



The Grace Messenger

BY HIS GRACE • FOR HIS SERVICE • TO HIS GLORY

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The Parable of the Two Trains

by Mark Webb

For the past twenty years or so, the modern “Grace” movement has been plagued and torn asunder by a controversy over the relationship between “Law” and “Grace”. On the one hand are men who are champions of the notion that God’s moral character is immutable, and, therefore, His moral standard, the law, is unchangeable. I appreciate them very muchly. On the other hand are men who are champions of the notion that the appearance of Christ has ushered in a new age in which great changes have taken place. I also appreciate them very muchly. Both notions, it seems to me, are Biblical. But just how much of the old is to be carried over into the new? Just how much change is to be allowed? Disagreements over the particulars has, unfortunately, all too often degenerated into labeling and name-calling. Accusations of “legalism” or “antinomianism” have been hurled at each other by brethren whose actual day-in and day-out practice does not vary in the least. In fact, I have observed so-called “grace” men whose lives are lived far more strictly than those who are known as “law” men! This is not to belittle the importance of the question being debated. It is, however, to suggest that more thought and less rhetoric might well be in order.

The relationship between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant forms one of the most difficult questions in all of theology. So said Jonathan Edwards, and, trust me, when Edwards says something

is difficult, you can bet that it’s difficult. Many think they have it all figured out and are quick to tell us so. Yet easy, quick, and simplistic answers betray a shallowness of thinking. If you think the answer is easy, it’s most likely because you’ve not even understood the question!

Our thinking tends to be governed by extremes rather than by balance. That is, we like to think in terms of “*this or that*” rather than in terms of “*this and that*”. The controversy at hand shows that same tendency, with “law” and “grace” often viewed as opposite ends of the spectrum rather than as complimentary truths.

(See “Two Trains” on page 2)

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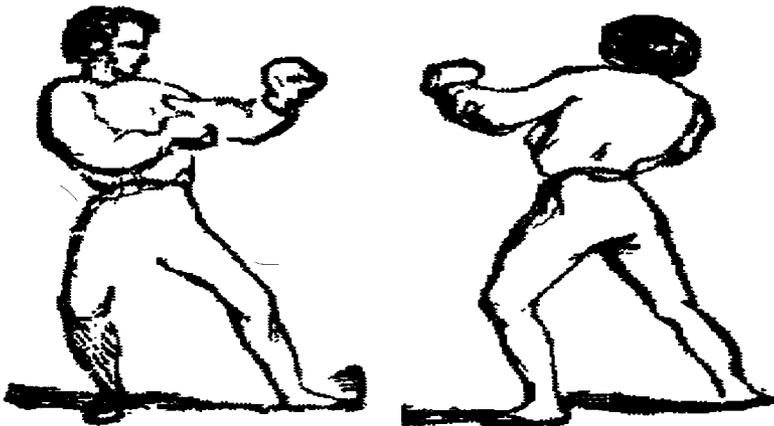
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The Covenantal Question

The conflict of “law” and “grace” actually flows out of the more fundamental question of how the New Testament saint is related to the Old Testament. How are we in this new age to view the various laws and regulations given to God’s people in the previous age?



“Covenant Theology” is a theological position that seeks to answer this question. It does so by seeing one covenantal principle in force at all times, the so-called “Covenant of Grace”. This position sees little change between the two ages, emphasizing, instead, the continuity between them. For instance, most, if not all, Pedobaptists hold to Covenant Theology. Infant baptism is seen as arising by a necessary inference drawn from this view of the covenants — in spite of a paucity of direct evidence for it in the New Testament scriptures. Covenant Theology reasons that if children of the elect were included in the **Old Covenant**, now children of the elect should be considered as included in the New Covenant. If the attendant sign of the Old Covenant, circumcision, was applied to infants, then the sign of the New Covenant, baptism, should be applied to infants as well.

Another answer to this question is given by “Dispensationalism”. This is the contrary theological position which emphasizes radical change from the old age to the new age, and insists upon discontinuity as its predominate principle. The idea behind Dispensationalism is that God places each age, or “dispensation”, under unique standards or “tests”. The “test” for this age may therefore bear no resemblance whatsoever to that placed upon a previous day.

Notice that, in principle, Covenant Theology emphasizes continuity between the **covenants**, whereas Dispensationalism stresses discontinuity. This has given rise to the oft-quoted, though not quite accurate, notion that Covenant Theology holds that anything in force in the Old Covenant is still in force today, unless expressly abrogated; Dispensationalism, on the other hand, is said to hold that anything in force in the Old Covenant is automatically repealed in the New unless expressly reinstated. It should be pointed out in fairness that the leading thinkers in both camps would not state their positions in this manner and are moving away from the extreme position. However, the perception stated above is still the one commonly embraced today by the man in the pew.

A Change of Covenant, or a Change of Administration?

One of the central questions we must face is this: Is the change from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant an actual change of covenants (the position of Dispensationalism) or merely a change in the administration of one, umbrella-like, all-encompassing covenant of grace (the position of Covenant Theology). To understand the difference, consider the following scenario. (See “Two Trains” on page 4)

Sermon Snips



Unregenerate Man

What does it mean to be unregenerate? It means that you can relate to nothing but what your senses connect you with. It takes the ministry of the Holy Spirit to connect you with a greater world of reality that is in the promise of God. That is why the natural man doesn't receive the things that are of the Spirit of God. They are not spiritually discerned. You must have a spiritual discernment and the unregenerate person doesn't have that — he's sensual. Oh, he can relate to touch, taste, smell, all of these things — but he cannot connect with God.

From "*Faith vs. Natural Senses*"
by Jim Gables

Spiritual Roots

I have found in my experience that there are some who have so-called salvation experiences that would rival or surpass the apostle Paul. I mean they see the lights, they hear the voices, they have the great experience. And a year or two later you can't find them. And then I've seen others come to know the Lord and there's hardly a change of expression on their face. But I'm telling you, 20 and 30 years later, they're still heading in the same direction — that direction that was changed back yonder 30 years ago. They're still pursuing Jesus Christ. Of those two things which do you suppose is closer to the biblical definition of a Christian? In fact the scriptures warn us in the seed falling on shallow soil — beware of that seed that sprouts up quickly cause it can just as quickly wither away. The seed that has the root is busier going down than up.

From "*The Christian's Duty to Saints and Sinners*"
by Mark Webb

Modernity

When all is said and done, the church-growth movement will stand or fall by one question. In implementing its vision of church growth, is the church of Christ primarily guided and shaped by its own character and calling — or by considerations and circumstances alien to itself! Or, to put the question differently, is the church of Christ a social reality truly shaped by a theological cause, namely the Word and Spirit of God? In sum, what — in practice — is the church's decisive authority?

Behind this question lies the fact that the church of God "lets God be God" and is the church only when she lives and thrives finally by God's truths and God's resources. If the church makes anything else the decisive principle of her existence, Christians risk living unauthorized lives of faith, exercising unauthorized ministries, and proclaiming an unauthorized gospel.

Yet, that is precisely the temptation modernity gives to us. The very brilliance and power of its tools and insights mean that eventually God's authority is no longer decisive. There is no longer quite the same need to let God be God. In fact, there is no need for God at all in order to achieve extraordinary measurable success. Thus, modernity creates the illusion that, when God commanded us not to live by bread alone but by every word that comes from His mouth, He was not aware of the twentieth century. The very success of modernity may undercut the authority and driving power of faith until religion becomes merely religious rhetoric or organizational growth without spiritual reality.

From "*Dining with the Devil*"
by Os Guinness

Two Trains

Continued from page 2

Suppose, early in 1992, you pulled a “Rip Van Winkle” on us and fell into a lengthy sleep. You have only now just awakened. When you fell asleep, George Bush was President of the United States and the Gulf War had just ended. Now you awaken to find that a man by the name of Bill Clinton is President. What would you conclude? Well, you’d probably make the correct assumption that Bush lost the election in November, 1992 to a Democrat named Clinton. You would assume that, essentially, the laws of the land were the same — e.g. you’d still send in your taxes (and don’t forget those back taxes for the years you were asleep) to



the IRS — but that these laws were now being administered by a new administration. Relate this scenario to the covenantal question and you have the view of Covenant Theology regarding a man living first in the Old Covenant age and then in the New. Just like the case in our example, going from the Old Testament age into the New is a fairly homogenous process. A change has occurred at the top, but little has actually changed for the “man on the street”. Men are saved the same way, the “church” of the Old Testament now becomes the “church” of the New Testament, and the laws under which we are to live are basically the same. We have a new and better administrator of the covenant — Jesus — but it is fundamentally the same covenant.

Now, assume the same scenario as described above — except that, this time, when you awake, a 29 year old German citizen named Fritz Von Somethingoranother



is President. What would you conclude? Well, it’s clear that what has transpired is far more than a mere change of administration! Our constitution requires the President to be at least 35 years of age and an American citizen. To discover that a 29 year old German is President means that a fundamental change in the government of the land has taken place. No longer could you assume that it was “business as usual”. You’d know that you owed taxes to somebody (we always do!), but you could no longer assume that the IRS was even operable! The government in place when you fell asleep has been replaced by another, and you would naturally assume that everything has changed, including even your citizenship. Apply this situation to the covenantal question, and you have the position of Dispensationalism. Note the discontinuity. The basic assumption is that all previous laws have been swept away and replaced by new ones.

Why is this so important? What’s at stake here? A whole slew of issues arise from this! Is there only one way of salvation, so that an Old Testament saint was saved exactly as we (Covenant Theology); or, is there at least the possibility that we are saved in a different manner from those saints (Dispensationalism). Are we part and parcel of the same people of God, Israel, that existed in the Old Testament age (Covenant Theology); or, are we a people completely distinct and separate from Israel (Dispensationalism). Do the same laws — except those that are ceremonial, admittedly fulfilled in Christ — that governed Israel in the Old Testament age still rule us today (Covenant Theology); or, are we under an entirely new set of laws inaugurated by Christ (Dispensationalism). All these things and more are affected by our answer. (See “Two Trains” on page 6)

A New Look

by Darryl Ochsner

The church web page has a new look. The address for the Grace Bible Church web page is: <http://www.vantek.net/pages/gbc>. The Web home page plays music (Come Thou Fount) and shows a menu selection with several options. The menu selections include a "More About Us" section, as well as "Missions Projects" and **Grace Messenger** sections.

The "More About Us" section has information about our church — its history, beliefs, the pastor, and upcoming and weekly activities. The "Missions" section tells more about missions that



Grace Bible Church is involved in, including the Mexican Indian Training Center and others. These sections include pictures with captions and addresses that people can write to for more information or to send tax-deductible contributions. You can go to the **Grace Messenger** section to view the current main article, or view many past articles.

The "Related Church Sites" page lists several other Sovereign Grace churches, with links to these, plus several directories of churches, and other sites such as Mark Webb's Sovereign Grace Music web site. Future enhancements will include a counter on the home page, so that you can see how many people have accessed the Grace Bible Church web site. Other possible enhancements include having different pieces of music (traditional church hymns) play on every page, and (in the distant future) being able to broadcast Sunday morning sermons live from this web site.

Please view this web site and give me your feedback. You can e-mail me at ochsner@juno.com. Please send inquiries regarding the church and its ministries to gbc@vantek.net.

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Two Trains

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Let's Make a Model

To help you envision the differences between these two systems, let me suggest two models. Let's use trains and train tracks to illustrate. The train represents a covenant, and those on board the train represent those under that covenant. The track represents the way of God's devising that takes men from here to Heaven. The train runs through human history, and men board it along the way by entering into the covenant it represents. The engineer, who runs the train, depicts the administrator of the covenant.

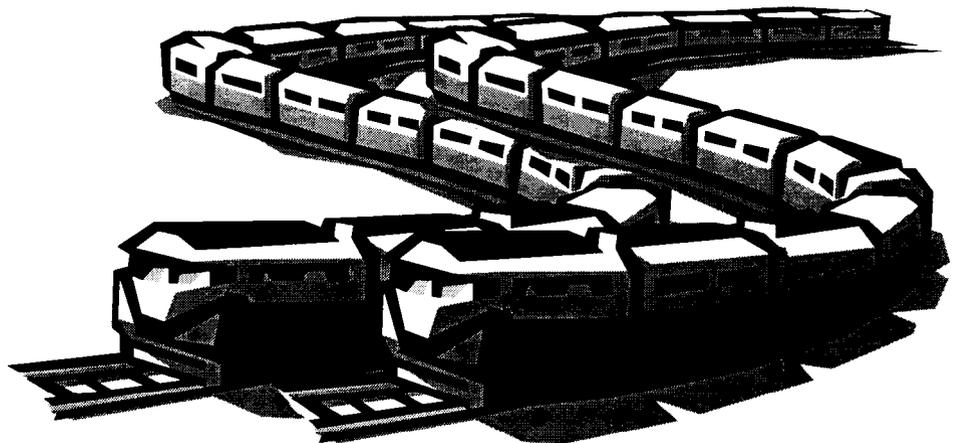


Covenant Theology envisions but one train and one track carrying the one people of God in every age. At first, the train has an engineer named "Moses". This train journeys through the Old Covenant age. It chugs along picking up the saints of that

age, mainly Israelites, as it passes through the time in which they live. In due time, it comes to the juncture between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. At this point, the train pulls into a station where Moses gets off, and a new engineer, "Jesus", gets on. The train now presses onward in time, now picking up the saints, like us, of the New Testament age, mainly Gentiles. Note the continuity. There's only one train — *i.e.* there's only one people of God, though some get on board in the Old age, whereas others board in the New. There's only one

track — *i.e.* there's only one route to glory. But there's two engineers — first Moses, then Jesus — who administer and supervise this process.

Dispensationalism envisions two trains running on two separate tracks. One train represents the Old Covenant. Its passengers are the saints of the old age, mainly Israelites. It has an engineer named "Moses" who conducts this train to glory. The track is of a very narrow gauge and the ride is very difficult and bumpy. In fact, some riders actually fall off or get bumped off along the way! The other train represents the New Covenant. Its passengers are the saints of the new age, mainly Gentiles. It runs on a completely separate set of tracks with a much wider gauge. It's easier to board and its ride is much smoother. The engineer, named "Jesus", does a much better job than Moses of keeping his passengers on board the train and arriving at their destination with all intact. There is, however, one very unusual feature of this model: Only one train is operable at a time! As long as the train of Moses was moving through the Old Covenant age, the train of Jesus was at a standstill. Now, as the train of Jesus begins to move, the train of Moses is at a standstill and will remain so until Jesus' train arrives in glory. Only then will Moses' train begin to move again and complete its journey. Note the discontinuity. There's two trains on two tracks with two engineers. The riders on the one train are kept completely separate from those on the other. (See "Two Trains" on next page)



Two Trains

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Problems, Problems

In my mind, there are many advantages of Covenant Theology over Dispensationalism. It sets forth the Biblical teaching that there is but one way of salvation for the saints in every age as opposed to the suggestion of Dispensationalism that there is one way for Israel and another for the church. It sees the people of God as a whole, rather than as the discommodulated, fractionalized groups that Dispensationalism envisions. In short, it does justice to the scriptural idea of the one purpose of God in Christ Jesus that He is performing in all ages.

the Biblical writers are describing far more than a mere change of administration of the same system — it sure sounds like the replacing of the old system with a completely new system. Neither, in my opinion, does it do justice to the scriptural emphasis concerning the great change brought about with the appearance of Christ. Neither am I (as one who is admittedly a Baptist in his thinking) comfortable with the dependence of Covenant Theology on “logical inferences” — leading to practices like infant baptism, for which I can find no scriptural support at all!

Is there no alternative but Dispensationalism? Is there no other covenantal model to be found which retains the strong points of Covenant Theology but avoids the weaknesses of Dispensationalism? Well, you know good and well I wouldn't be asking the question if I didn't think there was an alternative.



However, Covenant Theology just doesn't satisfy me in the long run. In my mind, it fails to do justice to passages — such as Jeremiah 31:31-34 — which depict the New Covenant in quite different terms than those existing under the Old. It certainly seems

But this will have to await our next issue. In the meanwhile, study the two models given and compare them to the testimony of scripture. Both, it seems to me, will be found wanting when judged by the standard of God's Word.

Conferences

Reformation & Revival Conference

Date: September 25-26, 1998

Theme: Growing the Church Biblically

Speakers: John Armstrong, Tom Nettles and Don Whitney

Hosted by South Woods Baptist Church, 3175 Germantown Rd. S., Memphis, TN 38119

For more information please write to the above address or call 901-758-1213

Ozark Regional Southern Baptist Founders Conference

Date: October 9 - 10, 1998

Theme: Biblical Evangelism

Hosted by First Baptist Church, Morrilton, Arkansas

For more information call 501-354-1977

ADBC's 6th Annual Reformation Celebration & Pastor's Seminar

Date: October 30 - November 1, 1998

Speakers: Martin Holdt, Joel Beeke, Tim Nettles

Hosted by Audubon Drive Bible Church, Laurel, Mississippi

For more information contact Pastor Jerry Marcellino at 601-649-8570

or E-mail: adbc@c-gate.net

Mid-South Sovereign Grace Pastors' Conference

Date: Thursday, November 19, 1998

Hosted by Grace Bible Church, Olive Branch, Mississippi

For more information call 601-895-1190 or e-mail: gbc@vantek.net

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