

COVENANT PRES NEWCOMERS' CLASS

Class #3 -- The Covenant and Old/New Testaments

Opening Question: What's the big story or narrative of the Bible?

- Creation → Fall → Redemption → Restoration
- Covenants provide an organizational framework to understand the Bible.

What is a covenant?

- In brief, a covenant is a relationship typified by promises and obligations.
- More specifically, "biblical covenants can be defined as elected (as opposed to natural) relationships of obligation, typically ratified by an oath, that include blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience" (Crowe, *The Path of Faith: A Biblical Theology of Covenant and Law*, 3).
- It is by way of covenant that God reveals himself, enters into relationship with his people, and brings about his plan of redemption.

Brief Survey of the Biblical Covenants:

- Adamic: creation and life (Gen. 1-3; Hos 6:7; Rom. 5:12-21)
 - Jesus is the new Adam who is perfectly obedient where the old Adam was disobedient (Rom 5: 18-21; 1 Cor 15:21-22, 45-49; Col 1:15; 3:10)
 - Covenant of grace begins in the Garden: God promise to save Adam and Eve by means of the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15)
- Noahic: re-creation and preservation
 - Noah functions as a new Adam ("Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth"; "I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you" Gen. 9:1, 7, 9).
 - It is through the family of Noah (Shem) that the redeemer (Jesus) would come (Gen. 6:18; 9:9).
- Abrahamic: land and offspring (Gen 12:1-3; 15:18; 17:1-14)
 - Jesus is the "offspring" through whom the promise was to come and all the world would be blessed (Gal. 3:16, 29).
 - The promise of land ultimately extends to the whole world (Rom. 4:13). The land of Canaan was a shadow or type of the worldwide inheritance promised to the people of God.
- Mosaic: law (Ex. 19:3-6; 20:1-17; Deut. 28-29)

- Jesus alone perfectly obeyed all the requirements of the law of God.
- He also bore the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us (Gal 3:13).
- “So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith” (Gal. 3:24).
- Davidic: kingship (2 Sam. 7)
 - The Lord promises to build David a house (2 Sam 7:11); establish his kingdom forever; “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son” (2 Sam 7:14); his throne will be established forever (v.16).
 - Jesus is this son of David (Matt 1:1, Rom. 1:3-4); he is the rightful heir, ruling the nations; seated at the Father’s right hand (Acts 2:31-34; Eph 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb 1:13; 10:13).
- New: fulfillment (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 7:22; 8:6; 9:15; 12:24; 2 Cor. 3:6)
 - Jesus mediates the new covenant (Heb. 7:22; 8:6; 9:15); He is a superior high priest (Heb. 4:14); His blood takes away sin permanently (Heb 10:1-4, 10-14).
 - Law of God written on our hearts (Heb. 8:8; 10:16)
 - Greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2); free access to God (Heb 4:14-16)
 - All of the covenants point to and are fulfilled in Christ.

I. We see the New Testament in harmony with and completing the Old, not replacing it or teaching a different Gospel

NT speaks of OT “scripture” in harmony with the Gospel

- The New Testament is the conclusion of the story that began in the Old Testament.
 - Listen to Paul: “set apart for the gospel of God which he *promised beforehand* through his *prophets* in the *holy scriptures*, concerning his Son, who was descended from *David*, according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power” (Rom. 1:2-4).
 - “That Christ died for our sins in accordance with the *Scriptures*, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the *Scriptures*...” (1 Cor 15:3-4).
- II Tim 3:16 (written in the 60s, likely before the Gospels were in regular circulation); Matt 5:17-20 (Xp and the Law); Heb 4:12

II. In both testaments, the mode of salvation has always been faith -- Heb 10

Berkhof: "Many of the Israelites... sought to base their claim to salvation on a scrupulous fulfillment of [the law] as a body of external precepts. But in the case of those who understood its real nature, who felt the inwardness of and spirituality of the law, it served to deepen the sense of sin and to sharpen the conviction that salvation could be expected only from the grace of God. The essence of real piety [through the history of redemption] was ever-increasingly seen to consist in a confident trust in the God of salvation."

- » So Psalm 25:7,11
- » 1 Pet 1:10 ("prophets... grace")
- » Rom 3:21
- » Heb 3:15--4:2 ("we've had the gospel... just as they")
- » Deut 7:7ff
- » Gen 8:21 (purposeful grace in the face of sin, just as Rom 5:8)
- » Ps 51:1-2
- » Eph 1:4-10 (the comprehensive, eternal plan)

III. Yet, there is continuity and discontinuity resulting from the greatness of the Covenant expressed in Christ.

- Heb 10:1 -- all else was shadow
- Heb 8:6 (remembering 4:2&6); Rev 21:6 -- He is superior / absolute / complete
- Heb 1:1 -- He is final ("he sat down...")
- Colossians 1:15ff -- He has supremacy in everything
 - » So, *discontinuity* in the unique clarity and finality of the Incarnation, but *continuity* in the reliance on the grace of God from eternity

IV. Contrary to what our culture says, the OT is not all about "law" and the NT all about "grace"

A. Covenant of grace begins in the OT (Gen 3:15 & 21)

- E.g., Redemption first (God delivers Israel out of Egypt), then he gives commands at Mt. Sinai (indicative before imperative).
- Exodus 34:6ff (This description reoccurs throughout the OT)
- Deut 7:7ff
- 2 Ki 20 & 1 Ki 21
- Psalm 32
- Isa 53; Jonah 4; Micah 7:18

B. "Law" in the NT, as with OT, the terminology of strict requirements for obedience.

- To live in a relationship with God (covenant) implies that there be rules (law). Any relationship built on love must have rules (e.g., marriage).
- Matt 6:1-4 (specific actions for "reward" - as OT)
- Matt 7:19ff & Jas 2:14-17
- Jn 5:14 (aside: why would this be true? To instruct)
- I Tim 3:4 & 5:9 -- hard & fast criteria
- Phil 2:13

C. There is *one* people of God throughout Scripture, not two.

- Gentiles have been grafted into spiritual Israel (Rom 11:11-24). No longer "strangers and aliens" but "fellow citizens," "members of the household of God" (Eph. 2:19-22).
- Difference between ethnic Israel and spiritual Israel; "circumcision of the heart" vs. "physical circumcision" (Deut 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4; Rom. 2:28-29)
- In the OT, physically belonging to Israel does not negate the need for true saving faith. Faith has always been the mode of membership the Church (Rom 4:1ff & Rom 10:1-3).
- NT believers are describes with same language as OT believers (1 Peter 2:1-10 & 1 Sam 12:22, Ex 19:6, Dt 7:6)
- Eph 1:4 -- how cd. this be true and his people divided?

V. The problem, then, is one shared with God's people in all ages: the way we think about our righteousness

- Lovelace's idea of justification:

"Only a fraction of the present body of professing Christians is solidly appropriating the justifying work of Christ in their lives. Many have so light an apprehension of God's holiness and of the extent and guilt of their sin that consciously they see little need for Grace. Many have a theoretical commitment to this doctrine, but in their day-to-day existence they rely on their sanctification for justification, drawing their assurance of acceptance with God from their sincerity, their past experience of conversion, their recent religious performance or the relative infrequency of their conscious, willful disobedience."

» As with God's people in the past, we are tempted to believe we're righteous when we act righteously. This was Luther's revolution:

to take us back to the righteousness of Christ as our only ground and hope of salvation and sanctification.

» Yet Luther's Law/Gospel dichotomy was an oversimplification

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What is the big story of the Bible? Is there a single, overarching theme?
- 2) What are some ways in which we tend to misunderstand the Old Testament?
- 3) How does the New Testament fulfill the promises made in the Old Testament?
- 4) In what ways are we heirs of the story of the Bible?
- 5) What are some ways in which we can be responsible stewards of the story?

Optional Reading:

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-biblical-covenants/>