

I. INTRODUCTION

A. With the covenant we begin Soteriology, the doctrine of salvation

1. **The main sections of Soteriology are: covenant, regeneration, calling, saving faith, justification and sanctification**
 - a. The doctrine of salvation is the study of the *application* of the benefits or blessings of salvation. In Christology, we learn how Christ purchased them; in Soteriology we learn how He makes us partakers of them by the HS.
 - b. This application of salvation, like the purchase of salvation, is the work of God alone. God does not make salvation merely possible. He saves. We do not apply salvation to ourselves. God does it.
 - c. But in salvation God, as the God of order, adopts a certain order. He applies the benefits of salvation in logical sequence, beginning with regeneration, ending with glorification (Rom. 8:30).
2. **We begin Soteriology with the covenant. The doctrine of the covenant is the starting point of Soteriology as well as the goal of Christology.**
 - a. There is some debate: should the covenant be treated in Christology or in Soteriology?
 - b. The covenant really could be treated in all parts of Reformed Doctrine: 1) God is the covenant God, within Himself living in perfect fellowship as Father, Son and HS; 2) God created man in a covenant relationship as God's son and in God's image, but man violated that covenant and is estranged from God; 3) Christ unites in one Person the divine and human natures, and His work is to restore God's people to friendship as the Mediator, etc.

B. We begin Soteriology with the covenant because salvation is covenant life with God in Christ, and the work of Christ brings us into that covenant fellowship with God by removing the barrier of our sin.

1. **Negatively, salvation is deliverance *from* the guilt, power, pollution, misery and presence of sin.**
 - a. Those who are saved are not poor unfortunate victims, but guilty, damnable sinners. They are sinners who have declared themselves by their actions and their very nature to be God's enemies, although God Himself loves them with an everlasting love (Rom. 8:7).
 - b. It is because God loves them that He purposed in eternity to save them, elected them, sent Christ to redeem them, and now in salvation applies to them all the blessings which Christ purchased for them.
2. **But, salvation is *so much more* than a mere deliverance from sin and death, as wonderful as that is.**
 - a. There is more to salvation than not going to hell, than escaping punishment, than being delivered from spiritual slavery, etc. We are saved *from* something bad and saved *unto* something good.
 - b. It is one thing to say, "God does not treat me as a guilty sinner." But it is more to say, "God adopts me as His son or His daughter, God lavishes on me His love, God makes me live with Him."
 - c. Illustrate: A peasant commits a crime against the king, and is about to be hanged. The king pardons the peasant. The peasant, overwhelmed by the king's mercy, prepares to go home to his hovel. But the king stops him: "No, you don't go home! I have made arrangements to have you adopted into my family. You will be heir of all my goods. You will sit at my table. I will love you freely. You will live with me." *God has greater benefits in mind when He saves His people than mere escape from hell. He gives us Himself.*

II. THE ESSENCE OF THE COVENANT: FRIENDSHIP OR FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

A. The Bible describes salvation in terms of friendship, fellowship and communion with God: "covenant."

1. **Many teach that the covenant is an agreement, a contract or a bargain between God and certain human beings.**
 - a. Thus a covenant has three main components: a *promise* of some great good, a *condition* which man must fulfill to receive what is promised, and a threat of punishment if the condition is not fulfilled. And this reflects human contracts: "I will give you this if ... but if not ... penalties!"
 - b. The "covenant as contract" theologians generally see a "covenant of works" with Adam: God promises to give to Adam and all Adam's posterity eternal life on condition of perfect obedience and threatens death upon disobedience. The Bible does not teach the "covenant of works."
2. **But, the word covenant does not mean agreement; God does not enter into cond. agreements with us.**

- a. God's covenant with us is a *reflection* of God's own covenant life within Himself. How does the Bible describe life within God? Not as three partners in a business agreement, but as three persons, Father, Son and HS, dwelling in intimate fellowship, communion, friendship, love.
- b. Besides, God does not make agreements with His creatures. God and man can never be parties in an agreement. One is the sovereign Creator, the other is a dependent (and sinful) creature.
- c. Rather, God created men in covenant relationship with Himself, man fell from that blessedness, and Jesus Christ restores that fellowship and develops it and perfects it so that what we receive in Christ far surpasses what we lost in Adam.

B. Instead of an agreement or bargain the covenant is a *bond of friendship* which God establishes, preserves and perfects in Jesus Christ.

- 1. Basically, the covenant is seen in the covenant formula, "I will be your God and ye will be my people."**
 - a. This covenant formula is a declaration of friendship. It is *friendship*. Friendship has three elements: deep affection or love, intimate knowledge and a sharing of life. Business partnerships are not friendships.
 - b. But it is a declaration of friendship. God does not say, "Would you like to be my friend? You can be if you do this and that." God says, "I shall be your God ..." or "I shall be your friend."
 - c. By virtue of that declaration of friendship, God draws near to us, and draws us into His own life, causes us to taste His goodness, reveals Himself to us, and makes us His own.
- 2. Because the covenant is *God's* covenant it is unilateral, unconditional and everlasting.**
 - a. *Unilateral* means one-sided: this means that the covenant was *God's idea*. It was not something which Adam and God, Noah and God, Moses and God or David and God decided together. No man had any input into what the covenant is. God conceived of and planned the covenant in eternity within Himself as the Triune God. That is why God always says, "This is my covenant ..." "I will establish my covenant."
 - b. *Unconditional* means that the covenant does not depend on man. God never says to us, "I will be your God, if you do this." God says, "I will establish my covenant." That means I will cause it to stand. If the covenant depended on us, on our faith, on our works, on our faithfulness, it would fail; it would not stand.
 - c. *Everlasting* means that the covenant remains forever. God never cancels His covenant, even when we are unfaithful to Him. God never breaks His promise. God never casts off or "un-friends" His people, and His covenant is perfected in the New Heavens & New Earth (Gen. 17: 7; Ps. 89:34; Rev. 21:3).
- 3. Proof that the covenant is friendship, not an agreement, is abundant in Scripture.**
 - a. First, we see it in the covenant formula itself, "I will be your God ..." This means I will be everything a God is to His people and do everything a God does for His people: salvation, protection, blessings, etc. This promise is given, as we have seen, unilaterally and unconditionally. Remember what a promise is: a declaration of some future good (Heb. 6:13-18).
 - b. Second, we see it in all the ways in which the relationship between God and His people is described: God is our Friend and we are His friend-servants (James 2:23); God is our Father and we are His children (II Cor. 6:18); God is our Husband and we are His bride (Jer. 3:14); God is our God and we are His people, His beloved sheep, His precious people (Deut. 7:7). *This is not the terminology of a mutually agreed business contract.*
 - c. Third, we see it in the fact that God *dwells* with His people. Business partners do not dwell together in love, but husbands and wives, fathers and children, and friends do. Adam & Eve dwelled with God in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:8); God's people walked with God (Gen. 5:24, 6:9); God dwelled in the midst of His people in the Tabernacle and then the Temple (Lev. 26:11); the land of Canaan was the land in which God dwelled with His people; in the NT the dwelling of God with His people is even closer: the thick curtain of the Temple is torn because Christ opens the way into the very presence of God. Jesus comes as our Immanuel ("God with us"); Jesus unites God and man in one Person; God dwells in our hearts by the Spirit; and dwells in the midst of His church, and finally God dwells with us in heaven (Rev. 21:1).
- 4. The covenant is in and through Jesus Christ.**
 - a. Christ is the *Head* of the covenant, the legal representative of all His people, and the source of all of our life. United to Him, we receive all the blessings of covenantal life. Separated from Him we have nothing.
 - b. Christ is the Mediator of the covenant. He came to restore fallen, estranged, alienated sinners to the God whom they had offended by their sins. *Next time we will look at who is included in this covenant.*