

Mary Craig Ministries, Inc.

Series: Covenant: God's Way of Relationship



Teaching Sermon Notes: "Essentials of the Covenant of Grace"

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"I will be your God and you will be My people" expresses the heart of the Living God in relationship. God's covenant binds Him to us and us to Him. Understanding the binding character of the covenant, the signs and seals, the granting of gifts, the offering of sacrifice, the fellowship of a meal, and the necessity of the bond in blood satisfies the yearning of our hearts to rest in the love of God our Creator and Redeemer.

In this series we have been exploring the nature and diversity of the divine covenants, their unity, their promises, and their benefits for us, the believers. We hope to establish and strengthen our faith in the True God and His promises to us as we grow in our understanding of covenantal relationship. We hope to discover the basis of God's provision, God's protection, God's pity, God's preservation, and God's pursuit of His enemies while growing in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ and the New Covenant in His Blood.

Today I want to review essentials of the Covenant of Grace before we go on to the Covenant God made with David. We have looked at the Covenant of Works a/k/a the Adamic Covenant, a/k/a the Covenant of Creation, a/k/a the Covenant of Favor; the Covenant of Preservation with Noah; the Covenant of Promise with Abraham; and the Covenant of Law with Moses.

Dr. Wayne Grudem has written a Systematic Theology used extensively by theologians, seminaries, and lay people. I encourage everyone to utilize this excellent work. What follows is taken from Chapter 25 of Grudem's *Systematic Theology*, Zondervan Publishers, 1994.

Dr. Wayne Grudem defines a covenant as "an unchangeable, divinely imposed legal agreement between God and man that stipulates the conditions of their relationship." These covenants, however, are unilateral. God sets forth the terms and expects them to be kept. There is no negotiation. The covenants being unchangeable means that they may not be changed once established. They may be superseded or replaced by a different covenant, but not changed.

For example, we see in the Covenant with Adam a definition of the relationship between God and man. There was a legally binding set of provisions, clearly defined commands, a promise of punishment for disobedience (death both physical and spiritual; and eternal death and separation from God). The tree of life in the midst of the garden signified the promise of eternal life with God. The conditions would have to be met by complete obedience during the time of testing. But, as Hosea 6:7 states, in referring to the sins of Israel, "But like Adam they transgressed the covenant." (NASB) Not desiring that Adam and Eve eat and live forever in their now fallen state, God sent them away from the Garden and set a guard over the tree of life.

Paul speaks as though perfect obedience, if possible, would lead to life in Romans 7:10 when he speaks of a "commandment which promised life, or the commandment unto life." He quotes Leviticus 18:5 about the provisions of the law that "He who does them shall live by them." (Galatians 3:12; Romans 10:5)

Now God didn't have to provide a way for man to have a relationship with his Creator. He didn't have to make any promises or give clear instruction about what He expected. This is all done out of God's love. The blessing of life for perfect obedience to God's laws continues as does the punishment of death for disobedience. "The wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:23). Even though no sinful human being can pull off the requirement of personal, perfect, perpetual obedience, there it is. But again, out of God's love, the Father sent the Son, Jesus Christ, who fulfilled the Law by His perfect, personal, perpetual obedience; He committed no sin (1 Peter 2:22). He obeyed God on behalf of every true believer (Romans 5:18, 19).

Since the Fall, when Adam sinned and plunged humanity into the estate of sin and misery, all human beings are totally unable to fulfill the provisions of the Covenant of Works on our own and receive its benefits. The only way to receive the blessing of life is by and through Jesus Christ. So eternal life cannot be earned and it is not deserved. Galatians 3:10, 11 tells us that all who rely on works of the law are under a curse... "Now it is evident that no man is justified before God by the Law." The only way a person is freed from the Covenant of Works is by trusting in the work of Christ alone and thus being included in the New Covenant in His Blood, the consummation of the Covenant of Grace.

Starting in Genesis 3, we see God working out in history, in real time, His plan of redemption, all with the goal: "And I will be your God and you will be My people." As time went on, there were variations in detail, but the essential elements are there. Here I will summarize Grudem's points.

1. Jesus mediates the covenant of grace between God and the people whom He will redeem. He fulfills the condition of the covenant in their place and thereby achieves reconciliation, redemption, expiation of guilt and liability of sin through sacrifice, propitiation of the wrath of God, and the destruction of the works of darkness in triumph over the Devil.
2. The requirement of participation in the covenant is faith in the redemptive work of the Messiah. We have discussed the example of Abraham and the Covenant of Promise and Romans 4:1-15. Old Testament believers were saved by looking forward to the Messiah to come, the One who is to come, and by putting their faith in Him. Faith in Christ's work alone is the beginning.
3. Continuing in the Covenant of Grace is the obedience of faith, obedience to God's commands. It doesn't earn any merit with God, but whenever our faith in Christ is genuine, it will produce obedience (James 2:17). Obedience is the evidence that we truly believe. (1 John 2:4-6)
4. The promise of blessings relates to Life, eternal life with God. He will be their God and they will be His people. This promise from God's very heart moves through Scripture from Genesis to Revelation.
5. The sign of the Covenant varies between the Old Testament and the New. With Noah it was the rainbow. With Abraham it was circumcision at the beginning and the sign of continuing the covenant relationship under the Law was keeping the covenant by observing all the feasts and ceremonial laws given at various times. In the New Covenant, the sign of beginning a covenant relationship is baptism. The sign of continuing in that relationship is participation in the Lord's Supper. (Grudem)

Moving through history and following the covenants, we can note that at the time of Adam and Eve there were hints, as in Genesis 3:15 and the promise about the seed of the woman, and in

Genesis 3:21 and the provision of clothing for Adam and Eve, a covering. After the Flood, God made a covenant of preservation with Noah (Genesis 9). The covenant with Noah did not promise blessings of eternal life or spiritual fellowship with God, but it promised that all mankind and the animal creation and the earth would not be destroyed by flood. The rainbow required no active or voluntary participation on the part of people.

It is with Abraham that we see the essential elements of the covenant of grace all being there. Galatians 3:8 says: “the scripture...preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham.” Zechariah, father of John the Baptist, prophesied that the coming of John the Baptist was to prepare the way for Christ, who would fulfill the covenant promises to Abraham. (Luke 1:72, 73)

The covenant God made with Moses at Mount Sinai is called the “old covenant.” (2 Corinthians 3:14; Hebrews 8:6, 13). So we’re not talking about the whole Old Testament but we are talking about the Covenant of Law made with Moses. That provision of Law was given to restrain the sins of the people and to be a custodian to point people to Christ. In Galatians 3:19 Paul says, “Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made.” Galatians 3:24: “The law was our custodian until Christ came.” The Law showed what love looks like, separating what is clean from what is unclean, what is good from what is evil, what is holy from what is unholy, etc.

Out of His grace and love for a people, God instituted the sacrificial system, as we have seen. It did not really take away sins (Hebrews 10:1-4), but it stood as type and symbol of the bearing of sin by Jesus Christ, who is the perfect high priest and perfect sacrifice for sin (Hebrews 9).

The Law cannot save. The Law is holy, spiritual, and good, but it has no power to give Life. Galatians 3:21 says: Is the Law then against the promises of God? Certainly not; for if a law had been given which could make alive, then righteousness would indeed be by the Law.” **The Law cannot make alive.** The Holy Spirit is the Life-producer, the Life-Maker. (John 6:63). The written code kills, but the Spirit gives life. (2 Corinthians 3:6)

In the New Covenant in Christ’s Blood everything is better. The Message to the Hebrews tells all about it. Jesus the Messiah has come. He has lived the life of radical obedience, has died to pay the penalty for sin, and has risen to demonstrate that His offering of Himself was acceptable to His Holy Father. He was sent by the Father to save. His finished work is applied by the Holy Spirit. Jesus revealed the Father, and all salvation is about getting back to the Father. The Holy Spirit has been poured out on His people in power. The laws of God have been written on the hearts of those who believe in Jesus, believe Jesus, and believe what Jesus believes. True believers persevere because the Living God preserves, kept by the power of God. And God will be our God and we will be His people.

Why is it so certain? Because before the creation of anything an agreement which we call the Covenant of Redemption was made among the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father would send the Son and He would give the Son a people who would be redeemed for His own possession (John 17:2, 6). Of all those given to the Son by the Father, the Son would lose none.

The Father would send the Son to be their representative. He would prepare a body for the Son to dwell in as a man; Jesus would be the God-Man, a perfect Mediator, fully God/fully Man. The Father would give Jesus all authority in heaven and on earth, including the authority to pour out the Holy Spirit in power to apply redemption to His people.

The Son agreed to come into the world, God in flesh appearing, God Incarnate. He would be a Son of the Law, living as a man under Mosaic Law, living in perfect, personal, perpetual obedience to all the Father commanded. He would obey unto death, dying physically,

committing His spirit into His Father's hands. None given to Him would be lost. He would bear the curse, bear the sin, bear the shame, bear the wrath of God, bear the glory of God, and be the Surety of the New Covenant.

The Holy Spirit agreed to do the will of the Father. It would be such that the Son would be the Child of the Holy Ghost. Jesus would have the Holy Spirit without measure, empowered for ministry and enabled to fulfill the mission for which He was sent. The Holy Spirit would apply what Jesus accomplished in redemption. He is the Life-Producer, the Life-Maker, the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, the Spirit of Truth, the Spirit of Christ, the Eternal Spirit. Amen.

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Blessing the Covenant Lord and One True God for His faithfulness,

Mary Craig

Mary Craig, D. Min.

"And to you and your descendants I will give the land of your sojourn--all the land of Canaan--as an eternal possession; and I will be their God." Genesis 17:8

"And He told me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give freely from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son." Revelation 21:6, 7.

Bibliography:

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