



<b>Covenant</b>	<b>Promises</b>	<b>Symbols</b>	<b>Scripture</b>
<b>Eternal</b>	Promises of Triune God	Scripture/ Incarnation	Heb. 13:20-21
<b>Creation</b>	Promises New Creation	Tree	Gen. 1-3; Hos. 6:7
<b>Noah</b>	Promise of Preserved Place	Rainbow	Gen. 6-9
<b>Abraham</b>	Promise of People/Place	Circumcision	Gen. 12, 15, 17
<b>Moses</b>	Promise of Law	Sabbath	Exodus 19-24
<b>David</b>	Promise of Ruler/King	Throne	2 Samuel 7:12-17
<b>New Covenant</b>	Promises Consummated/Fulfilled in Christ	Cup	Jer. 31:31-34; Luke 22:20

1. **One Covenant of Grace:** Although there are various covenants revealed in history throughout Scripture, there is ultimately one Covenant of Grace, and this Covenant of Grace is revealed progressively and expansively through all the covenants (such as covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David). This one Covenant of Grace is God's faithful commitment to save sinners from their sins and renew them into the image of His Son through the promises of the Gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit. The first revelation of this promise was made by our God in Genesis 3:15 and is subsequently repeated and progressively expanded upon throughout redemptive-history. This one covenant is one story that is made up of two primary epochs: One of *promise* (Old Testament/Old Covenant/This Present Age) and One of *fulfillment* (New Testament/New Covenant/Age to Come). One Covenant of Grace implies the following:
2. **One Mediator:** There is ultimately One Mediator for this one Covenant of Grace, the Lord Jesus Christ. Though Moses was a great lesser mediator in the Old Covenant (a type of Christ), there is ultimately only one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 2:5). Because there is only one mediator, there is only one Gospel hope, only one Savior, only one way of salvation that God offers to sinners, whether this be offered in the time of promise (Old Testament revelation in promises, types, shadows, ceremonies) or as it is fully revealed in the time of fulfillment in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ (New Testament).

3. **One People of God:** Because there is one Covenant of Grace and one Mediator of that one covenant, there is one people of God. The Israel of God in the Old Covenant was simply the “church under age” (Gal. 3:16-29), living in the time of promise, awaiting fulfillment with the coming of Christ the Mediator. The language used to describe Israel is used to describe the church in the time of fulfillment (New Covenant, Gal. 6:10-16; Heb. 3:1-6; 1 Peter 2:1-12). The Israel of God both in the times of promise (OT) and fulfillment (NT) are made up of all ages, and from every tribe, tongue, people and nations who believe.
  
4. **One Salvation:** To stress again what has already been said with implications, there is one Covenant of Grace, offering salvation through one Mediator, and one People of God (Israel/Church) that is privileged to participate in this salvation. This one salvation has the same goal for the one people of God: eternal life. This one salvation has the same means of grace essentially and substantively, though administered differently in time of promise (OT) and the time of fulfillment (NT) (circumcision and Passover/baptism and Lord’s Supper). This one salvation is the only way to truly glorify God and enjoy Him in an estate of blessedness forever and ever!

**One Covenant of Grace:** God’s one covenant is progressively revealed (eschatological) and each covenant supplements and expands prior covenants (Luke 1:55-56, 72-73; Heb. 3:1-6; 13:20-21; 1 Cor. 10:1-11; Gal. 3:8-29).

**One Story, Two Epochs/Ages:** (Present Age/Age to Come- Heb. 1:1-4, 6:4-5, 9:8-10 (cf. Matt. 12:32; Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30; 1 Tim. 6:17; Titus 2:12; cf. 1 Cor. 2:7, 10:11; Eph. 2:7; 1 Tim. 1:17; 2 Tim. 2:9; Heb. 9:26).

**Similarities between Old and New Covenant-Administrations:** 1. Same Hope/Promises; 2. Same Salvation by grace in Christ alone through faith; 3. Same Mediator (Jesus Christ in type, shadow, promise → fulfillment/consummation).

**Differences between Old and New Covenant-Administrations:** Same Gospel in substance but different outward administration of this glorious Gospel (cf. 1 Cor. 10:1-11; Col. 2:11-13). In OT, Israel exemplifies God’s righteous character and kingdom for the nations (in salvation and judgment); In NT, Israel is sent to the nations.

### iii. Trinitarian Covenant of Redemption and the Covenants

#### Eternal Covenant of Redemption (Inter-Trinitarian Covenant)

##### *Pactum Salutis*

- “I covenant with you...as my Father covenanted with me...” (Luke 22:29)
- Christ is Mediator-Surety
- The Lord Jesus Christ was obedient as Son/Servant of the LORD
- Major texts: Zechariah 6:13; Psa. 2:7, 110:1, 89:3, 19; 2 Sam. 7:14; Psalm 40:6-8 (Heb. 10:5); John 6:38, 57; 10:17-18; John 17:17-24; Isaiah 53:10-12 (Phil. 2:6-11); Hebrews 7:22; Eph. 1:3-14; 2 Tim. 1:9

- **Parties of the Eternal Covenant- Triune God**

1. Father: The Father initiates the pactum salutis in concert with the Son and the Spirit
2. Son: The Son functions as covenant surety (or guarantor- assuming legal responsibility on behalf of another)
3. Spirit: The Father anoints the Son with the Spirit to accomplish redemption. The Spirit is sent by the Father in the Name of Jesus (John 14:26; 15:26).

- **Three Requirements of the Covenant of Redemption:**

1. Son would assume human nature being born of a woman and would enter into history (Gal. 4:4-7).
2. As covenant surety Christ would place Himself under the law, and as such He would have a natural, penal, and federal relation to fulfill the law on behalf of the elect.
3. After Christ had merited eternal life and forgiveness of sins through His obedience and satisfaction (Rom. 3:21-26; Phil. 2:6-11), the Holy Spirit would apply the fruit of His merit to the elect.

Historical Covenant of Grace

1. Adam
2. Noah
3. Moses
4. David
5. New Covenant

- a. Distinction between “legal relationship” in Covenant of Grace (legal right because at least one parent is believer) and “living fellowship” in Covenant of Grace (regeneration).

# **“The Reformation and the Covenant God”**

## ***“Why Protestantism?”* Conference**

Autumn 2019

Rev. Charles R. Biggs

### **Introduction**

#### ***Theology in the service of Christ’s Church***

As we approach this subject together, let us be reminded that the study of theology should always be first for the glory of the Triune God, and secondly in service of His church. Theology should be in service to the church so that we can be faithful and edified and seek to be unified by God’s grace.

#### ***Approach this subject of ‘Reformation and the Covenant God’ in three parts***

We will approach this subject together in three parts:

- (1) The Revelation of Covenant God: A Brief Exegesis of Genesis 17:1-14- To practice what we believe concerning *sola Scriptura*, but embracing good, sound biblical tradition where we may find it. To define covenant, and let this portion of Holy Scripture address us.
- (2) The Reformers’ Exegesis and Application of the Covenant from Genesis 17 (focusing particularly on the Reformers John Calvin and Heinrich Bullinger).
- (3) Treasures for Protestants Today to Cherish from the Reformation (Pastoral Implications/Applications).

God promises and establishes a legal, yet personal relationship with His people in Christ (whether in promise, type, shadow, or in fulfillment); the ultimate promise:

***“I will be your God, and you will be my people.”***

***“By myself I have sworn.”***

## I. The Covenantal God: A Brief Exegesis of Genesis 17:1-14

<sup>ESV</sup> **Genesis 17:1-14:** *When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, <sup>2</sup> that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly." <sup>3</sup> Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, <sup>4</sup> "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. <sup>5</sup> No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. <sup>6</sup> I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. <sup>7</sup> And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. <sup>8</sup> And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God." <sup>9</sup> And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. <sup>10</sup> This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. <sup>11</sup> You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. <sup>12</sup> He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, <sup>13</sup> both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. <sup>14</sup> Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."*

### God reveals Himself-

Divine Condescension- Divine Summons to hear and believe—to receive.

Divine Supplementation- This further supplements God's covenant promises He has already graciously made, and now expands on it (even in light of Abram's lack of faith, Gen. 15-16).

How is God revealed specifically at this time in Redemptive-History?

"El Shaddai"- "Almighty God"- All piety is found in this Person and Power of God: "I am God All-Sufficient...walk before me blamelessly" (Gen. 17:1-2)

### God commits Himself-

Divine Covenant: **"My Covenant"**

*What is a covenant?* In context, it is God binding Himself to His word of promise.

*Covenant is a bond.*

*Covenant is a commitment.*

*Covenant is a gift.*

*Covenant is a relationship.*

*Covenant is a relationship that reveals God as father.*

*Covenant is a relationship that reveals God as friend.*

*Covenant is a legal transaction.*

*Covenant is a reconciling God who demands perfect righteousness as a utterly righteous God, and in the covenant bond/relationship/legal act, gives the righteousness required, reconciling sinners to Himself.*

Divine Promise: Substance of the Covenant

Summary: "I will be your God and you will be my people" (fully developed throughout Holy Scripture)

- To be God to Abraham and His Seed
- A people and a place; heirs and an inheritance

Divine Gift: The promises specifically made to whom? Abraham and his seed.

Divine Sign/Seal: Circumcision

### **Redemptive-Historical Layout of Genesis 17:**

- Galatians 3:16, 26-29
- Luke 1:72-73
- Acts 3:25
- Hebrews 11:8-16

This exegetical reflection should cause us to ponder the unified drama, or story-line of the Bible.

In Christ, covenant is fully realized (per above scriptures)

### **Unconditional/Conditional Nature of Covenant**

Covenant between Abraham and His Seed

Covenant is eternal (never ending, no expiration date)

Covenant requires a response of faith and obedience from Abraham (and His seed)

True tension? Yes, but resolved in Christ:

- (1) God unconditionally promises power and grace in Christ. Whatever God demands He provides for believers in Christ.

- (2) Christ as God can make unconditional promises; Christ as man can fulfill them all as the True Seed of Abraham.

**Focus on four truths from Genesis 17:**

1. Scripture: Canon as inscripturated revelation
2. Spiritual: Progressive eschatological escalating revelation that reveals Jesus Christ
3. Sanctification: “Walk blameless” or “Be holy as I am holy”
4. Sacraments: Circumcision (sign and seal of word revelation)

## **II. The Reformers’ Exegesis and Application-Implications of this Passage (John Calvin and Heinrich Bullinger)**

John Calvin (1509-1564) and Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575).

Fathers of Covenant/Federal Theology: Both were “fathers of covenantal theology” to some degree. Bullinger has been in some ways overshadowed by the great Calvin; it is commonly recognized that Bullinger should be called the “Father of Federal or Covenant Theology”; Calvin would be considered the first to use the covenant as the structure for his theology. Calvin would understand the concept of covenant as the “binding of God” to His own promises.

Students of the Church Fathers: Both were knowledgeable in the writings of the church fathers, specifically John Calvin, who was perhaps the most knowledgeable student of the fathers of his time. See especially his ‘Letter to King Francis I’ for more on this in every edition of Calvin’s ‘Institutes’.

True Heirs of the Church Fathers: Both of these men saw themselves as the true heirs of the early church fathers, especially in their covenantal reflections. That the early church fathers, particularly Irenaeus and Tertullian had been the first biblical theologians who also were covenantal theologians.

Irenaeus and Tertullian, Early Covenantal Theologians: This was stressed and continued in the time of the Reformation. Why Irenaeus and Tertullian particularly? They were concerned with the question: “How does the New Covenant relate to the Old Covenant?” This was a question asked in order to respond to Judaism in how Christ and the NT was a fulfillment (not replacement) of the OT, and in response to Marcionism that desired to completely sever the NT revelation about God and the OT revelation about God. Both covenant theologians stressed the continuity, with a movement of promise and fulfillment.

Reformation Catholics: Both considered that the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century was a Catholic Church reforming according to Scripture. Heirs of these two brothers are committed to being Reformed, and reforming Catholics.

Pastoral Scholars: Both were professionally trained in the original languages of Holy Scripture and proved themselves to be two of the most able exegetes of their time.

Genesis 17 as the Heart of Covenant Theology: Both found Genesis 17 to be a very important passage for understanding covenant theology. In fact, Bullinger said that the aim of all of scripture is to unpack the covenant made between God and Abraham in Genesis 17.

Both came to their unified covenantal convictions apart from one another.

**What did the Reformers John Calvin and Heinrich Bullinger specifically and consistently stress from their studies of Scripture:**

- Importance/foundation of Scripture alone- Scripture gives to us the content of our salvation and also the structure of how this salvation plan is revealed. God's covenant is something He has spoken/promised and plan to be revealed.

Tradition and common grace truth elements were embraced, but always submitted to Holy Scripture (sola Scriptura, not solo Scriptura-in agreement with the majority of the church fathers, biblically based tradition was useful; but always had to be submitted to Holy Scripture (cf. Matthew 15:1-9).

For something as important as the structure of divine condescension-revelation through the covenant, the Scriptures should not only provide the *content, but structure of that special revelation:*

- Calvin taught the absolute, objective authority of the Scriptures as indeed He has been described as the faithful "Theologian of the Holy Spirit"
- As Calvin wrote: "The Spirit's speaking is always the speaking of Scripture."
- Importance of covenant nurture of the saints for their own hearts and their children (not taking outward signs/sacramental privileges for granted, but allowing them to be gracious signs accompanied by the Spirit to the reality found in Christ).

There was a covenantal, redemptive-historical priority of Abraham's family being in covenant ("first to the Jews"), but there is an intention that is progressively revealed to

include Gentiles (“Father of many nations”). Yet the true children of Abraham are those (whether Jew or Gentile) who possess the saving faith of Abraham (Gal. 3:7-8, 16-29).

Though physical circumcision was the outward sign for Israel, Israel could reject what the outward sign symbolized and break God’s covenant. The circumcision would be as if they were not circumcised (cf. Rom. 2:25-29).

***“Covenant privileges implied covenant obligations/responsibilities”***

- There is one story, revealed in two covenants/epochs (OT/NT)
  - Same hope of immortality (the promise of a future of peace/shalom dwelling forever with God as our God in heaven)
  - Same One Mediator (Christ, whether revealed in shadow or in substance)
    - Christ was not a private person, but ordained/installed into a public office as Mediator- all blessings flow from the Father, through the Son’s mediation, by the Holy Spirit
    - Office of Mediator is the True Prophet, Priest and King
    - The Office of Mediator is particularly a Covenantal Office that has both legal and relational implications (both forensic/legal as well as relational/renovative)
    - Union with Christ is the summary of the Gospel according to both Calvin and Bullinger
  - Same Salvation based on grace alone followed/accompanied by good works
- Essential unity of the covenants or epochs of Old and New Testaments (yet there is both continuity and discontinuity)
- Recognizing the essential unity, yet there is also diversity (Calvin listed five differences in his ‘Institutes’):
  - Earthly benefits → the Land of Promise (Canaan) → Heavenly Jerusalem (Heb. 11:8-16)
  - Images/Shadows/Types → Substance in Person and Work of Christ (Type → Antitype)
  - Old Covenant comparatively described (with NT) as “under law”/ “ministry of death”/ “written code” → New Covenant comparatively described (with OT) as “under grace”/ “ministry of life”/ dominated by the “Spirit of God” (2 Cor. 3:7-18)
  - Old Covenant comparatively described (with NT) as “bondage” → New Covenant comparatively described (with OT) as “freedom” (Gal. 3:19-4:7)

- Full Gospel to Gentiles in New Covenant epoch (from conquest in OT → Mission and Evangelism in NT)
- Same sacraments in substance, differing in form- circumcision and Passover in the OT, and baptism and the Lord's Supper in the NT
- When interpreting physical promises to Abraham and His people, it was using prophetic pictures/figures in terms of earthly advantages and blessings that pointed forward and upward to heavenly advantages and blessings to be more fully revealed in Christ (Isa. 65-66; Ezek. 37)
- Importance of the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit as Author of Covenant: One who inspires the word of God and guides into its inscripturated form; One who illuminates the church/the people of God by faith to recognize and hear the true words of God (authority in illumination is not to determine what is canonical/scriptural, but it is authority to discover-recognize God's Word. Bullinger wrote that covenants are recorded in writing and Holy, Canonical Scripture is the "document of the covenant").
- The history of the church has elements of pure and impure/both visible and invisible churches (Rev. 2-3)

### **III. Glorious Treasures for Protestants Today to Cherish from the Reformation (Application/Implications)**

You could say that in summary Reformed (and Reforming) Covenant Theology has three primary interests and treasures to offer believers today:

- 1) Mining the Riches of God's Word
- 2) The Glorious Centrality of Jesus Christ
- 3) The Liberating Beauty of the Gospel and its Fruits

**Let's view these treasures to cherish today in more detail:**

#### **1) Covenant Document: Holy Scripture:**

Let us remain biblically bound and focused (sola Scriptura)

The Bible is a covenant document that reveals a Covenant of Grace. The Bible doesn't merely contain a covenant, it *is a covenant document*

God is the ultimate canon/rule/supreme authority who condescends to speak to His people through divine, trustworthy revelation

God is the Lord of history and He reveals Himself progressively in history. Dr. Richard Gaffin writes that “recognizing the redemptive-historical character of revelation is crucial to a proper view of the canon.”

Covenant, both the structure and content of God’s revelation in both Covenants/Testaments Canon, a process whereby the covenant is inspired, inscripturated, and illuminated by the Holy Spirit

Inward testimony of the Holy Spirit helps believers to recognize canonical books (authority), and the meaning of them (teaching from God, John 16:12-14)

Lord Jesus is King → Promises His Spirit to Rule/Guide/Lead on Earth → Canonicity: Process of inspiration, inscripturation, illumination → Apostolicity and ministry at the end of the ages (last two, canonicity and apostolicity closely related)

Word and Spirit: INSPIRATION  
INSCRIPTURATION  
ILLUMINATION

*Isaiah 59:21* "And as for me, this is my covenant with them," says the LORD: "My Spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your offspring, or out of the mouth of your children's offspring," says the LORD, "from this time forth and forevermore."

The canon is revelation; it can only be recognized through the event of illumination. As Michael Horton has written:

*"God must not only authorize these 'collected writings' as divine speech, but must directly guide the process from inscripturation to canon. Furthermore, the Spirit's inspiration in this process is matched by the Spirit's illumination for the believing reader."*

*"It is the covenant that constitutes the biblical canon as canon."* Why? Because it is divine discourse intended to reveal God and specifically His good Gospel promises to believers.

The Scripture cannot be broken (John 5:30, 39-40; 10:31-33)

“Scripture alone” but a scripture that is not alone; the embracing good, biblical tradition, is still a good thing, and very much needed. We need creeds and confessions of faith that summarize biblical truth to nurture the church and our children in.

Let us continue to learn to humbly interpret in community, trusting the Spirit of God that when we compare Scripture with Scripture, virtually all of our questions can be satisfied to some degree, and that some degree of harmony can be reached by true believers.

## 2) Covenant History/Progress/Story: Holy Spiritual:

The Scriptures reveal the History of Redemption through the structure of a covenant.

The covenant is Christ-centered, and progresses with eschatological escalation through history, taking two main forms/epochs: promise (Old Covenant) and fulfillment (New Covenant) (Gal. 3:16; 1 Cor. 10:1-13)

Christ answers to the covenant in our place as God-Man, the Incarnate Savior:

As God, the Lord Jesus Christ makes unconditional covenant promises, as man, he fulfills all of the conditions of the Covenant of Grace *for us, in our place*.

***Christ is the promise of the covenant, as well as the Redeemer who meets all of the demands of the covenant***

There is an essential unity of Holy Scripture, between the epochs of promise and fulfillment of the Old and New Covenants

-Neither severing the OT/NT epochs, nor flattening is wise

*Progressive and Christ-focused revelation*

*No severing- Judaism/Marcionism/Radical Reformers (Anabaptists of Reformation)*

*No flattening out- Roman Catholic: Does the biblical movement of promise and fulfillment fit in with Rome's teaching on the priesthood and sacraments, for example (e.g. have priests, temples, etc as if the time of promise has not given way to fulfillment in Christ; it undermines Christ, His Person and Work: He is High Priest and Temple; believers are called priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9-11) and temples (Eph. 2:19-22) 'In Him'.*

-There is a progressive, eschatological escalation through the one covenant that is supplemented, without being supplanted

Michael Horton has written that "*a covenantal, redemptive-historical, and eschatological approach accounts for both the unity (because of the promise made to Abraham and his seed) and diversity (because of the distinct administrations and polities of God's Kingdom in different 'acts' of the drama.*"

## 3) Covenant Blamelessness/Righteousness: Sanctification:

Justifying Grace and Sanctifying Grace is available in Christ.

Let us seek to emphasize from Scripture God’s sovereign, powerful, monergistic grace that is freely offered to sinners in Christ, continuing to learn a robust covenantal theology that establishes works as absolutely necessary for salvation (not from our merit, but Christ’s; yet absolutely necessary as proper obligation-response to God’s covenantal grace to us in Christ.

Unconditional/Conditional aspects of Covenant (from God’s perspective, from our perspective- this is particularly clearly revealed in Jesus Christ, the God-Man).

Important truth revealed particularly in Genesis 17: All that God requires of sinners is given in Himself in Christ- His promises in the OC (“El Shaddai”) and in the NC (“Jesus Christ”)

Mutuality of the Covenant: What is our response? Our response/privilege/obligation in Christ is to bear good fruits, to become holy. We respond to justifying grace in Christ with obedience that is worked in and by the Spirit

It is important to note that grace is not given in place of obligations in the covenant, it is the covenant gift in Christ to fulfill one’s covenant obligations in Him, in reliance upon His Holy Spirit.

Covenant emphasizes *grace and responsibility*, avoiding:

**Legalism** (relationship to God’s demands apart from a relationship)

**Antinomianism** (relationship to God apart from His demands in the law)

**Roman Catholicism** (confusion of the primacy of grace in justification prior to and preceding the grace of sanctification)

**Two Parts of the Covenant of Grace (P. Lillback)**

<b>Justification</b>	<b>Sanctification</b>
1. Through Covenant of Grace in union with Christ	1. Through Covenant of Grace in union with Christ
2. Simultaneous with sanctification	2. Simultaneous with justification
3. Inseparable from sanctification	3. Inseparable from justification
4. By faith alone in Christ	4. By faith and obedience to the Law by the Holy Spirit
5. A superior (perfect) righteousness	5. A subordinate righteousness meditated by Jesus Christ
6. Faith alone justifies	6. Faith is never alone in the justified person
7. Imputed righteousness	7. Inherent/infused righteousness

**4) Covenant Signs and Seals: Sacraments:**

Two sacraments in both epochs

Two sacraments that are both ordained, instituted, ratified by Christ

Outward sign of an inward reality by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 2:25-29): Sacraments are “visible words” (both Augustine and Calvin)

“Same in substance in both epochs, different in administration”

- Colossians 2:11-14- “Circumcision in the new...”
- 1 Corinthians 10:1-11- “Baptism in the old...”

How does one know they are truly in covenant with God not merely outwardly and formally, but truly, functionally, fruitfully in Jesus Christ?

Importance of good works and fruitfulness if one is a true justified believer

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