We all put the creeds above the word of God. We don't put the councils above the word of God, but we also pay attention to what the Holy Spirit did teach godly men at their period of time in history.

And I, personally, also think that the process of the Holy Spirit's teaching is not yet over. In other words, there are things that we have learned about biblical doctrine down through the years. When John Calvin came on the scene, he was responsible for a very important addition to the doctrine of the Trinity. Sometime we'll talk about that. But that gained the acquiescence of the breadth of the Christian church. Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterians, and others learned from John Calvin on that important point, but that kind of thing is not too often the case. I expect that we shall, as we study the word of God, we shall learn some more things about the word of God through the teaching of the Holy Spirit, and that means that all of us may be instruments in the study of the Scriptures and in the learning of things that are fresh and new and vital. And above all, of course, so far as the teaching of the word of God is concerned, all of this is ultimately to lead to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus himself. "That I may know him," prays Paul.

Now, I suggest to you, that since he's an infinite person, that we will have continuing knowledge of the Lord down through the ages of eternity and will continue to be astonished at the things that are found in the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have grasped some things, but we have many more things to grasp.

Now, I think, this is a proper place for us to stop for tonight. I know it's a kind of an introduction. We will, I think, see some very interesting things with Ursinus and Olevianus, who are Heidelberg theologians responsible for the Heidelberg Catechism and Robert Rollock, a Scot, and William Perkins, one of the greatest of the English theologians early. And William Ames, whose life though an Englishman who also labored in the Netherlands, whose life and writings have affected New England theologically; that is, New England over here as much as perhaps any other man. And then, of course, with the beginning of covenant theology with Johannes Cocceius and Herman Witsius.

Now, we have just a moment or two. Are there any questions? If you'd like to raise your hand and ask a question, something's troubling you or something you want clarified, I hope you'll feel free to ask me. Come on. All right. Speak. Incidentally, speak loud enough so that most everybody can hear you when you ask your question.

[Question inaudible] Well, you haven't seen the list of studies that we're doing, but I'm devoting a number of studies to the history of dispensationalism and what it stands for as well. So it's very difficult to give you in one sentence something that I would not want to take back, but dispensational theology is essentially gathered around a view of the progress of divine revelation that lays stress upon certain dispensations felt to be dispensations in the unfolding of the divine purpose. But involved in that are some more specific and unique views, such as, just to give you a few of them, such as

the church having its beginnings on the Day of Pentecost, the church having its conclusion in a rapture before the time of the great tribulation, and, you know, things like this are details. But we will deal with all of those points. I have set out forty studies, so we have five or six devoted to dispensational theology historically and an analysis of it later on.

Any other question? Yes, Edwin. Would you speak loud enough to us? I'm sorry. What is the difference between [Inaudible] They are different. Covenant, as I explained in the beginning, you may not have heard the introduction, but in the beginning covenant is a biblical term that refers to things like the Noahic, Mosaic, Abrahamic Covenant. Covenant Theology is a particular view of theological teaching constructed by induction and deduction from the teaching of the word of God and so it is a system, a way of looking at the Bible. Covenant Theology. So it's a discipline. You won't find that term in the Bible, covenant theology, any more than you will find dispensationalism in the Bible. You find covenants. You find dispensations, but it's a theological viewpoint.

Yes, Rich? [Question inaudible] When we say, "The Reformers were not covenant theologians," we cannot say that. What we have to do is say, "Some of the Reformers were covenant theologians, some of them were not." For example, Calvin was not what we would call a "covenant theologian" in the sense, that he had a developed covenant theology. On the other hand, covenant theology arose among the Reformers, but even in the age from the sixteenth century through the seventeenth century when covenant theology developed, some of the earliest men only had a smattering of knowledge of what became covenant theology. Others with Cocceius and Witsius, particularly, came to the developed form of it. We're talking about something

that took place over a period of time. That's why you can say only in the general sense, "The Reformers were covenant theologians."

Anything else? Yes. [Question inaudible] That would depend upon the way in which you understood the text at that point. As I mentioned to you, some of the manuscripts read, "He will guide you into all the truth." I'm using an English paraphrase. "Into all the truth," using the Greek word "ase". Others of the manuscripts and, I think, probably the more preferable reading is found in this edited text that I'm reading, use the preposition "in" is used there not "ase." "In" means "in the sphere of." So "He will guide you in all the truth," means he will give you guidance within all of the truth, but not necessarily guide you to a complete understanding of all the truth. So I rather prefer the second interpretation. The only way and, in fact, I don't think really that you could ever say that anyone is ever guided into all the truth, except one of the members of the godhead.

[Question inaudible] No, we're not saying oh no, not at all. You must remember the apostles were apostles, and because they were apostles, they were specially chosen by our Lord, ordained by him as apostles, given the responsibility and privilege to be the preachers of divine revelation. Revelation; that is, the apostles have given us largely, the New Testament. So they did have a special relationship and a special knowledge because they were companions of our Lord, and they have communicated their knowledge to us in the New Testament. If you want to know what the apostles knew, read the New Testament; become a master of it. No, we're not saying the apostles were limited as I am limited. I don't think that the apostles are waiting in heaven to hear my exposition of a particular passage of Scripture which they wrote, only maybe to

have some fun, if they have fun in heaven; something like, "Did you hear that interpretation that Johnson put on what I said?" [Laughter]

Question inaudible. They had the privilege of giving divine revelation and their knowledge stands, of course, supreme. I was talking about the apostolic fathers and from their time on. Now, the apostolic fathers are not the apostles. When we say "apostolic fathers," we mean those who followed the apostles; Irenaeus, Ignatius, Shepherd of Hermas, Clement, and Justin Martyr, and so on down through the years. They are called the "apostolic fathers," but the apostles are not the apostolic fathers. It's amazing that the apostolic fathers, some of whom were taught by an apostle like Polycarp had such an inadequate view of so many things in Holy Scripture. That's a remarkable thing. For example, you find Clement who wrote an epistle to the church at Corinth from Rome in ninety-five a.d. about the time that John the Apostle wrote the remainder of the New Testament, the Johannine literature. He wrote and he spoke about being justified on account of faith. No apostle ever said, "we're justified on account of faith." They always said, "on the basis of faith, through faith, I have faith" never "on account of faith" as if faith is perhaps looked at as a kind of work. But the minute the apostolic fathers start writing, then you find inadequate understanding of the apostles' beginning.

So anyway, our time is up. We'll have to stop. Those are good questions. I hope you'll feel free to ask others as well. So we'll see you next week. We finish the history of covenant theology next. [End of Tape]