

## Foundations of Christian Theology

### Lesson 11

#### The Progression of God's Covenant of Grace Through Redemptive History

**Goal:** To recognize the continuity of the one covenant of grace after the fall. And to understand the progression of that covenant through its various administrations – from its elementary inception at the fall, to its mature state in the new covenant, to its consummation in glory.

##### 1. Understanding the Comprehensiveness of God's Covenant of Grace

###### One covenant of grace after the fall, through one Mediator, Christ

*1 Tim 2:5, For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.*

*Heb 9:11&12 when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) 12 he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.*

###### The way God's Covenant of Grace was clothed in the Old Testament

The varying administrations of the covenant throughout the Old Testament are characterized by three identifying markers

- the **types** which are used in each administration
- the **promises** which are given in each administration
- the **ceremonies** which are observed in each administration

###### The original promise of Christ's gospel at the fall

*Gen 3:14-15 & 21 The Lord God said to the serpent,*

*"Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life.*

*15 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."... 21 And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.*

## The clothing of the Types and Promises and Ceremonies

*Col 2:17 These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.*

*The Old Testament saints were on the same journey as us, but their journey was at the crack of dawn, while ours is at noonday. John Calvin*

**What are some of the Old Testament clothing which we would say Christ's covenant was garbed in during the early stages of its life?**

- **Types-**

*Heb 8:5 They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain."*

- **Promises-**

*Rom 4:13 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.*

- **Ceremonies-**

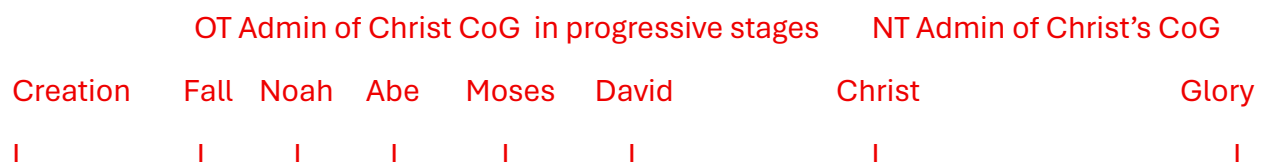
*1 Cor 5:7&8 For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. 8 Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*

Old Testament lived in these types, promises and ceremonies which we no longer utilize because the coming of Christ has made them obsolete.

*Heb 8:13 what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.*

*Heb 10:1... The law was a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities,*

## Visual Timeline of the Covenants



## Dispensationalism varies from this understanding

This is the heart of the difference between Covenant Theology and Dispensational Theology. Instead of seeing the unity and progression of these various administrations as different clothing for the one covenant of grace to the one people of God in Christ. Dispensationalism sees unassociated administrations with different purposes and different peoples throughout different dispensations of time. Where we see unity and progression, they see disunity and separation. This is why they must always separate Israel and the church from each other as two distinct families of God upon different familial basis. In Dispensationalism, God has an earthly family in Abraham and He has another heavenly family in Christ. This is in direct opposition to Covenant Theology which sees one family of God, spiritual in nature, first beginning within the family of Abraham, but having Gentiles grafted in who have the spiritual faith of Abraham, while the physical children who do not have that faith are cut off from that one family. Romans 11

“The Old Testament is the very embodiment of the covenant of grace, administered in the old fashion by way of shadows—and nothing other than that. If the Old Testament were other than the covenant of grace, the death of a testator other than Jesus Christ would be necessary, for no testament is confirmed except in the death of the testator (Heb 9:16-17). Furthermore, the Old Testament neither began at Horeb, having been in existence since the time of Adam, nor consisted in the inheritance of Canaan, as we have shown in detail in the previous chapter.” – Wilhelmus a Brakel (1635-1711)

This *covenant continuity* is the overarching hermeneutic of scripture interpretation.

“Let me make a bold assertion about Covenant theology: It is not incidental to Reformed theology—it is Reformed theology... Covenant theology is as vast as any systematic theology, touching on all the standard theological topics, because it is simply systematic theology focused on the Bible's own organizing principle of covenant.” – Stephen M. Baugh (Present)

## 2. Understanding the Covenant of Grace in its Primitive Economies

Paul likens Israel under the old covenant as sons and daughters who were yet underage and in school, being tutored by what he calls the elementary principles of the world.

Gal 3:23-25 We were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian,

*Gal 4:1-3 I mean that the heir, as long as he is **a child**, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, 2 but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. 3 In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.*

#### **WCF CHAPTER 7 Of God's Covenant with Man**

*WCF 7.5, 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.*

#### **Analogies of the Revelatory Progression of the Covenant of Grace**

- **The growth of a flower**
- **An artist painting a picture**

**Discussion Break** – Break into groups of about 3 or 4 and identify the different ways God revealed His covenant of grace in the previous ages and discuss any progression you see through those ages. From Adam and Eve to Noah. From Noah to Abraham. From Abraham to Moses. And from Moses to David. Can you associate a particular motif with each administration?

- Adam and Eve –
- Noah –
- Abraham –
- Moses –
- David –

#### **We see the fullness of the Old Testament covenants as they culminate in Christ**

- Christ – Christ is the promised Seed, who is the Prophet, Priest and King of the covenant, who calls a family to be His own and acts on their behalf. By His redeeming work, He reverses the curse and restores all that the fall has corrupted. His redeeming work reaches as far as the curse is found.

**What are some examples of how this changes the way we read the Old Testament?**

### 3. The Covenant of Redemption – The eternal basis of our covenant relationship

In his beloved children's story, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, C. S. Lewis writes of the Deep Magic which the Queen of Narnia uses to bind Edmund, the traitor to a covenant of death. There is no escaping this covenant which was established from the dawn of time. And Edmund is sentenced to death. Aslan the great Lion counsels with the Queen and offers Himself as a substitute to ransom the traitor. The Queen is delighted, for she sees she has finally won the victory over the great Lion. She puts Aslan to death instead of Edmund, and lets the traitor go free.

But something had been determined before - before time ever began. The witch had slain Aslan in the place of Edmund, and although the witch knew of this Deep Magic, Lewis says *"There is a magic deeper still which she did not know. Her knowledge goes back only to the dawn of time. But if she could have looked a little further back, into the stillness and darkness before Time dawned, she would have read there a different incantation."*

#### The Pact made in the Covenant of Redemption

- Behind both the covenants of works in the garden and the covenant of grace stands another covenant made between the three persons of the Godhead.
- It is from this covenant that the others flow.
- This covenant is God's eternal plan, not just for the creation of the world but for its redemption and final glorification.

John 5:30, "I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me."

John 6:38-39, "For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day."

John 10:17-18, "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. **This charge I have received from my Father.**"

John 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, **since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.** And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth, **having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.** And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

Philippians 2:5-11, Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

### **Some of the key points of the covenant of redemption**

- In this covenant, the Son would unite Himself with the human race by becoming a man.
- In doing this he did not diminish anything concerning His divine nature. Rather He veiled the glory of His Deity with His humanity
- In that humanity, He would fulfill all righteousness, and then sacrifice Himself in the place of others.
- In this covenant, the Father vowed to give to the Son a people to be His own.
- He would give to the Son all He needed to fulfill His mission, including the Spirit without measure, so that the Son might realize the fruits of His labor.
- In this covenant, the Spirit would bring to pass in the lives of those who belong to the Son, the effectual outworking of what the Son accomplished.

### **Implications of the covenant of redemption**

- The covenant of redemption places us in union with Christ.
- The promises between the Trinity in this covenant ensures the success of the covenant of grace.
- This covenant places Christ as our head which legally enables Him to be our Mediator

WLC 31. Q. With whom was the covenant of grace made?

A. The covenant of grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in him with all the elect as his seed.

#### **4. Consummation of the Covenant of Grace**

##### **The fullness of the covenant will only be experienced in eternal glory**

We live in the fullness of Christ's covenant now. And yet, we are still waiting for the consummation of our covenant relationship with God.

##### **We will see the covenant then even more clearly than we do now**

- Christ's three-fold office will be exercised in a realm of pure holiness
- His reign will be received by subjects who are no longer corrupted by sin.
- The fullness of His family will shine like the sun in the kingdom of the Father.
- All that is defiled will be restored, not back to its original state in Eden, but to a state that the promise of Eden held forth to Adam in the first covenant.
- We will experience in even a fuller way the forgiveness of our sins.
- "Behold, I make all things new".

**The book of Revelation gives us a glimpse of the consummation of God's covenant as we behold John's vision.**

- The tree of life
- The throne of the King
- Lightning and thunder of Mt Sinai
- The rainbow

**John brings to mind the sacramental emblems of the old covenants.**

Revelation 22:1-4, Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

## Discussion Questions

- **Inward Application:** How does reading scripture in light of the progressive revelation of the covenant of grace inform the way you study God's word?
- **Outward Application:** How does understanding the old covenant's spiritual fulfillment in Christ inform our relationship with Jewish people?
- **Basic Understanding:** Clarifying questions.
- **Further Understanding:** Discuss the differences between Covenant Theology and Dispensational Theology. How might these two differ on their view of soteriology? On their view of ecclesiology? On eschatology?
- **Reading Scripture:** Hebrews 9. Note the comparisons between the earthly form of worship and the heavenly worship. How would you describe their relationship?