

Leadership And The Covenants (Part Three)

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 21-Nov-15; Sermon #1296

I am going to ask you to turn to Romans 9. The reason that I am asking you to turn there is because of something that we occasionally get questioned on, or we hear complaints about, or we feel people are feeling sorry for themselves. I am not saying this a terrible thing at all, but they question why God would ever call them because they do not feel as though they are showing any qualities that would allow them to fit into what they think that they should be able to do.

In Romans 9, I want to take a little time at the beginning of this sermon to help us understand that God did not call us because we are so talented. There is a logical reason for that in Romans 9.

Romans 9:10-11 And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls). . . .

This is a statement that helps us to understand clearly that God did not call us because we were so talented, that we did all kinds of wonderful works, and therefore God said, look at that person down there, I am going to take that person and use him. No, if that were true we would have something to brag before God of what we are because we were talented, and because we were talented God made use of it.

I Corinthians 12:4-11 Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. [God does the work.] But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all [Who is doing the works that really matter? It is God who is doing the works and He does it for the purpose of the church, which He is creating]: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit [Where did the Spirit come from? We did not

Leadership and the Covenants (Part Three) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

have it before we were called, we did not have it before we were baptized. We did have it after God gave it to us, and with that Spirit came the gifts that God gave for us to fulfill our responsibility in what He is forming within the church.] works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.

John 15:1-5 “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vine-dresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”

I think you are seeing Jesus making an analogy here. He is using His own body as though those that God calls and chooses are part of that body, and they are producing or working. You cannot produce anything apart from what God is doing that is of any value to what God is doing.

Who is the creator? It is God. He is going to form and shape those that He calls into the body of Jesus Christ into what *He* desires, as those that He called allows Him to create. Our biggest contribution is allowing God to do His will within us. Therefore, God did not call us for what we produced *before* He called us. He called us for a purpose to fulfill what He has in mind for us to become.

We have no ground to stand on to complain that “I have no gifts,” because God says we do have gifts. He gives everybody that He called gifts. Our biggest problem is to discern what those gifts are and give ourselves over to helping God by yielding to Him.

Did Adam create himself? No, in God's spiritual creation it is exactly the same thing. God is doing the creating, we are the dirt. There is talent there, there is ability, there are things that we can be created to produce. Our job is to be searching for what it is we *can* do. There are certain things that are given in God's Word that gives us direction as to how we can give ourselves over to producing these things.

Would Richard ever get up here and speak the way he does, on what he does, on the subjects that he does, if he did not give himself over to studying, preparing, and so forth

Leadership and the Covenants (Part Three) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

and then giving them? God gave him the abilities to do it, but Richard had to yield.

I do not know if I ever told this story on myself but I will tell you anyway, I was terrified about getting up and speaking before even a high school class, it was so ingrained in me that I had nothing to give. Somebody nominated me to be one of the officers of the senior class when I was a junior. I was going to be in this group of people leading my fellow students as a part of the officers. I was so frightened I came down with the case of the measles!

I am certain that it showed up because of fear of having to get up in front of the people and speak. The school nurse had to take me home because I was now contagious. I do not think I was contagious at all. The girl that was running against me won. I lost my chance of being an officer of the class to a girl—that was embarrassing all by itself. Here I am, God had to bring it out of me, or put it into me to give myself over to doing these things.

If John Ritenbaugh can do what he hates to do, why not you, if it is something that is good and is productive. Richard and I are both speaking on the same general subject of leadership. This was in no way planned and each of us is covering a different aspect of it.

Last week Richard spoke on specific aspect of leadership of a good king of Judah, Jehoshaphat. I am speaking on a specific aspect of leadership pertaining to leadership in a certain area, by closely following the covenants God lays before us in His Word.

You might wonder what the covenants have to do with what I began this sermon with, about being gifted or not being gifted, and failing to give ourselves over to being used in this way. Covenants play a very large role in what I am taking about because, everybody that is in this room, everybody who is listening to my voice, has abilities within them to apply the covenants of God. Everybody has to apply the covenants of God in their lives, and if they do they will be showing leadership within what God is working out.

There is a logical reason why this is true. Before we can follow them we must first know where they appear in His Word, and then know what they require of us. There are more of them than those that we know best, which are the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.

The first portion of this sermon is dedicated as an appeal for you to pay attention to them because they provide a broad solid foundation for carrying out our responsibilities.

Leadership and the Covenants (Part Three) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

It is in the carrying out of our responsibilities before God that we show these leadership qualities. We do not have to do it before others, in the sense performing at all. We are *conforming* in our relationship with God, and it takes leadership to do that.

Christian leadership must have something solid and easily understood for it to be built upon. It is interesting that there are three terms that play large roles throughout people's lives in the church, and they all begin with the letter C. There are covenants, contracts, and compacts. All three, even as standalone terms, have distinctive differences in application. In one broad sense they all have essentially the same meaning: all three are used to indicate a circumstance drawing people together and unifying them in agreement in order to accomplish some purpose.

It is right here that the common practice in English-speaking nations, through the centuries, has separated them to apply them most specifically to different kinds of agreements. The term 'compact' tends to be used in political agreements, 'contracts' tends to be used in business agreements, and 'covenants' very frequently involve the solemnity of God being inferred or directly named within them.

None of them are something that we enter into on a daily basis, but they touch virtually everybody's life at some time or another. Becoming married involves the making of a covenant. Compacts are rarely officially entered into by any of us because we are not involved in politics. When we buy a house we enter into a contract with a bank, and the same is true when we buy an automobile or anything else that we pay for over a period of time. Each of them is still the same. It is merely an agreement between two or more parties, and they all define the terms of a relationship and they specifically give a list of responsibilities.

In simple terminology they all say that Party A agrees to do such and such, and Party B agrees to do this and that. They usually contain penalties that are imposed if a party fails to carry through on what he has pledged to do. A covenant made with God is no different in general purpose, but the fact that it is made with God makes a huge difference in its importance to life.

Who knows how many agreements are entered into every single day, but despite the billions of people born since Adam and Eve, relatively few of that huge figure have actually entered into a covenant with God. There is one exception to this, other than the marriage covenant. Some demographers estimate that as many as seventy billion people have lived on earth, but even if one billion have made a formal covenant involving God, old and new covenants combined, that would still be only one percent of all the people who have ever lived.

The biblical covenants of God are generally ignored even by those who claim they have made them. The chances are great that maybe you have not checked up on the covenants of God since you were baptized, and maybe when you were baptized you only went through them because the minister took you through one of them, usually the New Covenant.

I want you to think about that, because as we are learning, not a single word of God has ever been done away. How often have you looked into these agreements that you made with God? You signed on the dotted line as it were, because you became His son, because you wanted something that He is very willing to give, that is His forgiveness, and His Spirit, and say yes, I agree to that, I will keep them, and maybe you have never seriously looked at that any more than maybe two of them.

One we call the Old Covenant, and the one we call the New Covenant, and yet these are the legal foundation of our relationship with God. This is something we should do every once in a while, look at what God requires of me.

We generally know, we readily agree that He wants us to keep His commandments. That is a wonderful start, it is a good start. Each one of these covenants has commandments in them too, but maybe the only thing we ever really paid any attention to were the Ten. That is a wonderful start but there might be an awful lot more going on in those covenants than we have ever paid attention to and need to learn about.

As I said earlier, a covenant, a compact, or contract, all define a relationship, and the covenants of God define our relationship with Him. What my concern is that hopefully I can help urge you on to show your leadership not merely by generally knowing of them but having a good understanding of the responsibilities that they assign to us.

How can He give gifts to people who do not even look at what their responsibilities are? Because God is involved it is a truth that we must make good use of—His covenants by faith. Some level of faith is also involved in business contracts that we enter into and political compacts that are nowhere near to the level of a covenant with God in terms of their seriousness.

We will examine the foundational seriousness of a covenant with God by briefly reviewing how far-reaching God's sovereignty is over all that is stated in His Word. The first thing is this: God, unlike mankind, is omnipresent, He is always aware of what is going on. He knows whether we are keeping His covenants or not.

In addition to that He is also fully aware and all powerful. There is absolutely no way

Leadership and the Covenants (Part Three) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

around the seriousness of this issue for us, because God has determined to relate to us, to His children, by means of His calling and leading them to His requirements for them that are given in writings in His Book. There is a conclusion to this. Thus the keeping of the covenants definitely involve faith in our Creator.

Everybody involved in God's creative processes has access to the same terms, and the emphasis here is on *everybody*. What this means is even before conversion the unconverted are answerable to Him to some level regarding the conduct of their lives. This truth is important.

God has given life and breath to all—that means everybody. He upholds all things by the Word of His power. This means in practical fact that creation and God's sustaining oversight of His creation ties every person to Him even before conversion.

He gives the unconverted life, and He sustains their life. There is a dependence that is being created and mankind is ignoring the fact that God gives them life and breath *every single day*. We do not like to think that God is responsible for sustaining our life everyday. Does this give God the right to treat them as He sees fit? Absolutely it does! He gave them life in the first place, and He sustains their life right up to this moment, and they do not even think that they owe Him a thing.

We are dealing with serious stuff. The reason it is serious is because we are much more closely involved with God than the unconverted so our responsibilities are higher and deeper and broader.

Please turn to Romans 2, because I want us to see that every single person, whether they are converted or unconverted, has been given by God with a basic knowledge of right and wrong.

Romans 2:11-15 For there is no partiality with God. For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; for when the Gentiles who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law [By nature it was something that God gave them within the properties of simply their being alive.], these, although not having law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of law written in their hearts [He gave them a basic knowledge of right and wrong.], their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them)

Leadership and the Covenants (Part Three) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

They are going to receive eventually a much fuller disclosure of what God so freely gave them. God is using me right now to make sure that you understand this, that we not only receive the basics, we received it in much more depth and detail.

Most conclusively of all regarding the unconverted responsibilities is the series of scriptures that we have gone over a number of times in the last several months.

Romans 1:18-20 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. [This includes the unconverted.] For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they [the unconverted] are without excuse.

Those verses confirm that mankind, including the unconverted, are to some degree without excuse. God holds within His mind what degree that is and of course we understand that largely overall He does not hold them anywhere near as responsible as He does for you and me.

A statement made by Cornelius Van Til “There is not a place in all of the universe where man can go and say, ‘this is my private realm,’ no button he can press and say, ‘here I step outside of God’s jurisdiction.’ There is not a square inch in God’s creation over which Christ is not sovereign that He cannot say, ‘this is Mine.’ Everything belongs to Christ and He is aware of every square inch of what is going on within this.”

Those He calls especially owe their loyalty to Him.

Luke 12:48 “But he who did not know yet, committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.”

That is where we fit. Our responsibilities are much broader and deeper than those of the unconverted, but even from the unconverted there is a level of obedience that is required of them because they cannot say to God, you never gave me an understanding. He did.

Leadership and the Covenants (Part Three) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

At the beginning of this series I gave you figures regarding how much more frequently the term follow appears compared to leading. Pay attention to this because my Bible teaches me that in order to be a righteous leader one must first be a very serious follower.

Matthew 4:19 And He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."

Matthew 19:21 Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

II Thessalonians 3:7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you.

Revelation 14:4 These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being first fruits to God and to the Lamb.

Following the Lamb enables one to be prepared to follow Him right into the Kingdom of God. So in order to be a leader one has to first follow seriously. There is an interesting little aside for those scriptures that I gave to you, just a few of many in which following either Christ, following God, following the church, following the commandments, are a given that in modern translations they translate that word follow as pursue. That is an important distinction because we can follow stumbling along, at least doing that much is something good. But if we follow what it really says, then we need to be following with a great deal of energy, not just jogging along, but giving ourselves over to it.

A covenant spells out as an overview what we must faithfully follow according to God's will. The fruit of that activity will be leadership in His way, because it begins to become habitual and this is where the covenant fits in. A covenant makes a relationship exceedingly closer and tighter in that it defines the relationship, but as we shall see a biblical covenant generally does not give narrow details, it gives broad statements. The details have to fit in from either the surrounding material or from what obeying the covenant will produce.

The first thing is this, a covenant is a legal bond between us and God. This word legal is important to our understanding because it adds to our taking it more seriously. Satan

Leadership and the Covenants (Part Three) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

has tried very hard to take the words law and legal out of a Christian's vocabulary. He does not want us to think that something like this is a binding requirement. It is though.

When we make a covenant with God it is binding. It is a legal document in which God is the overseer and keeper of it. A covenant makes the relationship exceedingly closer and tighter in that it defines the relationship and, as we shall see, a biblical covenant does not give out narrow details.

We are going to look at the word bond. It is something that holds things together.

Colossians 3:12-14 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another, even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.

Love is an example of a bond that holds people together. Love holds a man and a woman together as one in a marriage, a weld is a bond making separate metal objects into one, glue is a bond between wooden pieces making them one. Faith in God's love for us, faith in His faithfulness to provide for us, and faith in the legality of the covenant are all bonding agents of considerable spiritual importance.

God's purpose for His people is all encompassing to our present *and* future life. God's plan comprehensively covers all of life. It has a beginning—when we repent, when we get baptized, when we receive God's Spirit, and that bond is intended by God to get stronger and stronger and start including other characteristics that are necessary bonding agents. It goes right on out into eternity and goes on forever and ever.

Every bonding agent has to have a beginning. The two bonding agents of greatest importance to us are faith and love. We might add what Paul did and put hope in there as well, because that tends to stick us together as a unit with God.

God designed a plan to satisfy His creative pleasure and at the same time to bring Him glory and enable Him to safely share Himself with others in peace. Maybe we do realize how important that phrase is, because He found out with Satan. He could not share Himself with Satan because Satan wanted to take over.

So God created the processes by which you and I were created, but He is going through this purpose, this plan, because He wants to be able to share Himself and what He is,

Leadership and the Covenants (Part Three) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

and all He has and does, with those who will share life with Him in peace.

This is why the covenants are so necessary, because we have to see the requirements and show Him that we will follow through with them, and the requirements are given in the covenants. The details are not often given in the covenants. What we see are broad principles, but once in a while you will see something that is detailed.

Which covenant is it that has all Ten Commandments in it? The Old Covenant, that is why it is not done away. Those things are still in effect and they are part of the requirements of our relationship with God. In that case we have detail, the Ten Commandments. Most of the time they are things that are not detailed like that.

This is one reason why nothing regarding His purpose for mankind is done away, because it goes on and on and on. What this means is this: His purpose is serious business. We need as much from His way that we can cram into our mind, and our character to be prepared as a king and a priest.

God knew before He began that we would sin. That is because He already experienced it with the angels, they sinned even though they were far superior to us in creation, and besides that they could literally see Him. He also planned from the beginning for our redemption as shown in the first two covenants (mainly in the second one depending upon how one separates the covenants).

I am going to show you a few basic rules regarding biblical covenants. In biblical covenants God is always seen as absolute sovereign of His creation and its purpose. All biblical covenants are initiated by God and He determines their purposes, terms, and penalties. There is no bargaining with God whatever regarding the terms.

Luke 14:25-26 Now great multitudes were with Him. And He turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to Me [a standard, no arguing with this] and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple."

It is all or nothing, no bargaining with God at all.

This is one reason whenever we have baptism counseling we always go through this so that people understand, as a witness before them, this is not what the ministry is requiring, this is not what the church is requiring, this is what our Savior requires if we

Leadership and the Covenants (Part Three) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)
are going to make a covenant with Him. Another way of saying this, God is the Boss.

Do you understand why it has to be this way? Because we do not know what in the world is going on. He has the plan, He has the purpose, He has the Spirit, all power resides on His side, so the only way this is going to work is if we give ourselves over to Him. The thing that is so wonderful is that He is so patient! He gives us plenty of time to get on board, and He accepts us at our word. That is merciful and patient.

He knows we do not understand the whole picture, He knows that we only grasp a small part of it, but He wants us to understand that the covenant that we made with Him is serious business, and He gives us time to grow.

In a sense, can you imagine, you as an adult, making a covenant with a six month old baby? Maybe that baby might be able to say Mama, Dada, at that is about all there is to it. I am talking about the comparison here. That is the way we are to Christ, with our children we give them time to grow, to overcome, and to mature.

There is no dickering with God over the fine points of the covenant we make with Him. At the age of six months we are alive, that is it in terms of adding to a covenant's value and need. We have little understanding at that time.

In a covenant a number of covenants are given and actually dictated by God and termed by the people who research into these things, 'universal covenants' because they directly apply to all of mankind. There are several of these, the very first two are universal covenants. The Old Covenant is not a universal covenant, the New Covenant is not a universal covenant. A universal covenant applies to people whether they are converted or not.

Do not expect the Bible to announce, this is a covenant so pay attention. They are not as compact within any given context as you might think. There are things that are separated away from the general technicalities of the covenant but they apply within that particular covenant even though they show up in the Bible a good bit later.

Naming a section of scriptures a covenant is a conclusion reached because God is clearly speaking, and He is establishing rules of conduct within a relationship. This is how you can tell this part of a covenant.

Here is where our faith comes in and is helpful to us. We have to always remember God's character. He is patient, He is faithful, He is kind, He is generous, He is never unjust in what He assigns as a responsibility and the reason is because His purpose is

Leadership and the Covenants (Part Three) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

always to save. He never issues any kind of a standard or an order that is made to cause anybody ever to fail. His purpose is to always save, which means, because we understand His grace to some degree, He can move the standards up and down as He sees fit for that particular person whether they can meet that or not.

This is why Paul could confidently say in I Corinthians 10:13, God never gives us any kind of a test, trial, that is too difficult for us, but He always sets the standard for each person at a pace that He knows that particular person can meet. He judges every single person by their own abilities, how long they have been at this, and so forth. His purpose is always to save.

If our salvation totally depended upon our obedience, we are all dead men. On the other hand, God is going to look at the way we go at things and see whether our hearts are sincerely in the efforts that we make to conform to the things that He has given for us to do.

The first covenant is termed the Adamic covenant. It is universal in its scope, it applies to everybody, all of mankind, whether converted or unconverted. We are having a lot of emotional chaos in the United States of America over marriage. The marriage covenant is part of the Adamic covenant. It applies to everybody, the standards of a marriage applies to those converted or unconverted, because God set the standard.

The parts of covenants do not have to have all of their requirements listed in one place. It is not until Matthew 19 that comes the standard, clarifying what it is that God will give a legal divorce on. It is actually part of the Adamic covenant and that covenant was made at the very beginning of the Bible.

Please turn to Genesis 1 and as we go through these what I am going to do is to make every effort to fit them within the context in which they appear. This covenant was made at the very beginning of creation.

Genesis 1:22 And God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth”

Genesis 1:1-2 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

Genesis 1:27-28 So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed

Leadership and the Covenants (Part Three) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

Genesis 2:3 Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

Genesis 2:15-17 Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

I read those scripture because they form the context in which the first covenant is made with mankind. In those verses that I gave to you God wants us to get a formation in our minds of the way that He approached Adam and Eve.

How does Genesis 1 begin? It begins with everything in chaos, it begins with nobody in sight. God is the first being that appears within what we are looking at. He appears within the first five verses, and then He begins speaking. This is important in seeing the context in which this covenant is given.

The first thing I read was, we see a chaotic earth and practically the first thing it says, God blessed them. That is important to understand. God wants us to look at what we have received from Him as a blessing. He blessed us with the creation, He blessed us with life, He blessed us with marriage, He blessed us with animals to take care of. He blessed us with everything that is necessary for every aspect of life.

What is He driving at? He first of all wants us to see Him as the one who gave all of this stuff. Before He appeared on the scene nothing but death, nothing but chaos, nothing beautiful, nothing peaceful, nothing reproducing, nothing even growing, everything in turmoil.

The person who gave all of these things is the Creator, the person who gave all of these things is somebody to be respected for His power. This person who gave all of these things is to be respected because of the beauty of everything that He did. This person is to be looked at because of what He made. *He* is the one to be worshipped, not the creation. He gave those things as a blessing to us.

Leadership and the Covenants (Part Three) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

One of His major gifts is not only life breath but the Sabbath. That was within the first week that He gave the Sabbath. He gave the Sabbath before any of the other commandments, He blessed it and sanctified it.

I want you to see at the very beginning of this that every one of the covenants that God puts forth to us is done in such a way that from it we will be able to understand the mind and character of this Creator who gave us these things.

He starts off by giving us life, He starts off by blessing us. Every covenant is a blessing. It is not something to hem us in, it is something to bless us with, and that He is to be the God that we are to worship.

There could not be a better covenant to start with because it introduces Him to us. If we are looking at it as if it was a motion picture we see the chaos, and then out of it this One steps forth and begins to give us gifts. That is His purpose. He wants us to share life with Him and He begins by giving us many gifts.

That sets a pattern for every one of the covenants that follows. This is the One who gave them. He is a kind, loving, good, gentle, yet powerful Being that we are to worship as the Giver of every good and perfect gift.