

Fundamentals, Study 7. God's Covenant (Gal. 3:7-18)

by BS Poh

o God deals with His people by way of covenant, in which He initiates and accomplishes their salvation by grace.

1. A *covenant* is a contract, or solemn agreement, between two or more persons. In any covenant, there are terms (i.e. promises) and conditions. A man and a woman make a covenant with each other when they get married. A house buyer and the seller make a covenant when they both sign the sale-and-purchase agreement. The Bible shows that God often deals with people by covenant. He took the initiative to make a covenant with Adam, promising him eternal life, upon the condition that he obeyed God.¹ This has been called *the Covenant of Works*. By his fall, Adam came under the curse of the law. Physical and spiritual death came upon him and the human race, which descended from him. (1. Gen. 2:15-17.)

2. God mercifully made another covenant with man, by which He freely offers to sinners life and salvation in Jesus Christ.² This covenant of salvation has been called *the Covenant of Grace*. The condition is that sinners repent of their sins and trust in Christ alone to be saved. The promises are: (a) that He will give the Holy Spirit to His chosen people to make them willing and able to believe; 3 and (b) that those who are saved will be reconciled to Him, and be able to enjoy all the blessings in Jesus Christ.⁴ (2. Rom 3:20-21; 8:3; 3. Mark 16:15-16; John 3:16; 4. Ezek 36:26-27; John 6:44-45)

3. This Covenant of Grace is revealed through the *gospel* (i.e. "the good news"), which is the message that focuses on the person and work of Christ in saving sinners. It was first revealed to Adam in the promise of salvation by the seed (i.e. a particular descendant) of the woman.⁵ This was a reference to the coming of Jesus Christ. It was then revealed by the system of animal sacrifices, which pointed to the need for the Saviour to lay down His life as a perfect sacrifice for His people. The prophets also spoke of the coming Saviour, who would die, and rise again from death. These various steps continued until the revelation was complete in the New Testament.⁶ (5. Gen 3:15; 6. Heb 1:1; Luke 24:46-47)

4. The Covenant of Grace rests on another, known as *the Covenant of Redemption*, or *the eternal covenant*, which was made in eternity, between the three Persons of the Trinity.⁷ The Son agreed: (a) to take on human nature, without sin, by being born of a woman, (b) to be born under the law, i.e. with the obligation to keep the law of God; (c) to bear the sins of God's chosen people by dying, in their place, on the cross. The Father promised: (a) to strengthen and enable the Son by giving Him the Holy Spirit freely and fully, (b) to save the Son from the power of death and exalt Him to His right hand in heaven, (c) to give to the Son all His chosen people so that they will be saved and be exalted with Christ throughout eternity. The Holy Spirit agreed with this arrangement, and does His work in harmony with the other Persons of the Godhead.⁸ (7. 2 Tim 1:9; Tit 1:2; 8. Isa 52:1-2; 53:10-12; Heb 13:20; 2 Thess 2:13; Tit 3:5-6.)

5. The final revelation of the Covenant of Grace in the New Testament is also called the *new covenant*, in contrast to the *old covenant* of the Old Testament period. The latter was basically a covenant of works - made with Noah, Abraham, David, and Moses - to which was attached the gradual revelation of the Covenant of Grace. Anyone who has been saved since the fall of Adam is by the grace of the Covenant of Grace.⁹ (Heb 11:6, 13; Rom 4:1-2; Acts 4:12; John 6:37-40)

= You cannot be saved by works. Come to Jesus Christ to be saved!

Review Questions

1. What is a covenant?
2. What is the Covenant of Works?
3. What is the Covenant of Grace?
3. Who are the parties involved in the Covenant of Grace?
4. What is the condition of the Covenant of Grace?
5. What are the promises of the Covenant of Grace?
6. What is the gospel?
7. On what does the Covenant of Grace rest?
8. Who are the parties involved in the Covenant of Redemption?
9. What is the Covenant of Grace called in the New Testament?
10. How was the Covenant of Grace revealed in the Old Testament?

Assignment/Discussion

Presbyterians claim that the Covenant of Grace was revealed in the Old Testament by stages, or “administrations”, in which both regenerate and unregenerate people, were included. They extended the argument by claiming that the revelation of the Covenant of Grace in the New Testament must, therefore, include the children of believers, while awaiting their conversion. What are the difficulties encountered in such a view?

Memory Passage (Jer 31:33)

33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

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