

## Foundations of Christian Theology

### Lesson 10

#### Man in Covenant with God

##### 1. Understanding our Covenant Relationship with God

In our first week on anthropology, we looked at man created in a state of innocence, endowed with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, after God's image. In week two we looked at man as fallen and in a state of sin, having everything about his holy character corrupted by that sin.

But in either state, whether man is an innocent being, undefiled by sin, or whether he is guilty and corrupted before God, man, as a creature, is not automatically entitled to a heavenly communion of blissful existence with his Creator. For, in no matter which state man is, He is still on this side of the Creator/creature divide, and God is on the other side. It is not inherently within man to exist in a communion with the Divine.

The only avenue that can cross that divide is a Divinely initiated covenant, which acts as a bridge between the Creator and the creature. And so, our goal this evening is:

**Goal:** To explore the beauty and depth of a relationship of covenant life with God. And to understand the necessity of the covenant of works before the fall and the covenant of grace after the fall for man to enjoy that relationship.

Pivotal to understanding this is to understand what it means to be in covenant with God.

##### God is high above all else

Now we already think in terms of the necessity of the covenant for sinful man to be in a relationship of life with God. Sin has created a divide which man cannot bridge. It is only through God's covenant of grace in Christ that heavenly communion with our Creator is reestablished. But before man ever fell and became sinful, a covenant between God and man was just as vital for that communion to be established in the first place. The Creator/creature divide prohibits a natural communion between an infinite God and a finite creature. Scripture reflects upon this truth that God is high above us.

We looked at Psalm 8 a few weeks ago.

*Ps 8 When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,  
4 what is man that you are mindful of him,  
and the son of man that you care for him?*

Paul focuses on this same exalted glory at the end of Romans chapter 11.

*Rom 11:33-36 Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!*

*34 “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?”*

*35 “Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?”*

*36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.*

This exalted divide between God and man is also seen in God’s response to Job in chapter 38:

*Job 38:1-11 Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said:*

*2 “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? 3 Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me.*

*4 “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. 5 Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? 6 On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, 7 when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?*

*8 “Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb, 9 when I made clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling band, 10 and prescribed limits for it and set bars and doors, 11 and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed’?”*

Many other passages of scripture display this great divide between the infinite God and finite creatures. But the opening of Psalm 113 is one of the most poignant.

*Ps 113:4-6 The Lord is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens! 5 Who is like the Lord our God, who is seated on high, 6 who looks far down on the heavens and the earth?*

The psalmist recognizes the exalted glory of God which separates Him from all else. God is high above and looks far down on both the heavens and the earth.

### **But God condescends**

But instead of Verse 6 saying God *looks far down on the heavens and the earth*, the King James version says God:

***humbles Himself** to look down on the heavens and the earth.*

We have a God who is not only exalted high above all that He creates, but we have a God who condescends to become intimately involved with His creatures. To share the life that is in Him with His creatures

### **God enters into a covenant with Adam in the garden.**

This is what we see in the second chapter of Genesis, as God enters into a covenant with Adam in the garden.

*Gen 2:7-9 15-17 then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. 8 And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. 9 And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil...*

*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."*

In our previous lesson we looked at how God warns Adam of the death that results from disobedience. But the flip side of that coin is the life that results from obedience. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil threatened death. But the other tree of the garden was the promise of life. And just as we saw in the last lesson that the death threatened was not merely physical life leaving the body, so the life that was promised was not merely physical life remaining in the body. It was the promise of a higher life and communion with God.

This is why the Larger Catechism in answer 20 refers to this initial covenant with Adam as the covenant of life.

It was God's good providence toward Adam that afforded man communion with his Creator. And the formalizing of that communion is the covenant of life God made with Adam. That covenant lifted Adam into a blessed relationship with his Creator and set before him the promise of eternal life pledged to Adam in tree of the covenant. Apart from God's good providence in entering this covenant of life, this communion and life could not naturally belong to Adam.

We see this articulated in chapter seven of the confession. And Like we have done the past two lessons I want this chapter of the covenant to guide our study this evening.

Paragraph one reads:

**WCF CHAPTER 7**

**Of God's Covenant with Man**

*1. The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.*

There is a lot crammed even in this first paragraph. But we notice that this chapter begins by recognizing this great divide that exists between God and not simply fallen man, but even unfallen man. *The distance between God and the creature is so great.* The “otherness” of God’s Divine existence so separates us from God that a covenant was needed even at creation for Adam to receive God as his blessedness and reward.

**The second phrase in this paragraph says that all mankind inherently *owes obedience to God as their Creator*. Why would we say this is true?**

- God’s authority by being Creator of all
- Our absolute dependence upon God
- The perfect character of God as seen in His attributes
- And the perfect care that God exercises upon His creation in His providence

Using the language of the children’s catechism, it is only reasonable that if *God made us and He takes care of us*, we owe obedience to Him so that we might glorify Him with our lives.

**God establishes His covenant to bridge the distance between Himself and man**

But the confession points out that this *distance between God and the creature is so great*, that such an obedient life, even if it is perfect, is not a living relationship with God. And neither is it the source of that relationship. A living relationship is qualitatively different.

This is similar to the way the distance of an online classroom is not, and will not produce a living relationship with a teacher we never meet.

One of my favorite websites to spend time on is the Reformed Forum. There are a number of courses on that site taught by Professor Lane Tipton that I really enjoy, and I have gone through several of them. But no matter how much I enjoy those courses, I do not know Lane Tipton, and he does not know me. Even if I perfectly fulfill all the courses, there is a distance, or a disconnect between me and that teacher. In order for us to have any fruit of a relationship, one of us must bridge that digital divide.

When it comes to God, we may have a life of perfect sinless obedience toward a Creator, but if there is an unbridged divide, we are going to have no relationship with our Creator. We cannot bridge it, so God must condescend to meet with us.

This is why the confession goes on to say that we can *never have any fruition of God as our blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.*

Our Divine Creator, and Instructor of obedience, condescends in order for us to have something more than just a sterile function of obedience toward a Deity. He condescends to commune and to bring us into the *blessedness and reward* of a relationship of life with Him. And that condescension is expressed by way of covenant.

Do we find this to be what scripture teaches? Does God use covenant to bridge the distance between us?

*Gen 17:1-7* (notice the language of relationship as God establishes His covenant with Abraham)

*When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; **walk before me**, and be blameless, 2 that I may make my covenant between me and you, **and may multiply you greatly.**" 3 Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, 4 "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. 5 No longer shall your name be called Abram, 2 but your name shall be Abraham, 3 for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. 6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. 7 And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, **to be God to you and to your offspring after you.***

What is some of the relational imagery used here in God establishing His covenant with Abraham?

- He makes promises
- Walk before me
- And may multiply you greatly
- I will make you exceedingly fruitful
- Kings shall come from you
- I will be God to you and your offspring after you

Foundational to this covenant is that God is bringing Abraham into a relationship with Himself, to be his God, and for Abraham's family to be God's people.

This core of the covenant is reiterated to Moses as God calls him to deliver His people.

*Ex 6:2-7 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.** 6 Say therefore to the people of Israel, ‘I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. 7 **I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God,** and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.*

At the heart of God’s redemptive care for His people lies His covenant that He made with them to be their God.

Like this deliverance from Egypt, we see God’s covenant at every turn of redemptive history, through which He cares for those who are His own. And not only this, but we see that covenant as the instrument of His redemptive kindness toward His people.

- **Noah – Gen 6:11-22** As God singles Noah out to enter a saving relationship with him, He does it by covenant.
- **David – 2 Sam 7:1-17** As God blesses David with the dynasty of an everlasting kingdom, He does it through the covenant.
- **Christ – Lk 22:14-23** We can go on, but we ultimately come to the Upper Room, where we read of Jesus fulfilling what was promised by the prophets, as He finalizes His covenant with the house of Israel in His body and blood, writing His laws upon our hearts and putting His Spirit within us.
- **Paul** – this cup of our communion that we take every Lord’s Day is the cup of the new covenant in Christ’s blood. **1 Cor 11:25** For the Passover Lamb of the covenant has been slain for us. **1 Cor 5:7**
- And we are now servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the spirit. **2 Cor 3:5&6**

We see biblically, that as God enters relationships of more than simply His common grace being poured out on mankind in general, He does it through His covenant. The covenant is instrumental in attaining this higher communion and life which bares the fruit of having God as our *blessedness and reward*. And the seeds of this life of the covenant was first sown as God condescended to enter into a relationship with Adam even as He formed Adam from the dust of the ground. This first covenant of life is commonly referred to as the Covenant of Works. But whether it was the Covenant of Works in Adam or the Covenant of Grace in Christ, they were both established for this same end, the joy of eternal communion with God.

*\*This is a marked difference between what we refer to as common grace and saving grace. Common grace is exercised upon all in general, redeemed and unredeemed in varying degrees, flowing out of the benevolent character of God to care for His creation and curb the effects of sin on His creation. Saving grace belongs to*

the covenants, and therefore the soteriological realm. It is spiritual in nature. And has as its goal communal oneness with God. We see this demonstrated in that every sign of the covenants is a sign of eternal salvation and communion with God.

### Discussion Pause –

How does seeing the covenant at creation as a bridge for communion with God change our perception of the covenant of works?

In what sense is that covenant an obligation laid upon man?

In what sense is that covenant a gift given to man?

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### A loving relationship with God is having God as our blessedness and reward

We have focused on the necessity of the covenant for a higher communal relationship to exist between God and man. But what do we mean by a higher communal relationship? The confession states it as man receiving the fruit of God Himself as *their blessedness and reward*. In other words, it is God sharing Himself and the blessedness and joy of His life with His creatures. And this is indeed true and eternal life with God.

We see shadows of this promise in the Levitical Priesthood. The Levites were told they would receive no inheritance of the land. And the reason God gives for this is because He says, *“I am your inheritance.” Numbers 18:20*

The psalmist says *The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; Ps 16:5*

And Paul tells us in Ephesians that in Christ, *we have obtained an inheritance,*

And that we have received the *promised Holy Spirit, 14 as the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it,*

### God as our blessedness and reward

If the life of the Spirit we now have is only the guarantee or down payment, what must the abundance of our full inheritance look like? It must be glorious beyond description! Our inheritance is to receive God Himself, the fullness of God Himself as our blessedness and reward.

It is one thing to receive a lot of things from someone. It is a far different thing to receive the gift of that person themselves. A parent who is financially well off but distant in their love is able to give many things to their child and yet never share themselves, their time and their affection, a communion with the essence of who they are.

This human analogy falls far short of the Divine archetype. But it helps us to see that if such tangential and incidental blessings are all we expect in our relationship with God, then we



have severely cheapened our view of that relationship. So much so, that it fails to be the covenantal relationship that God desires to have with us.

The beating heart of our eternal joy is not about the blessings and benefits we receive **from** God. It is about having God as our covenant God. We will eternally glory in the reality that we **belong** to God, and that He is **our** God. We are in communion with our Creator.

### **The merit of heavenly bliss by way of covenant**

This is the covenant promise that was set before Adam. And such a promise of heavenly bliss must be only by way of a gracious covenant because Adam could not inherently merit such a reward.

Perfect obedience is already owed to God from His creatures with no reward in response. But through the covenant, the reward of eternal life and communion with God is granted.

This covenant in the garden was God's gracious gift to Adam. It not only penetrated the divide, it provided Adam the vehicle to attain God as *his blessedness and reward*.

This merit of heaven can only come by way of covenant. For as we said, Adam's obedience could not earn it. Adam's obedience could not even partly earn it. Rather by the covenant, God obliges Himself to receive that already due obedience in order for us to gain in return the priceless prize of heaven.

Samuel Rutherford calls this *the overwhelming goodness and mercy of God, that for our penny of obedience, so rich a wedge as communion with God is given*.

And this stipulation of obedience in the covenant was not an ask greater than Adam's natural ability. Such perfection of obedience is what Adam was created for. It was his default setting. There were no new superhuman conditions imposed upon him, no great acts of impossible hoops that he had to jump. No, he was just to remain obedient to his created character. And the covenant enabled that natural ability to bear the supernatural fruit of heavenly life. How gracious of God that the covenant of higher life was sculpted to fit Adam perfectly. And that Adam was formed to perfectly fulfill that covenant.

\* This view is significantly different than The Roman Catholic view of man's original condition and his merit of heaven flowing from the donum superadditum, a super added gift which God bestowed upon mere humanity so that Adam could perform works capable of meriting heaven. In the fall, Adam is supposed to have lost this superadded grace while retaining his natural human condition. Therefore the essence of his humanity did not significantly change, and man did not become totally depraved, as we would understand the fall. And so, all that is needed is God's assistance in restoring this added grace. This doctrine then becomes the catalyst for Rome's doctrine of infused righteousness for justification instead of justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ upon one completely unrighteous.



## Christ and the covenant

God established this covenant relationship with Adam so that He might ultimately bring it to pass in the second Adam, Christ. For Paul says in 1 Cor 15 that as:

*1 Cor 15:47 “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.*

Christ, by His perfect obedience, has earned the eternal bliss of the Father for us. The obedience of the covenant is always the avenue of higher life with God. The original covenant established this. And Christ fulfilled it.

Adam failed to cross over the divide that God bridged in the garden with the covenant. But Christ has taken Adam's covenant out of his hands, and out of our hands and fulfilled its requirements. He crossed over, not simply the divide that Adam failed to cross in the covenant of works, but over the even greater divide that Adam caused in the fall, the divide of sinfulness.

This second divide of the fall called for the initiation of a second covenant – a covenant of grace established in Christ, by which He accomplished a double work. Christ achieved the required righteousness of the covenant of works for us. And He suffered the penalty of death that Adam and all mankind incurred breaking that covenant.

So, the covenant of life given to Adam in the garden is the very covenant of life which comes to us in Christ through His covenant of grace. This is the good news we have to share. Christ has brought us communion with Father, that we might have God as our *blessedness and reward*.

So, as we go forward to look at the relationship between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, we must never untie these two from one another. They are intricately related. It is the covenant in the garden upon which God's covenant in Christ rests. Christ built His home of grace upon the foundation stones that God set in place in the initial covenant at creation.

## 2. The Essence of Our Covenant Relationship with God

### What does it mean to be in covenant?

That's our introduction to man in covenant with God. But we have not yet even talked about defining a covenant.

### Discussion Break-

I'd like for us to take five minutes and break into groups of two or three. Identify some of the terminologies you would use in describing a covenant? And then discuss how these relate to the bible's concept of covenant?

- Covenant like a contract- a pact - an arrangement or agreement between parties. Mayflower Compact.
- Contract – purchasing a house
- Our constitution is a covenant between our government and its people.
- A relationship
- Marriage
- Communion
- Promises
- A desire to seek the benefit of the other
- Blessing and curses by keeping or breaking the covenant

### Definition of covenant

What is the definition of a biblical covenant? Herman Witsius says:

*A covenant is not simply a legal document, but **a framework for a relationship focused on attaining "consummate happiness" with God**, including the threat of eternal destruction for those who despise the offered happiness and seek it outside of the covenant. Herman Witsius, The Economy of the Covenants*

Francis Roberts says:

*God's covenant is his gratuitous agreement with his people, promising them eternal happiness and all subordinate good: and requiring from them all due dependance upon God, and obedience unto him, in order to his glory...It is God's gracious and intimate way of bringing man into "fellowship or communion" with himself. Francis Roberts, God's Covenants: The Mystery and Marrow of the Bible*

In defining the covenant, it would be good for us to define covenant theology as well.

### Definition of covenant theology

Ligon Duncan says:

*Covenant theology is the gospel set in the context of God's eternal plan of blessing for and communion with His people, and its historical outworking in the covenants of works and grace, as well as in the various progressive stages of the covenant of grace. Ligon Duncan*

We see how connected these definitions are, focusing on the eternal or consummate happiness and communion with God that the arrangement in the garden *framed* and the gospel *fills*. The covenant is the vehicle, or as Witsius puts it, *the framework* for this high and heavenly life.

### Bi-covenantal Framework (on the board)

We notice from Ligon Duncan's definition that Reformed Theology holds to what is known as a bi-covenantal framework, meaning all of God's dealings with humanity occur within one of two great covenants. And we have already alluded to this. Either the covenant of works which God initiated with Adam at creation, or the covenant of Grace which God initiated with Christ as a result of the fall. Our confession focuses on this bi-covenantal framework in paragraphs 2 and 3 of chapter seven.

## *WCF CHAPTER 7*

### *Of God's Covenant with Man*

*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.*

*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 offereth 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.*

### **Both covenants are covenants of life**

Two distinct covenants are referenced here. And just as the Larger Catechism refers to the first covenant as the covenant of Life, these paragraphs also speak of these covenants as being covenants of life. Life which Adam rendered himself and his posterity incapable of attaining. Adam, by his fall, *made himself incapable of life by that covenant*. This fall, and its inability to attain the intended life initiated the second covenant.

There was no need for a covenant of grace apart from the failure of the covenant in the garden. And once there was a failure of the first covenant there is no possible option of a covenant relationship apart from a covenant of grace. Any covenant based on personal performance would be rendered inoperative. Why? Because that avenue has already had its bridge collapse. The covenant of works has been abrogated as a means to life. All it can do now is condemn those who do not belong to the covenant of grace.

This means, once the covenant of grace entered redemptive history, all of God's dealings with his redeemed people from that point on in history transpired in the framework of this second covenant, the covenant of grace.

But I want to beg the question here, when did this covenant of grace make its appearance? At what point in time did it enter the stage of history? At the very point of the fall. For even in the pronouncement of the curse the promise of grace is laid out to Adam and Eve. Not

simply a promise for them to look forward to sometime in the future. But a promise for them to live their lives in now, as broken as those lives were.

### **Discussion Pause –**

What are the implications that the saints throughout redemptive history related to God in the covenant of grace instead of the covenant of works?

It means they all had life. It means they all had Christ and the benefits of His redemption. It means they all related to Christ on the basis of faith and not works.

*Rom 4:1-5 What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. 3 For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” 4 Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. 5 And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness,*

Brothers and sisters this is the covenant of grace, all the way back to Abraham.

What about the covenant that God made with Noah?

What about the covenant God made with Moses? And so on... These are some of the things we are going to look at next week. As we look at the progression of the covenant of grace through redemptive history.

But tonight we are just looking at the relationship between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. , no matter at what stage of life the covenant of grace is in, it will always hold the key markers of

And so on...Did God reenter Adam's covenant of works to deal with these saints of the Old Testament. Or did He inaugurate a new and different covenant of works

We have seen that both these covenants were established to be covenants of life. What other parallel do we see in paragraphs two and three between the covenants of works and grace?

### **The Head and body relationship in each covenant**

Each covenant has a federal or covenant head and a body of those who belong to each head. Life was promised to Adam in the first covenant *and in him to his posterity*. This life is now promised to Christ and *all those that are ordained unto eternal life*.

We saw some of these passages last time which tie Adam and Christ together in this way, such as Roman's five where Paul speaks of those in Adam and those in Christ, and refers to Adam as a type of Christ, drawing the parallel that ... *by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.*

We also see it in 1 Cor. 15:22 when Paul says:

*For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.* The heads of the two covenants, Adam and Christ, each have a body which belongs to them. The body suffers or gains the consequences of their head. All those who are in Adam die. And all those who are in Christ are made alive. *But each in his own order*, Paul says: *Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.*

What dissimilarities do we see between these two covenants?

### **Life versus life and salvation**

We notice that life was promised in the first covenant as well as the second. But in the second, the covenant of Christ, it is not only life, it is *life and salvation*. Salvation was not part of the first covenant. Adam did not need saving in his state of innocence. But just as the fall called for the necessity of a second covenant, it called for the necessity of salvation from that fall.

How would we define salvation? It is a rescue from the guilt and corruption of the fallen state that we looked at in the last lesson. As we saw last time we, do not need a rehabilitation of our fallen condition. We need a deliverance from it. For the condition itself condemns us. It's important that we understand salvation in this sense. Man has made himself *incapable of life*. He didn't just mess up his one avenue of covenantal blessing. He forfeited life, giving him no avenue to achieve life himself. God must save him.

### **Works versus Faith**

Another dissimilarity we see is the obligations associated with each covenant. Adam's covenant obligation, as well as all his posterity's was *perfect obedience*. Why? Because anything short of that is sin. And sin breaks the covenant.

But this perfect obedience was accomplished by Christ and is given to all those in the second covenant as a gift. It is a covenant of grace. And it is appropriated through faith.

Therefore, the obligation associated with this covenant, instead of the work of perfect obedience, is for all those in Christ is to rest by faith in His perfect obedience.

The original covenant, although graciously given, rested on our performance. The covenant of grace does not. It rests upon the work of Christ. And so, the required faith, which appropriates the covenant, instead of being a work on our part, is a letting go of any performance we may supposedly have, to cling to and rest upon the work of another. This is true faith. It is a disposition of hands, empty of my own goodness and eyes, looking outward toward Christ instead of inward toward self. Notice the way Paul sets these two principles of faith and works over against each other.

*Eph 2:8&9 For by grace we have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

Again, we can reference Romans chapter 4: about Abraham being justified by faith instead of works. Then in chapter 11 Paul says:

*Rom 11: 6 ...if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.*

Paul is doing more than simply setting faith over against works. He is laying out the bi-covenantal framework of history, showing that if you belong to Christ and His covenant of grace through faith, then you no longer belong to Adam and his covenant of self-performance.

### **The promise of the assisting gift of the Spirit**

The final dissimilarity is the promise of the assisting gift of the Spirit. This is not a promise of God giving His Spirit to us if we believe. It is so much deeper than this. It is God's promise in His covenant of grace to give His Spirit to *all those that are ordained unto eternal life* so as to *make them willing, and able to believe*.

Man did not keep the first covenant. And fallen man, now being held captive by Satan, cannot even desire the second covenant. God *freely offers unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ*. But dead sinners that we are, we reject the offer of life. And so, the required faith, that we may be saved is Spirit-generated faith in the elect to usher those *ordained unto eternal life* into that life of the covenant. Just as everything was dependent upon man in the first covenant. Everything for those *ordained unto eternal life* is dependent upon, and accomplished by God in the second.

*Titus 3:5&6 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,*

*Eph 2:1-5 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the flesh and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved*

### 3. The Source of our Covenant Relationship with God

- What prompts God to desire to be in covenant relationship with us?
  - The character of God, who Himself exists in a Trinitarian relationship as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. (God not only images His relational existence by the creation of relational beings. But by covenant, He enters into that creation to relationally participate in what He has imaged.)
  - The exercising of God's attribute of love, among others. (God is love and so there is in Him the ever-existing movement of His will toward the affectionate benefit of others. He accomplishes this through covenant.
  - The manifestation of His glory. (All things are of Him through Him and unto Him. And His covenant is the vehicle for the glory of His grace to come to fruition.)

When we speak of the relationship between the Persons of the Trinity. What does scripture focus on?

- The love between the Persons.
  - The Father/Son relationship particularly manifests this. But we should not isolate this from the Holy Spirit.
  - For the Spirit is the breathing forth of this Divine love toward each other.
  - Just as the Word is the imaging of the Father in the Son, the Spirit is the breath of that Word in action.
  - The Son is the manifestation of the Father, and the Spirit is the operation of the Divine will in love.
- The glory that this love seeks for each Person
  - The Son seeks to glorify the Father
  - The Father seeks to glorify the Son.
  - The Spirit is the Spirit of glory, 1 Pt 4:14 and seeks the glory of the Father and the Son.
- The community of the three in the unity of the one
  - God is not only simple and absolute, he is relational



- The threeness of the persons in the Trinity displays this relational perfection of the being of God.

Nowhere are these truths more prevalent than John's gospel.

*Jn 3:35 The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand.*

*Jn 5:20 the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing.*

*Jn 8:54 Jesus answered, "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, 'He is our God.'"*

*Jn 14:15 If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, 17 even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.*

*Jn 16:12-15 I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. 14 He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. 15 All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.*

*Jn 17:1-5 When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, 2 since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. 3 And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. 4 I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. 5 And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.*

We would not necessarily term this glorious relationship of the Trinity as itself a covenant relationship. But it is this relationship which is the source of God's covenant relationship with His creatures. He brings us into the beauty of the communion of the Trinity. And this is exactly what we hear Jesus praying for in John 17.

*Jn 17:20-23 "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, 21 that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent*

*me. 22 The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, 23 I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.*

God's desire to be in relationship with us is not because of anything lacking in Him. Instead, it flows out of His relational existence in the Trinity. God seeks to duplicate His blessed existence, and the expression of this is the covenant. It is God bringing us into the life and love and glory of the Trinity.

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### Discussion Questions

- **Inward Application:** How does being in covenant with God affect your devotion and obedience to God?
- **Outward Application:** How does recognizing that we are members of God's covenant by grace affect your interaction with those who do not yet know Christ and His covenant kingdom?
- **Basic Understanding:** Clarifying questions.
- **Further Understanding:** Discuss the different ways the covenant of works and the covenant of grace relate to each other. Are they opposed to one another? And if so, in what ways? Are they related to one another? And if so, in what ways?
- **Reading Scripture:** John 17. How does this shape our understanding of God's desire to be in covenant with us?