

Introduction

There is nothing more important to mankind than the good news of Jesus Christ our Lord. Life and death hang in the balance; not just life and death as understood on this earth, but life and death as an everlasting experience of every human being. This is not a subject with which we can afford to be shallow and thoughtless. The good news of Jesus Christ must be understood in the way the Scriptures themselves present this message. The good news of God's salvation must be embraced for what it is in its entirety, devoid of the "human ballast" that so grieved Dietrich Bonhoeffer a generation ago.¹ Our present day struggle is to continue the Reformation. We must reform; but we must reform according to the Scriptures of our Lord. Martin Luther will not be our judge. How the church "stands or falls" is not according to his word, but according to the revealed will of God. The Reformation was the result of hard work and deep thought, which is precisely what we need today. The church is becoming increasingly shallow, trivial and thoughtless. We must resist these tendencies and fight hard to hear God again through His holy Word.

This book is the fruit of hard fought efforts to hear God's Word as it is meant to be heard. His Word is not meant as material for our entertainment, nor is it a servant of our doctrinal traditions. God's Word is deadly serious, and is seriously committed to the glory of the one true God. God's Word is the keeper of God's traditions, the traditions of the apostles. It is God's Word which will judge all traditions, be they Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Protestant, Reformed or Emergent. People who love God more than anything else will delight in nothing less than the holy will of our Lord as revealed in Scripture. People who love God will also delight in the teachings of men, but only as these men fight hard to hear God's Word as it is meant to be heard. We strive to hear from God because we want the life He offers us in Scripture. We don't want any substitutes, no matter how popular they may be, nor how long

1 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*. Simon & Schuster, 1959, 35. "The real trouble is that the pure Word of Jesus has been overlaid with so much human ballast – burdensome rules and regulations, false hopes and consolations – that it becomes extremely difficult to make a genuine decision for Christ."

they may have been believed.

Our God is a God who has committed Himself to His people. He has tangibly expressed His commitment through the means of covenants. In the Old Testament He covenanted with Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Israel; now in the New Testament He has given us a New Covenant. In fact, “testament” is derived from the Latin word for covenant, so our Scriptures are actually divided into two covenants, the Old and the New. To have a relationship with God is to be in covenant with God. Therefore, it is imperative that we listen closely to God's Word in order to understand what it means for us to be in a covenantal relationship with Him. I am grateful to be living in our times when so much progress has been made toward a more biblical understanding of this covenantal relationship, and I am also grateful to those who have not rested contentedly with discoveries of the past, but have pressed on in the spirit of the reformers who have gone before, looking intently into the “royal law found in Scripture” (Jas. 2:8). This pressing on toward a better understanding is not being disobedient to the intent of the apostles; rather it is commanded by them. It was Peter who exhorted the church to “grow in the grace and the knowledge of our and Savior Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 2:17). In some small way, may this work continue what Dr. C. van der Waal could not finish when he wrote, “It is impossible to preach a gospel from which the covenant has been removed. It is impossible to speak of the kingship of God, without bringing the covenant into it. The Great King is the God of the covenant. His royal Word is covenantal.”²

I present this book to all who are led by our Lord to inquire about the nature of the covenant that He has made with his people. I am especially grateful to so many who have helped me in my own inquiry through their studies and writings; Meredith Kline, Norman Shepherd, Scott Hafemann, NT Wright, William Law, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, C. Van der Waal, Jonathan Edwards, Richard Gaffin and Daniel Fuller among others. They have helped me in various ways to think more biblically about the covenant. But I am most grateful to the apostle James, who grabbed me by the scruff of the neck and wouldn't let me go, by writing, “You see, a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.” This sentence pricked and prodded me to question my own evangelical tradition, as every time I read it, it became more incredible to me that the brother of Jesus and pastor of the church in Jerusalem would make, what has become for many, an unorthodox statement in defense of

2 C van der Waal, *The Covenantal Gospel*. Inheritance Publications, 1990, 175.

orthodoxy. James has not inspired me toward Roman Catholicism, as it may be presumed by many, but he has inspired me to become more biblical in my understanding of how the covenant functions, and in being more biblical, to become more evangelical. The purpose of writing this book is to help others to understand what I have come to understand concerning God's covenant and the salvation it promises. My own conviction is that this is the great need of our day. The church faces many potent challenges and we need the covenant as a safeguard against worldliness and apostasy. This is true, because as the Scriptures reveal, it is the covenant that pledges us to our Lord, and it is the covenant that motivates us to "throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles." My hope and prayer is that God is glorified by this small, and by his grace alone, faithful explanation of His covenant.

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