

Mary Craig Ministries, Inc.

Series: Covenant: God's Way of Relationship



A Teaching Sermon: "Finding God's Purpose in His Covenants"

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A covenant is a bond in blood sovereignly administered. A covenant is characterized by a bond, a binding oath, signs and seals, cutting, a bond in blood, life and death, provisions, and in the case of God's divine covenants, it is unilateral. God's multiple bonds with His people unite into a single relationship. Details may vary, but the covenants of God are one. First, God's covenants manifest a **structural** unity, and secondly, they manifest a **thematic** unity. So by structure and by theme, God's covenants are one.

Each successive covenant builds on the previous relationship, continuing the basic emphasis already established. In the progression of the covenant of grace we can find a unity in historical experience as God deals with His people.

The framework of covenant is "I will be Your God and you will be My people." God is with us. Today we will consider the thematic unity of Divine Covenants and likewise their diversity.

Thematic unity

1. God is with us. Genesis 17:7; Exodus 6.6, 7; Exodus 19.4, 5; Lev. 11.45; Deut. 4.20

God to Abram: **And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you.** Genesis 17:7

For I am the LORD who brings you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy. Leviticus 11:45

2. I will be Your God and you will be My people. 2 Kings 11.17; Ezekiel 34.24-31; Zechariah 2.11, 8.8, 16.

Thus they shall know that I, the LORD their God, am with them, and they, the house of Israel, are My people," says the Lord GOD.''" "You are My flock, the flock of My pasture; you are men, and I am your God," says the Lord GOD. Ezekiel 34:30, 31

As the king is in covenant with God and God is with the king, so also God is with the people under the king. 2 Cor. 6.16.

And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: I will dwell with them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people."

2 Corinthians 6:16

3. God dwells in the midst of His people. From tabernacle to tent of meeting to temple to the city of God, we see the reality of God's residing among His people. It involves the incarnate Christ, the church of Christ, and the final glorification of God's people. When God dwells in the midst, He seals the reality of the fact that He is our God and we are His. The tabernacle was to be constructed that God might dwell among His people. (Exodus 25.8) (Ezekiel 37.26-28)

“Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people. The nations also will know that I, the LORD, sanctify Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forevermore.” Ezekiel 37:26-28

The climax of this theme culminates in a single person, in Christ—not in the tabernacle made by men, but in Christ Incarnate, God in flesh appearing.

“And the Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:14

Christ embodies in Himself the essence of the covenant. Isaiah 42.6; Isaiah 49.8; 55.3, 4. Both kingdom and covenant unite under Immanuel, God with us. It is not “the” blood of the covenant, but My blood of the covenant. (Matthew 26.28) As king-mediator, Christ does not administer merely the laws of the kingdom, but Himself. Jesus is the heart of each covenant, and in each covenant we must look for Him and find Him.

Diversity in the Divine Covenants

We have seen that the covenants of God are one, both in their structure and in their themes. There is a unity which characterizes God's dealings with humanity from creation to consummation. Yet in addition to unity, we can also talk about diversity in the divine covenants.

Pre-creation. Many theologians talk about a pre-creation covenantal bond among the Godhead. You may have heard pastors speak of a “covenant of redemption,” or the “eternal covenant,” or the “counsel of peace,” or the “counsel of redemption.” They are talking about an agreement pre-creation in which God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit agree as to what part they will play in the economy of salvation. This is to show the intention of God from eternity to redeem a people to Himself and to affirm that before the foundation of the world God set His covenantal love upon His people.

Now we cannot show from scripture that such a covenant exists, but we can affirm the role of redemption in the eternal counsels of God. Certainly, there is a pre-creation ordained order of salvation. Whether or not it was a “covenant” with terms and conditions among the Godhead, we cannot prove from Scripture. So perhaps the term “counsel of redemption” is most accurate.

Pre-fall covenant. A second distinction can be made between the pre-fall and post-fall covenants. For pre-fall covenant, some use the term “covenant of works,” some “covenant of favor,” and some “covenant of creation.” All apply to God's relationship to man prior to the fall. The term “works” was chosen to emphasize the testing period Adam went through. If Adam chose properly, a “work,” then he would receive the blessings promised by God. It would have been a work of faith that merited salvation. Others call this same covenant the “covenant of favor” to indicate that God was being gracious to Adam even in the pre-fall covenant. The favor was that God provided a promise for obedience when He had the right to expect perfect,

personal, perpetual obedience from Adam on the basis of the Creator/creature relationship alone. God didn't have to make the promise of life for obedience. That promise in the case of obedience indicated favor.

Still others call this same covenant a covenant of creation because it was made at the time of the creation of humanity.

Post-fall covenant. After the fall we speak of the covenant of grace, for since the fall God graciously provided the means of relationship despite sin and a way back to the Father for people living in the estate of sin and misery. It is not that there are no "works," because in the covenant of grace Christ works for the salvation of His people. His accomplishment of righteousness for sinful human beings is the work. Romans 5. Likewise, Ephesians 2.10 tells us we are created in Christ Jesus unto good works. The final judgment of man is according to works. Salvation is by faith, but judgment is by works.

We will be looking at these three views of the pre-fall covenant in more detail.

A third distinction relates to the diversity of administration within the covenant of grace. Before Christ, we speak of the "old covenant." After Christ, we speak of the "new covenant." The old covenant, or OT, is a shadow of the new, a period of promise and prophecy. The new covenant, NT, is fulfillment of prophecy, the reality of the shadow, and realization of the promises. The Incarnation sets the dividing point. Hebrews and Galatians can tell you more about the contrast between the OT and NT.

One contrast is legalism versus graciousness, another "before faith came" and "faith has come" (Gal. 3.23, 25). Yet the unity, the single way of salvation, is that the inheritance of God's blessing is not based on law, but on promise. (Galatians 3) Law under Moses was never intended to function apart from promise. When people separated from the promise dimension of the Law, the Law could never provide a way for making sinners righteous. Shadowy rituals have to give way to the reality, Christ Jesus our Lord. The law-covenant under Moses did not annul the covenant of promise (Gal. 3.17). Law in distinction from promise was given to reveal sin (Gal. 3.19). The Law uncovered sinful man's inclination to self-trust. The unity of the covenant of grace was not ruptured; rather revelation progressed to bring man closer to Jesus, the way, truth, and life.

O. Palmer Robertson says, "In the covenant of grace we can distinguish:

Adam: the covenant of commencement a/k/a the covenant of creation, the covenant of God's favor, the covenant of works, the covenant of life, the Adamic covenant

Noah: the covenant of preservation

Abraham: the covenant of promise

Moses: the covenant of law

David: the covenant of the kingdom

Christ: the covenant of consummation (Robertson, *Covenants*, page 61)

God through redemption achieves His original purpose of creation. Each successive covenant expands on previous administrations. Each finds its fulfillment in Christ, who embodies the new covenant. Grace and truth come in Jesus.

God has a single purpose—I will be your God and you will be My people. God with us. Christ in us, the hope of glory.

Declaring Jesus Christ, the Promised One, who heals, saves, and delivers,

Mary Craig

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“He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.”
Revelation 21:7

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