

GOD'S COVENANT, PART 1
(SUNDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2015)

Scripture Reading: Gen. 2:7-17; Rom. 8:1-11

INTRODUCTION

If you have been a Christian for a number of years or have enjoyed the blessing of being raised in a Christian home, then you know quite a few big words and important theological phrases.

See if you recognize some of these terms and phrases:

Adiaphora, Concupiscence, Christology, Ontology, Propitiation, Supralapsarianism, Soli Deo Gloria...

Some of these phrases are man-made terms, but still are very important.

Other words come from Scripture and we especially must come to appreciate these words.

The word covenant is one of the most used words, especially in Reformed circles.

What does the word covenant mean?

O. Palmer Robertson in his book, *Christ and the Covenants*, says this is almost like asking for the definition of a mother.

He writes:

A mother may be defined as the person who brought you into the world. That definition may be correct formally. But who would be satisfied with such a definition?

What then is a covenant? How do you define the covenantal relation of God to His people?

A covenant is a bond in blood sovereignly administered.

When God enters into a covenantal relationship with men, He sovereignly institutes a life-and-death bond.

This week and next, Lord willing, we will focus on how God deals with man in terms of covenant.

This morning we will consider three points:

1. God in His sovereign glory graciously humbles Himself to enter into relationship with man by way of covenant.
2. God established His covenant with man at creation.
3. God established a covenant of grace after man's fall and rebellion in the garden.

Your comfort and assurance is that God will never fail to keep His covenant promises.

1. GOD IN HIS SOVEREIGN GLORY GRACIOUSLY HUMBLER HIMSELF TO ENTER INTO RELATIONSHIP WITH MAN BY WAY OF COVENANT.

The book of Job is often considered to be focused on suffering.

That is indeed an important theme in Job.

It is also an important book that guides you in considering who you are before the God who created all things and ordains all things.

In Job 38:1, when God directly appeared to Job near the end of the book, we are told that the LORD [Yahweh] answered Job out of the whirlwind.

In this background information, which is so easy to miss, we have a summary of my entire message.

The mighty presence of God is shown by way of the whirlwind, the powerful image of a storm.

We must never to lose sight of God's majesty, glory, and holiness.

Job 38:1 uses the name Yahweh, LORD, the name especially associated with God's covenant.

Job at the end of the book faces the mighty God who graciously reveals Himself and is faithful to His covenant promises.

Now as the LORD continued to speak, Job was quickly reminded of the awesome majesty of God.

Job 38:4 "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?"

Tell *Me*, if you have understanding.

Job 40:2 "Shall the one who contends with the Almighty correct *Him*?"

He who rebukes God, let him answer it."

Listen to several other passages which beautifully describe God's glory and majesty.

Psa. 113:5 Who *is* like the LORD our God,

Who dwells on high,

6 Who humbles Himself to behold

The things that are in the heavens and in the earth?

Is. 40:13 Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD,

Or *as* His counselor has taught Him?

14 With whom did He take counsel, and *who* instructed Him,

And taught Him in the path of justice?

Who taught Him knowledge,

And showed Him the way of understanding?

15 Behold, the nations *are* as a drop in a bucket,

And are counted as the small dust on the scales;

Look, He lifts up the isles as a very little thing.

16 And Lebanon *is* not sufficient to burn,

Nor its beasts sufficient for a burnt offering.

17 All nations before Him *are* as nothing,

And they are counted by Him less than nothing and worthless.

Acts 17:24 God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. **25** Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, **as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.**

The Sovereign, Triune God we serve does not need anything from anyone of us.

He doesn't need you or me.

But God has graciously chosen to reveal Himself and to establish a relationship with those He has made.

God has sovereignly and graciously chosen to establish His covenant with man.

2. GOD ESTABLISHED HIS COVENANT WITH MAN AT CREATION.

I want to issue a warning at this point.

There is a certain amount of theological controversy over the nature of God's covenant or dealings with Adam in the Garden.

Brilliant and Bible-believing theologians do not always agree.

Why?

Because they and we are finite, fallible, and sinners.

I am not going to make this the main point of our reflection, but I do want to bring this to your attention and even encourage you to study this subject further.

The WCF in 7.2 reads:

7.2. The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.

The Hebrew word for covenant is *berith*, a word used 284x in the OT.

In the NT, the word for covenant is *diatheke*, a word found approximately 33x.

In total in the NKJV, the word covenant is found 268x, so the word covenant is not always translated as covenant.

Now is the word covenant used in Genesis 1-3 with respect to Adam?

The answer is no.

The first place where the word covenant is found is Genesis 6:18.

Gen. 6:18 But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark—you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you.

Clearly God dealt with Noah in terms of covenant.

So I don't think it is a stretch to say that God also established a covenant with Adam at the beginning.

Consider two other passages.

Jer. 33:25 “Thus says the LORD: ‘If My covenant *is* not with day and night, *and if* I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth,

Both Jeremiah 33 and 31 call attention to God's covenant or ordinances with what He has created.

This is beyond our subject for this morning, but God's covenant is the basis for all science.

The orderly operation of the world is the reason why men and women can study what God has made and seek to make sense of it.

The world is not an impersonal machine. God in His faithfulness rules over what He has made.

Now getting back to our subject, we can argue that if God established a covenant with day and night, then it makes sense to understand that God also established a covenant with Adam in the garden, even though the word covenant is not used.

A second passage to consider is Hosea 6:7.

Hos. 6:7 “But like men [Adam] they transgressed the covenant; There they dealt treacherously with Me.

The ESV, NIV, and other translations read, “But they like Adam have broken the covenant...”

Let's review again what Genesis 2 teaches us in terms of God's dealing with Adam.

Gen. 2:8 The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. **9** And out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. **The tree of life *was* also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.**

Gen. 2:16 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; **17** 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.”

The word covenant is clearly not used, but we see the essential parts of a covenant here.

There is provision for life, a clear law that is given, and a warning for the breaking of God's law.

Whatever we call this relationship, it is a type of a covenant.

Further, as we know, God established the relationship of marriage, which we call a covenantal relationship between a man and a woman.

Gen. 2:22 Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.

The chapter ends focusing on the beauty of God's creation with respect to Adam and Eve in their innocence and purity.

Gen. 2:25 And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

Compare this to the end of Genesis 1.

Gen. 1:31 Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed *it was* very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

The covenant of works or the covenant of life or the covenant of creation.

The exact term does not really matter as long as we appreciate and understand the significance that Adam was our representative in the garden and he was given a very simple command which he did not keep.

There is comfort in knowing that God will keep His covenant promises.

Your own obedience and faithfulness never can be the basis for your own assurance.

3. GOD ESTABLISHED A COVENANT OF GRACE AFTER MAN'S FALL AND REBELLION IN THE GARDEN.

Listen again to the words of the WCF 7.3.

7.3. Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein He freely offers unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life His Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe.

Do we see the language covenant of grace in Genesis 3 or anywhere else in Scripture?

We don't find these exact words, but we do see from Genesis 3 the nature of God's dealing with fallen man according to the truth summarized in the Confession.

Gen. 3:15 And I will put enmity

Between you and the woman,

And between your seed and her Seed;

He shall bruise your head,

And you shall bruise His heel.”

It is this great promise of redemption that is played out over the next 4000 years involving thousands of Bible characters.

Now the Bible doesn't read like a systematic theology or a confession of faith.

But we see the outline of the covenant of grace displayed as we look at the word of God.

Compare Genesis 6 with John 3.

Gen. 6:5 Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually. **6** And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. **7** So the LORD said, “I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.” **8** But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. **17** For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

John 3:18 “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. **19** And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

There are four major covenants in the OT after Adam that all show the covenant of grace in action we can say.

What are those covenants?

Covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David.

God's Word is also entirely clear that salvation can never be based on man's obedience or ability to earn God's favor.

Rom. 8:3 For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh,

Ezek. 36:26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

John 6:44 No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. **45** It is written in the prophets, "*And they shall all be taught by God.*" Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.

Heb. 13:20 Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, **through the blood of the everlasting covenant,**

All men enter the world guilty in terms of the first covenant made with Adam.

This means that all men and women enter the world in covenant relationship with God.

Now this is not a source of comfort. It does mean that even for the those in rebellion, God is not some distant, irrelevant figure.

The doctrine of God's covenant is only a source of comfort to those who confess who they are in Adam, who confess their own sin and rebellion against a holy and righteous God, and cry out to Him for His mercy and grace.

CONCLUSION:

The word impossible is used three times in the book of Hebrews.

The first time is a warning:

Heb. 6:4 For *it is impossible* for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, **5** and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, **6** if they fall away, to renew them again

to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put *Him* to an open shame.

The second time the word is used to encourage you.

Heb. 6:17 Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed *it* by an oath, **18** that by two immutable things, in which it *is impossible* for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before *us*.

The third time is used to speak of the role of faith.

Heb. 11:6 But without faith *it is impossible* to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Your comfort and assurance is that God will never fail to keep His covenant promises.

Prayer

Hymn: 271

Benediction – Hebrews 13:20-21

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.