

Second Presbyterian Church
Richard D. Phillips, Senior Minister

New Members' Class

Lesson #4: Covenant Theology

What Is Covenant Theology?

- An understanding of the Bible in terms of God's covenants with man.
- The Bible's own system of organization, structuring both unity and diversity in Scripture.
- Usually contrasted with Dispensational Theology.
 - Differ especially in terms of the relevance of the OT to Christians, and the relationship of OT Israel to NT Church.
- Relates God's promises and commands to us in terms of the covenants.
- The Bible's way of sealing our assurance of salvation blessing (Heb. 6:17-20).

What Is a Covenant?

- “A covenant is a *bond in blood sovereignly administered*” – O. Palmer Robertson
- Covenant as a *Bond*:
 - Parity covenants (mutual compacts) in the Bible: Genesis 21:27, “So Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two men made a covenant.”
 - God’s covenants with man are *not* mutual compacts.
 - Legal, relational, or both? The example of marriage.
 - Covenant as *pact* or *oath-bond*.
 - James Boice: covenant as “a solemn promise confirmed by an oath or sign.”

What Is a Covenant?

- Covenant as a bond *in blood*:
 - Issues of life and death (Gen. 2:16-17; Gen. 15:17).
 - Promises of blessing; obligations of obedience.
 - *Cutting* a covenant.
 - Eternal life the ultimate covenant blessing.
 - Death the penalty for breaking God's covenant: Heb. 9:22: "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins." Mt. 14:24: "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many."
- Covenant as *sovereignly administered*:
 - *Not* negotiated contracts: imposed by the sovereign King.
 - Many covenants are bi-lateral in their functioning, but they are all unilateral in initiative.
 - Covenant-making as a function of Lordship.

What Difference Do Covenants Make?

- To be in covenant with God is *to benefit from the covenant (or federal) representation and headship of another.*
 - Through covenant theology, the Bible teaches not merely what is our obligation to God, but more centrally what God has done for our salvation, and how sinners are reconciled by God to Himself.
- To be in saving covenant with God is *to be the recipient of God's oath-bound promises.*
 - God has not only given his promises, but he has sovereignly bound himself with a covenant oath. Hebrews 6:17-19 tells us that God bound himself not to ensure his own faithfulness – which is hardly needed – but so that “we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul.”
- To be in covenant with God is *to have received obligations from God as His people.*
 - “He has now reconciled [you] in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel” (Col. 1:22-23).
- To be in saving covenant with God is *to enter an eternal relationship of love with God in Christ.*
 - “Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go” (Gen. 28:15).
 - “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:25-27).
 - “As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you” (Isa. 62:5).

The Covenants of the Bible

Covenant	Blessing	Condition	Sanction	Sign
Adamic*	Eternal Life	Obedience	Death	Tree of Life
Noahic	Preservation	N/A	Death to God	Rainbow
Abrahamic**	Land/Seed	Faith	Death	Circumcision
Mosaic	Nation	Obedience	Exile/Death	Sabbath
Davidic	Eternal Kingdom	N/A	N/A	Throne
Christ***	Eternal Life	Faith	Death	Baptism

*Covenant of Works ** Covenant of Grace Inaugurated ***Covenant of Grace Fulfilled

The Covenant of Grace

- *God's Way of Reconciling Sinners to Himself*
- *As Promised to Satan:*

"I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15).
- *As Symbolized to Adam and Eve:*

"And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them." (Gen. 3:21).
- *As Inaugurated in God's Covenant with Abraham:*

"I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing... and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:2-3).
- *As Fulfilled by the Lord Jesus Christ:*

"This cup that is for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Lk. 22:20).

The Covenant of Grace Administered

- *God's Covenant with Abraham*

- *Covenant of Grace Inaugurated*

- "Now the Lord said to Abram, 'God from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed'" (Gen. 12:1-3).

- *The Mosaic Covenant*

- *Nation Covenant for the preservation of Israel and the Holy Seed*

- "Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary" (Gal. 3:19)

- *Israelite nation established on works principle; salvation offered on grace principle*

- "For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith" (Rom. 4:13).

- "Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 5:20-21)."

- *The Davidic Covenant*

- *Promise of Messianic King*

- "When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever" (2 Sam. 7:12-13)."

The New Covenant

Jeremiah 31:31-33; Hebrews 8:8-12

- *Reason for New Covenant: Failure of Old Covenant*

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah..." (Jer. 31:31).

"For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord" (Heb. 8:9).

- *Promise #1: Forgiveness*

"For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jer. 31:34).

- OT sacrifices not able to atone for sin (Heb. 10:1-4); Christ's blood sufficient (Mt. 26:28).

- *Promise #2: Inward Transformation*

"I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts" (Jer. 31:33).

- What the law could not do, the Holy Spirit does (Rom. 8:2-4; Eze. 36:25-27).

- *Promise #3: Knowledge of God*

"No longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord" (Jer. 31:34).

- What was formerly true of the prophets (Num. 11:29; Acts 2:16-18), priests (Heb. 10:19-22), and kings (Rom. 8:14, 17) is now true of all Christians.

- God's eternal covenant aim is accomplished: "I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer. 31:33).

Covenant Baptism

Why we baptize covenant children (not just infants):

- Continuity between circumcision and baptism (Col. 2:11-12).
- OT-NT continuity
 - "I will be your God and the God of your children after you" (Gen. 17:7; Ex. 19:5, 6; Dt. 7:6, 14:2; Jer. 31:33).*
 - "For the promise is for you and for your children" (Acts 2:39).*
 - "Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money shall surely be circumcised" (Gen. 17:12-13).*
- Principle of Covenant Representation
- Jesus' command to bring little children
 - "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there" (Mt. 19:14).*
- Children of believers accountable as covenant members (Eph. 6:1, Col. 3:20-21).
- Children of believers are *holy* (1 Cor. 7:14).
- Household baptisms in the NT (Acts 16:15, 33-34; 1 Cor. 1:16)

The Church as Covenant Community

- The covenant community should contrast starkly with the surrounding world.
- The covenant community is a community of the Spirit.
- The church is a community of wondrous diversity.
- The covenant community is built by the Word and prayer.
- The covenant community is led by Spirit-empowered men.
- The covenant community is composed of fully responsible members.
 - Caring for one another sacrificially
 - Encouraging one another spiritually
 - Carrying the gospel message to the world
 - Eagerly and generously supporting the work