

## **Chapter XIII: Man in the Covenant of Grace**

For the sake of clearness we distinguish between the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace. The two are so closely related that they can be and sometimes are, considered as one. The former is the eternal foundation of the latter.

### **1. The Covenant of Redemption**

This is also called “the counsel of peace,” a name derived from Zech. 6:13. It is a covenant between the Father, representing the Trinity, and the Son as the representative of the elect.

a. The scriptural basis for it. It is clear that the plan of redemption was included in God’s eternal decree, Eph. 1:4 ff.; 3:11; 2 Tim. 1:9. Christ speaks of promises made to Him before He came into the world, and repeatedly refers to a commission which He received from the Father, John 5:30, 43; 6:38-40; 17:4-12. He is evidently a covenant head, Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15: — 22. In Ps. 2:7-9 the parties of the covenant are mentioned and a promise is indicated, and in Ps. 40:7, 8 the Messiah expresses His readiness to do the Father’s will in becoming a sacrifice for sin.

b. The Son in the covenant of redemption. Christ is not only the Head but also the Surety of the covenant of redemption, Heb. 7:22, A surety is one who takes upon himself the legal obligations of another. Christ took the place of the sinner, to bear the penalty of sin and to meet the demands of the law for His people. By so doing He became the last Adam, a life-giving spirit, 1 Cor. 15:45. For Christ this covenant was a covenant of works, in which He met the requirements of the original covenant, but for us it is the eternal foundation of the covenant of grace. Its benefits are limited to the elect. They only obtain the redemption and inherit the glory which Christ merited for sinners.

c. Requirements and promises in the covenant of redemption. (1) The Father required of the Son that He should assume human nature with its present infirmities, though without sin, Gal. 4:4, 5; Heb. 2:10, 11, 14, 15; 4:15; that He should place Himself under the law to pay the penalty and to merit eternal life for the elect, Ps. 40:8; John 10:11; Gal. 1:4; 4:4, 5; and that He should apply His merits to His people by the renewing operation

of the Holy Spirit, thus securing the consecration of their lives to God, John 10:28; 17:19-22; Heb. 5:7-9. (2) And the Father promised the Son that He would prepare for Him a body, Heb. 10:5, would anoint Him with the Holy Spirit, Isa. 42:1; 61:1; John 3:34, would support Him in His work, Isa. 42:6, 7; Luke 22:43 would deliver Him from the power of death and place Him at His own right hand, Ps. 16:8-11; Phil. 2:9-11, would enable Him to [s]end the Spirit for the formation of the Church, John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13, 14, would draw and preserve the elect, John 6:37, 39, 40, 44, 45, and would grant Him a numerous seed, Ps. 22:27; 72:17

## 2. The Covenant of Grace

On the basis of the covenant of redemption God established the covenant of grace. Several particulars call for consideration here.

a. The contracting parties. God is the first party in the covenant. He establishes the covenant and determines the relation in which the second party will stand to Him. It is not so easy to determine who the second party is. The prevailing opinion in Reformed circles is that it is the elect sinner in Christ. We should bear in mind, however, that the covenant may be viewed in two different ways: (1) As an end in itself, a covenant of mutual friendship or communion of life, which is realized in the course of history through the operation of the Holy Spirit. It represents a condition in which privileges are improved for spiritual ends, the promises of God are embraced by a living faith, and the promised blessings are fully realized. So conceived, it may be defined as that gracious agreement between God and the elect sinner in Christ, in which God gives Himself with all the blessings of salvation to the elect sinner, and the latter embraces God and all His gracious gifts by faith. Deut. 7:9; 2 Chron. 6:14; Ps. 25:10, 14; 103:17, 18. (2) As a means to an end, a purely legal arrangement for the realization of a spiritual end. It is evident that the Bible sometimes speaks of the covenant as including some in whom the promises are never realized, such as Ishmael, Esau, the wicked sons of Eli, and the rebellious Israelites who died in their sins. The covenant may be regarded as a purely legal agreement, in which God guarantees the blessings of salvation to all who believe. If we think of the covenant in this broader sense, we can say that God established it with believers and their children, Gen. 17:7; Acts 2:39; Rom. 9:1-4.

b. The promises and requirements of the covenant. Every covenant has two sides; it offers certain privileges and imposes certain obligations.

(1) The promises of the covenant. The main promise of the covenant, which includes all others, is contained in the oft repeated words, "I will be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee," Jer. 31:33; 32:38-40; Ezek. 34:23-25, 30, 31; 36:25-28; Heb. 8:10; 2 Cor. 6:16-18. This promise includes all others, such as the promise of temporal blessings, of justification, of the Spirit of God, and of final glorification in a life that never ends. Job 19:25-27; Ps. 16:11; 73:24-26; Isa. 43:25; Jer. 31:33, 34; Ezek. 36:27; Dan. 12:2, 3; Gal. 4:4, 5, 6; Tit, 3:7; Heb. 11:7; Jas. 2:5.

(2) The requirements of the covenant. The covenant of grace is not a covenant of works; it requires no work with a view to merit. However, it does contain requirements and imposes obligations on man. By meeting the demands of the covenant man earns nothing, but merely puts himself in the way in which God will communicate to him the promised blessings. Moreover, it should be borne in mind that even the requirements are covered by the promises: God gives man all that He requires of him. The two things which He demands of those who stand in covenant relationship to Him are (a) that they accept the covenant and the covenant promises by faith, and thus enter upon the life of the covenant; and (b) that from the principle of the new life born within them, they consecrate themselves to God in new obedience.

c. The characteristics of the covenant. The covenant of grace is a gracious covenant, because it is a fruit and manifestation of the grace of God to sinners. It is grace from start to finish. It is also an eternal and inviolable covenant, to which God will always be true, though men may break it. Even in its widest extent it includes only a part of mankind, and is therefore particular. If its New Testament dispensation is called universal, this is done only in view of the fact that it is not limited to the Jews, as the Old Testament dispensation was. This covenant is also characterized by unity. It is essentially the same in all dispensations, though the form of its administration changes. The essential promise is the same, Gen. 17:7; Heb. 8:10, the gospel is the same, Gal. 3:8, the requirement of faith is the same, Gal. 3:6, 7, and the Mediator is the same, Heb. 13:8. The covenant is both conditional and unconditional. It is conditional because it is

dependent on the merits of Christ and because the enjoyment of the life it offers depends on the exercise of faith. But it is unconditional in the sense that it does not depend on any merits of man. And, finally, it is testamentary as a free and sovereign disposition on the part of God. It is called a 'testament' in Heb. 9:16, 17. This name stresses the facts, (1) that it is a free arrangement of God; (2) that its New Testament dispensation was ushered in by the death of Christ; and (3) that in it God gives what He demands. The covenant of grace differs from the covenant of works in that it has a mediator. Christ is represented as the Mediator of the new covenant, 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24. He is Mediator, not only merely in the sense that He intervenes between God and man to sue for peace and to persuade to it, but in the sense that He is armed with full power to do all that is necessary for the actual establishment of peace. As our Surety, Heb. 7:22, He assumes our guilt, pays the penalty of sin, fulfills the law, and thus restores peace.

d. Membership in the covenant. Adults can enter the covenant as a purely legal arrangement only by faith. And when they so enter it, they at the same time gain entrance into the covenant as a communion of life. They therefore enter upon the full covenant life at once. Children of believers, however, enter the covenant as a legal arrangement by birth, but this does not necessarily mean that they also at once enter it as a communion of life, nor even that they will ever enter it in that sense. Yet the promise of God gives a reasonable assurance that the covenant life will be realized in them. As long as they do not manifest the contrary we may proceed on the assumption that they possess the new life. When they grow up, they must accept their covenant responsibilities voluntarily by a true confession of faith. Failure to do this makes them covenant breakers. From the preceding it follows that unregenerate persons may temporarily be in the covenant as a purely legal relationship, Rom. 9:4. They are recognized as covenant children, are subject to its requirements and share its ministrations. They receive the seal of baptism, enjoy the common blessings of the covenant, and may even partake of some special operations of the Holy Spirit. If they do not accept the corresponding responsibilities, they will be judged as breakers of the covenant. The different dispensations of the covenant. (1) The first revelation of the covenant is found in Gen. 3:15, which is usually called the protoevangel or the maternal

promise. This does not yet refer to the formal establishment of the covenant. (2) The covenant with Noah is of a very general nature as a covenant with all flesh. It conveys only natural blessings, and is therefore often called the covenant of nature or of common grace. It is closely connected, however, with the covenant of grace. It is also a fruit of the grace of God and guarantees those natural and temporal blessings which are absolutely necessary for the realization of the covenant of grace. (3) The covenant with Abraham marks its formal establishment. It is the beginning of the Old Testament particularistic administration of the covenant, which is now limited to Abraham and his descendants, Faith stands out prominently as its necessary requirement, and circumcision becomes its seal. (4) The covenant at Sinai is essentially the same as that established with Abraham, but now takes in the whole nation of Israel, and thus became a national covenant. Though it strongly stresses the keeping of the law, it should not be regarded as a renewed covenant of works. The law increased the consciousness of sin, Rom. 3:20, and became a tutor unto Christ, Gal. 3:24. Passover was added as a second sacrament. (5) The new covenant, as revealed in the New Testament, Jer. 31:31; Heb. 8:8, 13, is essentially the same as that of the Old Testament, Rom. 4; Gal. 3. It now breaks through the barriers of particularism and becomes universal in the sense that its blessings are extended to people of all nations. Its blessings become fuller and more spiritual, and baptism and the Lord's Supper are substituted for the Old Testament sacraments.

**To memorize. Passages bearing on:**

a. The parties of the covenant:

Gen. 3:15. "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: he shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."

Ex. 19:5, 6a. "Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then shall ye be mine own possession from among all peoples: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation."

Jer. 31:31-33, "Behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that

I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was a husband unto them, saith Jehovah. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith Jehovah: I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

Acts 2:39. “For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call unto Him.”

b. Its promises and requirements:

Cf. Gen. 17:7; Ex. 19:5; 6a; Jer. 31:33 under a. above, for the essential promise.

Gen. 15:6. “And he (Abraham) believed in Jehovah, and He reckoned it to him for righteousness.”

Ex. 19:5. “Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be mine own possession from among all peoples.”

Ps. 25:14. “The friendship of Jehovah is with them that fear Him; and He will show them His covenant.”

Ps. 103:17, 18. “But the lovingkindness of Jehovah is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him, and His righteousness unto children’s children; to such as keep His covenant, and to those that remember His precepts to do them.”

Gal. 3:7, 9. “Know therefore that they that are of faith, the same are sons of Abraham.... So then they that are of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.”

c. Characteristics of the covenant:

Eternal. Gen. 17:19b. “And I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his seed after him.” Isa. 54:10. “For the mountains may depart, and the hills be removed; but my lovingkindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall my covenant of peace be removed, saith Jehovah that hath mercy on thee.” Isa. 24:5. “The

earth also is polluted under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant."

Unity. Gal. 3:7, 9 under b. above. Rom. 4:11. "And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while he was in uncircumcision; that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be in uncircumcision, that righteousness might be reckoned unto them"

Testamentary. Heb. 9:17, 18. "For a testament is of force where there hath been death; for it doth never avail while he that made it liveth. Wherefore even the first covenant hath not been dedicated without blood."

d. The Mediator of the covenant:

1 Tim. 2:5. "For there is one God, one Mediator also between God and men, Himself man, Christ Jesus."

Heb. 7:22. "By so much also hath Jesus become the Surety of a better covenant."

Heb. 8:6. "But now He hath obtained a ministry the more excellent, by so much as He is also the Mediator of a better covenant, which hath been enacted upon better promises."

### **For Further Study:**

a. Can you name some special covenants mentioned in the Bible? Gen. 31:44; Deut. 29:1; I Sam. 18:3; II Sam. 28:5.

b. Can you name instances of covenant breaking? Gen. 25:32-34, cf. Heb. 12:16, 17; Ex. 32:1-14; Num. 14; Num. 16; Judg. 2:11 ff.; I Sam. 2:12 ff.; Isa. 24:5; Ezek. 16:59; Hos. 6:7; 8:1; 10:4.

c. Did the giving of the law change the covenant essentially? Rom. 4:13-17; Gal. 3:17-24.

### Questions for Review:

1. What is the covenant of redemption? By what other name is it known, and how is it related to the covenant of grace?
2. What scriptural evidence is there for it?
3. What is the official position of Christ in this covenants?
4. Was it for Christ a covenant of grace or a covenant of works?
5. Whom does Christ represent in this covenant?
6. What did the Father require of Christ, and what did He promise Him?
7. What distinction do we apply to the covenant of grace?
8. How does this affect the question, who is the second party in the covenant?
9. What is the all-embracing promise of the covenant?
10. What does God require of those who are in the covenant?
11. What are the characteristics of the covenant?
12. In what sense is the covenant unbreakable, and in what sense breakable?
13. How can you prove the unity of the covenants?
14. In what sense is it conditional, and in what sense unconditional?
15. Why can it be called a testament?
16. Where do we find the first revelation of the covenant?
17. What was the nature of the covenant with Noah?
18. How did the covenant with, Abraham and the Sinaitic covenant differ?



19. What characterized the New Testament dispensation of the covenants?
20. What is the position of Christ in the covenant of grace?
21. How can adults become covenant members?
22. How do children of believers enter the covenant?
23. What is expected of them?
24. Can unregenerate persons be members of the covenants?