

I. WITH WHOM IS THE COVENANT MADE?

A. The covenant is made with Christ as the Head of the covenant and with all those who are “in Christ.”

1. Remember, that Christ makes the covenant with Christ as the Head which means two things

- a. First, Christ is the legal or representative Head. Christ is a “public person,” representing all the elect. He takes upon Himself our sins, and He earns for us all the blessings of salvation.
- b. Second, as Head, Christ is the source of life for all of His members. The eternal life, earned on the cross and acquired by the resurrection, flows to us from the Head to the whole body and each member.
- c. Christ is the Elect of God, the Servant of God, the object of God’s delight, the one in whom all fullness dwells. God establishes His covenant centrally with Christ (Ps. 89:3; Isa. 42:1; Gal. 3:16, 29).

2. Because Christ is the Friend of God, and all the elect are “in Christ,” God is the Friend of all the elect.

- a. The friends of God, then, the members of the covenant, are believers, those chosen in Christ, redeemed by Christ, called by Christ and united to Christ by a true faith.
- b. By nature we are not such friends of God, but His enemies, but He reconciles us to Himself, and makes us His friends by creating enmity between us and the devil (Gen. 3:15). Thus Rom. 8:7 becomes James 4:4!
- c. The reprobate ungodly remain God’s enemies. God sets face against them; His wrath remains on them; they never taste of His friendship, His blessing, His salvation. They only know His just curse.

3. Third, it is an important aspect of God’s covenant that it always includes *the children of believers*.

- a. In every revelation of the covenant, God says, “I will be your God and the God of your seed” and God always mentions “generations.” Generations means children and grandchildren.
- b. God could have decreed to save His people differently but He is pleased to gather His people in the line of continued generations. Ordinarily, where father & mother believe and are the friends of God, the children also believe and are the friends of God *as children*.
- c. This is true in every age: Gen. 6:18, 17:7; Acts 2:39. Israel circumcised their children; we baptize ours.

B. Therefore, election governs the covenant. Election determines the membership of the covenant.

1. Only the elect are “in the covenant;” only the elect “belong to” or “are members of” the covenant.

- a. This is true because Christ is the Head of the covenant and Christ is Head only of the elect. He represents only the elect. He died for only the elect. He is the source of life for only the elect.
- b. That election governs the covenant means that even *in the visible church* only the elect are members of the covenant. This is true of both Old Testament Israel and the New Testament Church.
- c. This means that God declares Himself to be the God of Israel as a body, and the God of the church as a body, but not of every member of physical, national Israel, and not of every member of the visible church.

2. Others live in close proximity to the covenant community (as members of national Israel or members of the visible church) but are not saved. These are not “in the covenant” or “members of the covenant.”

- a. Rom 9:6 makes this distinction – some are “Israel” and others are merely “of Israel.” Some are “children of the flesh,” others are “children of the promise.” Only the children of the promise are the children of God and counted for the seed. Some Israelites are “Jews outwardly,” but not inwardly (Rom. 2:28-29).
- b. The theological distinction we make is: “in the covenant” vs. “in the sphere of the covenant.” Of David’s children, Absalom was in the sphere of the covenant. He belonged to that nation known as God’s people; he enjoyed many of the outward benefits; he was circumcised, but he was not “in the covenant.” He was reprobate and revealed that by his ungodliness. Solomon was “in the covenant.”
- c. The Bible addresses Israel & the church “organically,” as one living organism. Sometimes, God addresses them from the perspective of the reprobate shell or husk (the chaff); sometimes, God addresses them from the perspective of the elect kernel or remnant (the wheat). *But God always addresses the whole church.*

3. This means that God does not promise to all physical descendants of Abraham, to all Jews or to all the children of believing parents that He will be their God and their Friend in Jesus Christ.

- a. Many have taught that all the physical children of believers are in the covenant conditionally. So, for example, God promised to be Absalom’s God and Friend *if* Absalom believed, repented and remained faithful, and threatened him if he did not. Some have even said that God does more than promise: He

actually befriends all the children of believers, but some do not fulfill the conditions of friendship and thus lose the friendship which they once had.

- b. But, the Bible is clear that not all the children of believers are in the covenant. Some are not, and never were, friends of God. They are, and always remain, God's enemies. God never gives such children any blessings, but He curses & hardens them even through circumcision, baptism & other external privileges.
- c. This does not invalidate God's covenant promise. Godly parents view their children from the perspective of the promise. And they must treat them as children of God: they teach them, they admonish them, they correct them, they discipline them as children of God. If their children manifest themselves to be wicked and unbelieving they bring them to the elders to be excommunicated. Election and reprobation cut through even the lines of generations to the grief of parents and the church. *But God's promise never fails.*

II. HOW DOES THE COVENANT DEVELOP?

A. There is one covenant which God reveals over time; with each new revelation of the one covenant God adds a new element to the one covenant.

1. This "covenant" theology is the opposite of "Dispensationalism."

- a. Dispensationalism divides the history into seven distinct periods called "dispensations." In each dispensation God deals with man in a new way, man having failed the test of the previous dispensation.
 - b. Some Dispensationalists even teach seven different ways of salvation by these dispensations, so that in the Old Testament salvation was by the works of the Law, but now we are in the disp. of grace.
 - c. The seven dispensations are 1) innocence [Adam], 2) conscience [to Noah], 3) human government [post-Noah], 4) promise [Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etc], 5) law [Moses, Israel], 6) grace [Christian], 7) Millennium [future]. *One of the great characteristics of Disp. is the idea of two distinct peoples of God.*
- #### 2. We reject Dispensationalism. We see one covenant unfolded and developed over time and history.
- a. It was always God's purpose to reveal His own covenant life to His elect people, to take them into that life and to make them share in it through Jesus Christ. Paradise in Eden was never God's original purpose.
 - b. In the Reformed Faith, therefore, there is never a plan B with God, always the same Plan A. Man's sin never makes God tear up His previous covenant and start anew.
 - c. With each new revelation of the one covenant God adds something new, always with Christ in mind. This is why we read of God "establishing" His covenant, or "remembering" His covenant (Ex. 2:24).

B. Briefly, how did the covenant develop? How did God reveal His own central promise of Christ over time?

- 1. **The covenant with Adam ["of creation"]:** Many theologians wrongly call this covenant a "covenant of works." But Adam could not merit a higher, spiritual eternal life with God. He was earthly (I Cor. 15:47). Adam was made in the image of God, able to fellowship with God as God's friend & son (Gen. 3:8, 15).
- 2. **The covenant with Noah ["cosmic"]:** in Gen. 6:18 the word "covenant" appears for the first time. Notice the inclusion of children. Notice that it is not a new covenant ["establish"]. The new aspect here is that the covenant includes the creation (Gen. 9:8-17). And the sign of that covenant is the rainbow.
- 3. **The covenant with Abraham:** in Gen. 17:7, etc., God speaks of "establish," of "my covenant," of an "everlasting" covenant, of the inclusion of children. God adds the promise of the land of Canaan as a place where God's people will dwell with Him (a picture of heaven, Heb. 11: 14-16), and the sign of circumcision.
- 4. **The covenant with Israel:** This covenant was made at Mt. Sinai. To the promise given to Abraham God adds the Law. But the Law does not cancel the promise. Gal. 3:17, 19. The Law was added because of the immaturity of the people. They needed to be hemmed in with strict rules (Gal. 4:1, etc).
- 5. **The covenant with David:** in II Samuel 7:8-16 God establishes the covenant with David and his line. The covenant will have a king. And that king will be Christ (Luke 1:32-33).
- 6. **The "New Covenant":** This covenant is promised in Jeremiah 31:31-34. Notice that Jeremiah speaks of "the house of Israel" but Hebrews 8 applies this to the NT Church. The "new" covenant is confirmed in Christ's blood (Matt. 26:28). The "new" covenant is not new in the sense of "brand new" but a renewal, a fulfillment with better promises, better [spiritual] blessings, richer fellowship with God ("they shall all know me").
- 7. **The covenant in heaven:** When salvation is completed, God does not cast away His covenant. It is not a means to an end. It is the end, the goal. Thus, heaven is dwelling with God forever (John 17:24; Rev. 21:3).

C. Next time: we begin the *Ordo Salutis*: regeneration, calling, saving faith, justification, sanctification.