



A Review & the Davidic Covenant Pt. 2... Selected

Now this morning we will be resuming our study on covenant theology...for five or six weeks. You have had a summer rendezvous with the beach, with backyard cookouts, and hopefully with some travel and relaxation.

I have had a rendezvous of a different sort.

Still, both our trips were important. Both trips de possibility of better days, brighter days, and happier more productive days. I have prayed for you as you have prayed for me...that we would survive the summer and comeback ready to press ahead in the worship and adoration of our great, covenantal King and Lord. I have also prayed that we may come back and move quickly ahead into a right understanding of the ramifications of all we have learned and discussed in our study of covenant and the covenants.

Now I thought that since so much time has passed since our last lesson it might be a good idea to review a bit about where we have been and what we have learned so far. I thought that I then might like to spend just a bit of time reviewing the Davidic Covenant...the last thing we looked at before the break.

And then I would them like to talk for a few minutes about where we will be going for the next few weeks.

So what I want to do is discuss where we have come from, where we are, and where we are going...obviously, the three most important questions anyone can ever seek to answer.

Alright...let's talk first about where we have been.

Covenant or federal theology came to be fully appreciated and more fully developed in the period of time after John Calvin. Sometimes critics like to say that covenant theology was invented in the period after Calvin but that would be a little like saying I invented peach cobbler.

I, of course, did no such thing.

I may have discovered peach cobbler early on. I may have developed a whole new appreciation and understanding of it nature and structure. I may have even advanced its status and reputation in the world...but alas I did not invent it. It was already there...long before I came along. All I have tried to do is publish its glory.

That's what happened in the time after Calvin with regard to covenant theology.

You see after Luther and Calvin and the beginning of the Reformation, Biblical scholars began to study in earnest God's great covenantal dealings with man in redemptive history. They began to contemplate, with a real measure of interest,

how God worked out the salvation of the elect in history and what they saw in Scripture was exactly the same thing Calvin had seen...that the redemption of sinners was wrapped up part and parcel...was permeated with...was based upon something called a "covenant."

That, of course, raised the question, **"What is a covenant?"**

Now what you will find when you study covenant theology for awhile is that how you define the word **"covenant"** is quite telling to how you understand covenant theology overall. In other words, it matters a great deal how you define the word "covenant" ultimately reveals how you understand covenant theology in general.

Let me illustrate what I mean with an off the wall illustration.

Let's say I wanted to define **"patriotism"** as **"a deep, emotional loyalty related to the advancement of a particular country or nation."** If I defined "patriotism" that way, could I then say Washington was **"patriotic?"** Yes, I could without any sort of equivocation or explanation. Could I also say that Hitler was **"patriotic?"** Yes, if I used **"a deep, emotional loyalty related to the advancement of a particular country or nation"** I probably could. But that creates a problem for me personally. The problem it creates is that I cannot bring myself to describe George Washington, the Father of our country (whom I know to have been a good man, an upright, god-fearing man) using the same language that I do when I talk about a megalomaniacal, psychopathic, serial killer like Adolph Hitler.

I just can't do it.

In the same way, I have to be very careful about how I define the word **“covenant.”** I have to be very careful about that because the definition I choose may make me have to alter, rearrange, or mess with my understanding of covenant theology later on.

Now that having been said, I defined **“covenant”** as **“an oath bound promise.”**

That is a little bit different than the most common definition you will run across as you read the current theological works on covenant theology. The most common definition you will run across is O. Palmer Robertson’s definition that a covenant is **“A covenant is a bond in blood that is sovereignly administered.”**¹

Robertson uses that definition very effectively and it is largely accepted by our own denomination but I don’t think it is quite broad enough. You see Robertson doesn’t seem to promote the classic covenantal idea of the Covenant of Redemption...the covenant between the members of the Trinity before the creation of the world. I am not sure why he doesn’t...it may be because our confession of faith doesn’t address it. He may simply want to limit his view to the Confession itself. Still, I think, the idea of the Covenant of redemption has been largely accepted and is a very clearly implied position of Scripture and I want you to consider it carefully...only there was no blood sprinkled or applied in the making of that particular covenant. That is true because the covenant itself was made between members of the Trinity and was made before the world began. If I used Robertson’s definition, it would introduce an element (the idea of blood) foreign to the making of that particular covenant. But because I accept the idea of the Covenant of Redemption I need a definition large enough to include it. So I used James Montgomery Boice’s definition, **“an oath bound promise”**

which means a covenant is a **“promise”** but a special kind of promise; it is one in which one or more of the parties has sworn sometimes to their own hurt to keep the promise or promises they have made.

One thing is sure. The modern Federal Vision desire to define a covenant as **“a relationship”** just won't do. It is woefully inadequate. We'll talk in due course about why they like to use it and what using it gains them.²

Now I defined the word **“covenant”** and then went on to explain that there are three major covenants described in the Bible. I am following here the historic, traditional teaching of Presbyterianism and the Reformed Church at large.

The three covenants are: the Covenant of Redemption, the Covenant of Works also called the Adamic Covenant or the Covenant of Creation and the Covenant of Grace. Now the name used for the middle covenant...works, Adam or creation...is often determined by the particular emphasis a person wants to make about that covenant. I choose the word **“works”** purposely.

Now there a few scholars that prefer to use the term, **“the eternal covenant.”** They do so because they like to stress God's omniscience and because they want to argue that God had one design all along and they want to stress the unity of that design. I think John Murray fits into that group but I ought to add that Murray is/was different than just about anyone else in that group. He wanted to maintain the concept of grace...others claiming the same position have different agendas.

Now historically the Covenant of Redemption refers to an eternal pact or

covenant between the Father and the Son before the creation of the world in which the Father and the Son covenanted together to redeem the elect from fallen mankind after the fall in the Garden of Eden. Some theologians see all three members of the Trinity as being involved in the covenant. Most however, limit the covenant to the Father and the Son.

Walter Elwell's *Dictionary of Theology* spells it out like this:

...covenant theology affirms that God the Father and God the Son covenanted together for the redemption of the human race, the Father appointing the Son to be the mediator, the Second Adam, whose life would be given for the salvation of the world, and the Son accepting the commission, promising that he would do the work which the Father had given him to do and fulfill all righteousness by obeying the law of God.³

Berkhof is much shorter when he says:

The covenant of redemption may be defined as the agreement between the Father, giving the Son as Head and Redeemer of the elect, and the Son, voluntarily taking the place of those whom the Father had given Him.⁴

Historically, the idea first appears in Reformed theology in the latter half of the 16th century. And there is a lot of controversy over who actually coined the phrase first. When it is referred to it is referred to as the *pactum salutis*...the "pact of salvation." Sometimes the Covenant of Redemption is also called the "the counsel of peace" (*consilium pacis*).

Now when we were going through the Covenant of Redemption I made the point that it is not mentioned in our Confession of Faith or the Bible but that

there are a number of passages that allude to the idea. I don't want to go back and cover any of those this morning but what we saw was that basically:

- 1) ...Jesus existed in glory with the Father before the world began.
- 2) ...the Father gave Jesus some task to accomplish and that Jesus carried out that task faithfully.
- 3) ...the task involved the acquisition of eternal life for those that the Father had chosen.
- 4) ...that Jesus having accomplished the mission He had been assigned fully expected to regain whatever glory and honor He possessed with the Father before the creation of the world.
- 5) ...that this exchange of glory was based upon some arrangement (covenant) they had before the incarnation.

The reason that the Covenant of Redemption is so important is that it sets the ground for both Jesus' active and passive obedience. In other words, it provides the basis for both our sin being imputed to Jesus and His righteousness being imputed to us. Jesus won our redemption. Obviously the Covenant of Redemption was built on a works principle. Christ obeyed and fulfilled...and received.

If you want to learn more you ought to go back in the series and read or listen to lesson 6.

Now after the Covenant of Redemption comes the Covenant of Works. It was the initial covenant after the creation of the world...that is why it is sometimes called the Covenant of Creation. It was made with Adam in the Garden which is why it is sometimes called the Adamic Covenant and it involved Adam obeying God's specific command to not eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil upon penalty of death which is why it is sometimes called the Covenant of Works.

Our Confession of Faith puts it like this;

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.⁵

Now I have to tell you there are number of people that find the description "Covenant of Works" objectionable. They don't like it for a number of reasons but the principle reason they don't like it is because of one of its implications...and that implication is something called original sin. But I want to argue that it is a good tag and the reason it is a good tag is because it reflects exactly what the text in Genesis 2 and 3 says. Look at it with me.

^{ESV} **Genesis 2:15**...The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, 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."

Now you can see just as clearly as I can that the command is given to Adam. It is not given to Adam and Eve but to Adam alone. You can tell it is not given to Eve because at the point in the narrative this verse occurs, Eve had not yet been created. She doesn't actually come up until verse 18.

^{ESV} **Genesis 2:18**...Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."

You see God established a covenant with Adam in which he made him lord of the Garden of Eden. You can tell that in the text from the fact that Adam names all the animals and had dominion over them. In the covenant, God gave Adam a

task...to work and keep the garden. I ought to note here that work itself is not a part of the curse that would come later. Work in and of itself is a good thing and a good gift from God. It only became burdensome after the fall when God in judgment against Adam and Eve's sin makes it so.

Anyway, in the covenant with Adam God promised Adam life and free run of the garden with one exception and that exception involved the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. So what we see is that God established a covenant with Adam and gave him a single stipulation to obey. God also threatened with that stipulation that in the day that Adam broke the covenant he would surely die. An obvious implication of the arrangement is that if Adam had obeyed the covenant and not broken it he would have surely lived.

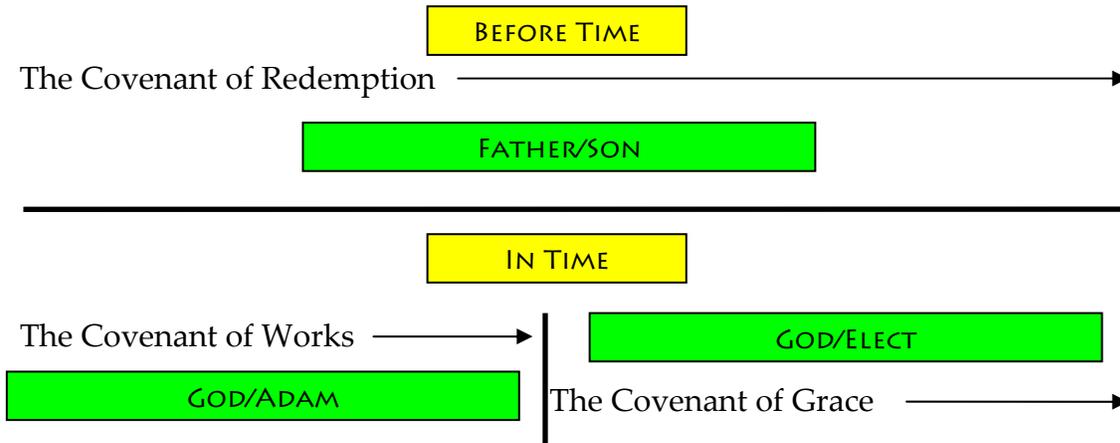
But, of course Adam did break it and death and sin entered the world because of the fact. And because of that God introduced a different covenant...a covenant called the Covenant of Grace. Our confession describes it this way:

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.⁶

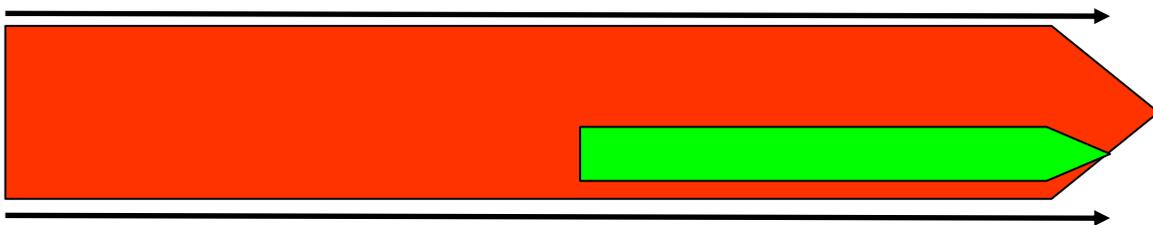
Now it is a covenant of grace from the perspective of sinners because they do not have to do anything to obtain God's mercy. They don't have to perform at all. But, of course, it is a covenant built on the works principle from the perspective of God because Jesus Christ had to accomplish a great deal for the covenant to become the vehicle God could use to redeem His people.

We have spent most of time in our study so far talking about the Covenant of Grace. We've done so because it is the covenant which most addresses the problem of our sin and salvation.

Now if you look at those three covenants in time they look like this:



If you look at them from 30,000 feet, however, (from the perspective of God) they look more like this:



Now what I argued in our lessons after that is that the one true covenant of grace is made up of several administrations or outworkings. I have purposely avoided saying that it is made up of a number of different covenants or sub-covenants

because saying that implies that they are distinct and altogether different in kind and I do not think they are. Saying it that way, would seem to me, to make matters even more confusing. The various covenants that together make up the one covenant of grace may differ in degree but not in kind. They are each one linked at the hip. They are not like a long line of distinct dominos that knock down the next domino in the row when the first one is pushed over. They are more like steps on a pathway inextricably connected together leading to God's redemption of the elect in Christ. The confession says it in Elizabethan English. Still it's pretty clear. It says it like this:

This covenant was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the Gospel: under the law it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foreshadowing Christ to come; which were, for that time, sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation; and is called the Old Testament.⁷

The Larger Catechism says it like this:

The covenant of grace was not always administered after the same manner, but the administrations of it under the Old Testament were different from those under the New.⁸

Calvin says it like this:

The covenant made with all the patriarchs is so much like ours in substance and reality that the two are actually one and the same. Yet they differ in the mode of dispensation. But because no one can gain a clear understanding from such a short statement, a fuller explanation is required if we wish to make any progress.⁹

Now here's what Calvin means by that and here's what I mean when I say that the Covenant of Grace is made of differing dispensations or administrations.

The Covenant of Grace began immediately after the Fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden with something called the *proto-evangel*...the proto-gospel. That is found in Genesis 3:15. God could have judged Adam and Eve instantly by putting them to death but He didn't. Instead He promised even in judgment to provide a future deliverer who would crush the head of the serpent. While the word covenant is not used, the idea of unconditional promise is set forth quite clearly and it is easy to see how that promise leads inextricably to the covenant of grace.

After the Fall, in the days of Noah, God broke into history again in a very gracious way by promising to deliver Noah from an impending worldwide flood.

James Montgomery Boice writes this:

Notice that Noah did not earn grace. Noah found grace. He was willing to accept God's judgment on his sinful and rebellious nature and place his hope in the Savior. It is the same today. We have no claim on God. We have not earned anything but His just wrath and our eventual destruction. But we can find God's grace in Christ.¹⁰

Now the reason that Noah finding grace in the eyes of the Lord is important is because God had determined to wipe out all flesh upon the earth. You can see that starting Genesis 6:11.

^{ESV} **Genesis 6:11**...Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. ¹² And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. ¹³ And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth. ¹⁴ Make yourself an ark of gopher wood. Make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch.

And so Noah was delivered and his descendants filled the earth not willingly but as a result of judgment. That is God scattered them at Babel. But even as He did that, God determined to bless a particular branch of Noah's family...the line of Shem.

In the Bible, Moses traces Shem's line down to Abraham and then Genesis 12 God calls Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldeans and out of idolatry and Abraham responds in faith. And the story of Abraham involved a different covenantal arrangement or dispensation under the Covenant of Grace.

We spent a lot of time on Abraham and I did do because I wanted to establish in your minds the graciousness of the Abrahamic Covenant. In fact, the Abrahamic Covenant carries directly on into the New Testament and is pretty much referred to there as the same thing as the New Covenant. That's not my interpretation but the interpretation of Mary and Zechariah and Paul. They all wind up saying either directly or indirectly, **"This New Covenant is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant."** Now I made that point time and time again to demonstrate the Unity of the Covenant of Grace and to show that the various dispensations of the covenant in the Old Testament had a measure of continuity to them...so much so that sometimes people said, **"This equals that."**

If you want to review that point you can go back and look at lesson four.

After the Abrahamic Covenant came the Mosaic Covenant. It is called the Mosaic Covenant because it was mediated through the person Moses. Still, the early part of Exodus makes the point quite clearly that the Mosaic Covenant is closely linked to the Abrahamic Covenant. Over and over again in His dealings with the Israelites God delivers them or withholds His divine judgment against them on the basis of the promise He had previously made in the Abrahamic Covenant.

^{ESV} **Exodus 6:2**...God spoke to Moses and said to him, "I am the LORD. ³ I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them. ⁴ I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners. ⁵ Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant.

So there is a real connection between the Mosaic Covenant and the Abrahamic Covenant. I tried to stress that as much as I could. But there is also a bit of a difference or disconnect between the two covenants. That difference is based on the fact that the two covenants are different types of covenants. The Abrahamic Covenant is something called a "royal grant" promise and is unconditional. We saw that when God made the Abrahamic Covenant He came down and walked between the divided pieces of an animal carcass in a self-maledictory oath that He would bring His promise to pass. Abraham did not pass through the pieces. Abraham made no vow. He was commanded to "walk before God" but He was required to make no promise.

It was not quite the same with the Israelites under Moses. They were required to make a covenant at Sinai to obey God's laws. They were even sprinkled with

blood as part of a solemn oath and ceremony and the reason they were is because the Mosaic Covenant had as its basis...a work principle. That works principle was not the basis for the salvation of any Israelite...the basis of their salvation was grace alone through Christ alone as was promised in the gracious offering of the Abrahamic Covenant. The Mosaic Covenant concerned the setting up of a theocracy in the nation. In other words, it turned the Israelites from a family into a nation with God as their King and the Mosaic Covenant laid out God's stipulations for living in the land. It promised them...if you do this...you will get this. If you obey you will prosper. It did not require perfection per se...but did require covenant fidelity. In other words, there was a provision for dealing with sin and failure but as time passed the Israelites began to think they were keeping the Mosaic Law and that their keeping the law guaranteed their position before God. Of course, they did not keep the law and were not covenantally faithful. The law should have served in that respect to drive them to Christ...to point out their inability and to drive to look forward to God's gracious provision in Christ. Now I made the point in our study that whenever the New Testament talks about the Old Covenant it has in mind not the Abrahamic Covenant or the Davidic Covenant or even the Noahic Covenant...it has in mind the Mosaic Covenant and it does so because by the time of the New Testament the Jews had begun to see it as the means of their salvation and not simply God's rule for making them a kingdom of priests.

Now here's my point. The New Testament sometimes says the New Covenant is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant or of the Davidic Covenant but it never makes the same kind of assertion regarding the Mosaic Covenant. Jesus does obey it of course...and as a result fulfills it and provides for us the basis for God declaring us to be a nation or kingdom of priests.

After the Mosaic Covenant, we talked about the Davidic Covenant and How God unconditionally promised David to give his heir an everlasting throne...to make Him the eternal king. Initially and superficially that promise was linked to Solomon. Ultimately, however, it was fulfilled in Jesus.

Last week I made the point that the genealogy found in Matthew is given to prove that Jesus was the rightful heir to the throne. I also made the point that Luke contains a different genealogy and that it is in all probability the genealogy of Jesus through Mary.

The reason for that may be related to the curse upon Jehoiakim.

^{ESV} **Jeremiah 36:29**...And concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah you shall say, 'Thus says the LORD, You have burned this scroll, saying, "Why have you written in it that the king of Babylon will certainly come and destroy this land, and will cut off from it man and beast?"' ³⁰ Therefore thus says the LORD concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah: He shall have none to sit on the throne of David, and his dead body shall be cast out to the heat by day and the frost by night.

Now here's the problem. Joseph, the father of Jesus, was one of Jehoiakim's descendants. Joseph's offspring could not claim David's throne because of the curse against Jehoiakim. If Jesus had been born of Joseph, the curse would have been contradicted.

Of course, you know that God had promised David that one of his physical descendants would reign on the throne of his kingdom forever (2 Samuel 7:12-13). As explained above, Joseph was excluded from being the genetic father of the future king of Israel. It was impossible to fulfill the requirements of both

curse and promise by natural means. One man had to be both heir to and offspring of David, without being the genetic descendant of Jehoiakim. This problem required a divine solution.

Jesus was heir to the throne through Joseph but not related to Jehoiakim. Mary was a direct descendant of David not through Solomon but through Nathan Solomon's brother. So through Mary Jesus bypassed the curse. He was heir to the throne through Joseph but actually related to David through Mary. It's a remarkable coincidence.

Now that's where we have been. Starting next week we will dive into the New Covenant for a couple of lessons and try to connect some of the dots to the previous administrations of the Covenant of Grace.

After that we'll get very practical. I will then take a couple of lessons to try to demonstrate that the various administrations of the covenant had attached covenant signs and what it means for something to be a sign or a seal.

After that I want to try to demonstrate what baptism means, where we find the warrant for baptizing infants and where Baptists disagree with our view. I want to try to explain the nature of John's baptism and try to answer the question as to whether or not it was Christian baptism.

I also want to show the breadth of baptismal positions in Presbyterianism from Southern Presbyterian wet dedications to FV baptismal regeneration. To show how historic Presbyterian covenant baptism lines up midway between the two poles.

I then want to try to demonstrate the importance of the Lord's Supper as a meal of covenant renewal and to explain why some Presbyterians hold to the idea of paedocommunion.

Finally, I want to demonstrate the importance of Covenant Progression as a means of building Christ's Kingdom alongside good old-fashioned evangelism. That is a lot to do but we have time...if the Lord wills...and will get there in due course.

Alright, let's pray.

¹ O. Palmer Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishers, 1980), 4.

² Guy Prentiss Waters, *The Federal Vision and Covenant Theology*, (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishers, 2006), 10ff.

³ M.E. Osterhaven's article on "Covenant Theology" in Walter Elwell's, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 279-80.

⁴ Lewis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1993), 271.

⁵ WCF, 7.2

⁶ WCF, 7.3.

⁷ WCF, VII.5.

⁸ WLC, Question 33.

⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Volume 2, 10.2. This is from the Battles translation.

¹⁰ James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis Volume 1: Genesis 1:1-11:32* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Corporation, 1982), 254