

# What is Man?

LESSON  
FOUR

## THE COVENANT OF GRACE



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# What is Man?

## Lesson Four

### The Covenant of Grace

#### INTRODUCTION

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In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Charles Dickens published the novel *A Tale of Two Cities*. At one point near the end of the story, the protagonist is in prison awaiting his execution. But he's rescued through a secret plot in which a free man switches identities with him. The prisoner is set free, and the one who freed him voluntarily dies in his place. In significant ways, this scenario resembles believers' experiences in the covenant of grace. Humanity's fall into sin placed us all under a death sentence. But in the covenant of grace, Jesus became our mediator and representative. And he used that position to do what we couldn't. He took away our death sentence by dying on the cross in our place. And by his righteousness, he earned God's covenant blessings, which he shares with us. So, instead of dying in our sin, now we live in Christ through God's grace.

This is the fourth lesson in our series *What Is Man?* — a series exploring theological anthropology. We've entitled this lesson "The Covenant of Grace" because we'll be focusing on the gracious covenant relationship God established with humanity after our fall into sin.

In the beginning, God made a covenant with humanity through Adam, often referred to as the "covenant of works." This covenant could have resulted in life for humanity. But Adam violated the terms of that covenant, and our entire race fell under the curse of sin. Thankfully, God didn't leave us without hope in our sinful state. Instead, he made additional promises to govern his relationship with humanity, and secured those promises in what theologians often call the "covenant of grace." The *Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapter 7, section 3, describes the purpose of the covenant of grace this way:

**The Lord was pleased to make a second [covenant], commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein He freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved.**

When the Confession says that this covenant is "commonly called" the covenant of grace, it means that the term comes from theologians rather than from the Bible. But this shouldn't worry us, because the same thing is true of many other terms, like "Trinity." And the ideas summarized by the term "covenant of grace" are solidly grounded in Scripture.

For those who have saving faith in Jesus, the covenant of grace repairs the damage we've suffered through Adam's sin. And it does so by providing forgiveness and redemption on the basis of God's mercy in Christ.

Our lesson on the covenant of grace will divide into four parts. First, we'll explore its background in God's eternal counsel. Second, we'll describe its origin in terms of

divine providence. Third, we'll describe its elements. And fourth, we'll survey its historical administration. Let's begin with God's eternal counsel.

## ETERNAL COUNSEL

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The covenant of grace has its roots in God's eternal plan for history, which theologians refer to as his "eternal counsel" or "eternal decree." From the perspective of God's eternal decree, the covenant of grace flows out of an arrangement between the persons of the Trinity.

Even before God created the world, he knew humanity would fall into sin. And in light of that reality, he created a plan to save us. And that plan involved all three persons of the Trinity committing themselves to different aspects of our salvation. Evangelical traditions disagree over the precise commitments they made. But we all agree that God planned to redeem sinners through Christ's death on our behalf.

**God, in the beginning of the world, in the beginning of creation, he had already planned what to do with man... And therefore, in his creation, it was not afterthought for him to plan for Jesus Christ; for example, that Jesus eventually who would be the one who would come to redeem and cure this problem of sin... And therefore that's what we read in the Bible that he already saved the seed of a woman who would be the one to crush the serpent, would be the one to crush sin. And when it says the seed of a woman, he referred to the birth of Jesus Christ, as we know it in the Christmas story... And this is God's plan from eternity past.**

— Prof. Mumo Kisau

For our purposes in this lesson, we'll focus our attention on just three aspects of God's eternal counsel that relate to our redemption. First, we'll look at the timing of God's counsel. Second, we'll consider the roles assigned to the various members of the Trinity. And third, we'll focus on the fulfillment of God's eternal counsel in the covenant of grace. Let's look first at the timing of this agreement.

## TIMING

God's plan to redeem human beings from the corruption and consequences of our sin was made before he created the universe. This timing is mentioned in places like Ephesians 3:11, which speaks of God's "eternal purpose," historically accomplished by Jesus. Second Thessalonians 2:13 says that we were chosen for salvation "from the beginning." And 2 Timothy 1:9, 10 speaks of grace that was given to us "before the beginning of time."

As an example, listen to what Paul wrote in Ephesians 1:3-4:

**The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ... chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight (Ephesians 1:3-4).**

Here, Paul said that our redemption was determined before the creation of the world. And in Ephesians 1:11 we read:

**In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will (Ephesians 1:11).**

In this, and several other passages in the New Testament, God's decree of salvation is referred to by the Greek word *proorizo*. This term is most commonly translated "predestination." In context, it means that God's eternal decree of salvation was foreordained, or decided before the world began. The word *proorizo* is also used in places like Romans 8:29, 30 and Ephesians 1:5.

Different theological traditions understand God's eternal counsel regarding salvation in different ways. Some teach that God didn't choose specific people, but simply proclaimed that all who would receive Christ would be saved. Others think that God looked down the corridor of time and acknowledged those specific people that he knew would come to faith. And still others believe that God chose particular individuals purely on the basis of his good pleasure, and that his choice of them guarantees that they'll come to faith in Christ. But we can all agree that God's decision to save sinners was made as part of his eternal counsel, before the foundation of the world.

Having looked at God's eternal counsel in terms of its timing, let's turn to the roles the members of the Trinity assumed.

## TRINITY

God's eternal plan of redemption involves the work of all three persons of the Trinity. The Father originated the agreement because of his desire to redeem fallen human beings from the curse of sin. In particular, Scripture says that it was the Father's plan to save us. For instance, in Ephesians 3:10-11, Paul taught:

**[God's] intent was that ... the manifold wisdom of God should be made known ... according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ (Ephesians 3:10-11).**

According to Paul, it was the *Father's* eternal purpose to accomplish our redemption through Christ. We see the same thing in Ephesians 1:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; and 1 Peter 1:20.

Correspondingly, the Son agreed to add a perfect human nature to his perfect divine nature, so that he could die on behalf of sinners. That's why in 2 Timothy 1:9, Paul

said that we received grace in the Son before the beginning of time. And we see something similar in John 17:4, 5.

And just as God's eternal counsel decreed roles for the Father and the Son, it also determined the Holy Spirit's part. The Holy Spirit agreed to enable and empower the Son's work, and to apply salvation to those whom the Son redeemed. Listen to what Paul wrote in 2 Thessalonians 2:13:

**But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:13).**

In this passage, Paul indicated that the Father's choice was made from the beginning, that is, before creation. And that plan involved the Holy Spirit's agreement to perform the sanctifying work of applying salvation to us. Moreover, the name "Lord" probably refers to Jesus here, so that all three persons of the Trinity are mentioned.

**All three persons of the Trinity, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, were and are involved in our salvation. The Father planned our salvation from eternity past, chose his people in spite of who we would be, chose us in grace, chose us in Christ, and covenanted with the Son, that the Son would come to redeem us. He gave us to the Son, as Jesus says in his prayer in John 17, that Father had given us to him before eternity began — before creation began. And the Son has come, has taken our human nature, offered the obedience that we owed but failed to offer, offered himself as the sacrifice, and rose again. So, he came as the *accomplisher* of our redemption. The Father is the planner, the *purposer*, the giver of the Son. The Son is the *accomplisher* of our salvation, and the Holy Spirit is the *applier* of our salvation. He's the one who brings our stony hearts to life, makes them tender to God's word, who gives us the ability to believe and trust in Christ and so to be united vitally to Christ.**

— Dr. Dennis E. Johnson

Having considered God's eternal counsel with respect to its timing and the persons of the Trinity, let's look at the fulfillment of this counsel in the covenant of grace.

## **FULFILLMENT**

God's eternal counsel is his plan of what will happen in history. And the covenant of grace fulfills part of that plan. The persons of the Trinity always knew that humanity would fall into sin. And they always intended to redeem human beings through Christ's

life, death, burial, resurrection and ascension. They decreed these things in their eternal counsel. And they implemented them in history through the covenant of grace.

Consider, for instance, that the Father eternally decreed our redemption in Christ. And then he fulfilled this decree in the covenant of grace by sending the Son and the Spirit to do their work. He also appointed the Son to the office of Messiah or Christ, which was necessary to his redemptive work. In Acts 2:36, Peter told the Jews:

**God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36).**

In John 5:36, Jesus himself said:

**The very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me (John 5:36).**

And in John 6:38, Jesus added:

**I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me (John 6:38).**

Clearly, when God the Son, Jesus Christ, came to do his saving work, he was executing the Father's plan. The Father also gave the Son his powerful Spirit without limit, as we learn in John 3:34. And he prepared the Son's perfect human nature, as recorded in Hebrews 10:5.

For his part, God the Son also fulfilled his eternal agreement to redeem humanity. He veiled his divine glory, added a full human nature to his full divine nature, lived a perfect life, and died an atoning death. Listen to Paul's explanation in Philippians 2:5-8:

**Christ Jesus ... being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:5-8).**

Jesus became incarnate for the specific purpose of dying on a cross to save us from our sins. And 2 Timothy 1:9, 10 indicates that he provided this grace to fallen human beings to fulfill God's eternal counsel. Listen to how Hebrews 2:13-17 puts it:

**[Jesus] says, "Here am I, and the children God has given me." Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might ... make atonement for the sins of the people (Hebrews 2:13-17).**

Here, the author interpreted Isaiah 8:18 to mean that the Son had come to die as an atonement for the people the Father had previously given him, in fulfillment of their eternal counsel. We find similar statements in Romans 8:3, 4 and Galatians 4:4, 5.



And the Holy Spirit fulfills his part in God's eternal counsel, too. He enabled and empowered the Son's incarnation and subsequent work by conceiving the Son's human nature in his mother Mary, as recorded in Matthew 1:20 and Luke 1:34, 35. The Holy Spirit also empowered Christ's death on the cross, as we're told in Hebrews 9:14. And he was instrumental in Christ's resurrection, as Paul taught in Romans 8:11.

Beyond this, the Holy Spirit also continually fulfills his agreement to apply salvation to us. He regenerates our spirits, as we see in John 3:5-8, and Titus 3:5-7. He empowers us to resist sin, as we learn in Romans 7:6. He gives us the spiritual gifts that are part of our salvation, as 1 Corinthians 12:11 says. And he secures our salvation, as Ephesians 1:13, 14 teaches. We might summarize the Spirit's work by saying that he is the person of the Trinity that enables, empowers and applies the Son's saving work in the world. Wherever God's power is shown, and wherever salvation is realized, the Holy Spirit is fulfilling God's eternal counsel regarding our redemption.

God's eternal counsel regarding our redemption should be a great comfort to believers. It reminds us that the tragedies we see in history, including the murder of Jesus Christ, aren't problems that God struggles to solve. They aren't unforeseen crises that require his creative solutions. Rather, they're obstacles he has designed to accomplish his greater purposes of redemption. So, no matter what happens to us in life — and many terrible things do and will happen — God has a plan. And that plan will *unfailingly* bring believers to salvation and glory through the covenant of grace.

Having considered the background of the covenant of grace in God's eternal counsel, let's explore its origin in terms of divine providence.

## PROVIDENCE

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In contrast to God's eternal counsel, which was determined *before* the creation of the world, providence is God's preservation and governance of creation in *history*. It involves all of his interactions with the universe, with particular emphasis on his creatures and their actions. So, when we think about God's offer of salvation as a response to humanity's sin, we're approaching the covenant of grace from the perspective of providence.

We'll address the covenant of grace in terms of providence by looking at two ideas. First, we'll explore how human sin made the covenant of grace necessary. And second, we'll look at Christ's role as mediator of the covenant of grace. Let's look first at how our sin necessitated the covenant of grace.

## SIN

Historically, the covenant of grace was necessary to restore humanity's ability to fulfill the cultural mandate of Genesis 1:26-28. As we saw in a prior lesson, Adam and Eve broke the terms of God's covenant by eating the forbidden fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. And God responded by cursing humanity. This resulted in

the corruption of our beings, alienation from God and other people, and physical and spiritual death.

Humanity justly deserved God's curses. But these curses created a problem; after all, God created humanity as images to reflect his glory, and as rulers that would expand his heavenly kingdom to cover the whole earth. In our fallen state, we couldn't do those things to his satisfaction. Our corruption prevented us from being *able* to please him, and even from *wanting* to please him. Our alienation kept us away from his presence, and prevented us from cooperating to build human culture throughout the world. And death kept us from enjoying the blessings of his kingdom.

But God didn't leave us without hope in our state of misery. In the face of these huge problems, God's solution was to redeem us. He didn't withhold his covenant judgment against Adam and Eve. But he did restrain it so that they didn't die right then and there. And beyond this, he graciously offered to redeem them. This offer of redemption appears in God's curse against the serpent. In Genesis 3:15, God told the serpent:

**I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel (Genesis 3:15).**

In executing covenant judgment, God promised that a human descendant of Eve would eventually crush the serpent's head. Revelation 12:9 identifies the serpent with Satan. So, the promise in Genesis was God's way of foretelling that a human being would eventually conquer Satan's sinful kingdom. This person would rescue humanity and save them from sin's oppression and condemnation. Theologians often refer to this announcement by the Latin term *protoevangelium*, or its Greek-based equivalent *protoeuangelion*, both of which mean "first gospel." And this first gospel marked the beginning of the historical covenant of grace.

Louis Berkhof, who lived from 1873 to 1957, explained the gracious nature of this covenant in his *Systematic Theology*, part 2, section 3, chapter 3. Listen to what he said there:

**This covenant may be called a gracious covenant, because in it God allows a Surety to meet our obligations; because He Himself provides the Surety in the person of His Son, who meets the demands of justice; and because by His grace, revealed in the operation of the Holy Spirit, He enables man to live up to His covenant responsibilities. The covenant originates in the grace of God, is executed in virtue of the grace of God, and is realized in the lives of sinners by the grace of God. It is grace from the beginning to the end for the sinner.**

In the initial covenant with Adam, humanity's blessings and curses were completely contingent on our works. If we obeyed, we'd be blessed; if we disobeyed, we'd be cursed. This is why God's first covenant with humanity has been called the "covenant of works." But the covenant of grace is different. Rather than depending on

our works, it depends on Jesus' works. He fulfills the terms of God's covenant for us. And then he graciously shares his covenant blessings with the people he saves.

**In our theology, we sometimes speak of the covenant of works, which God made with Adam before the Fall, and the covenant of grace that God enters into with sinful humanity after the Fall as a way to bestow upon them, upon us, the great salvation in Jesus Christ. And it's important to distinguish these covenants. There are some different things going on with these covenants, and yet they also are related in some very important organic ways. In terms of understanding the distinction between them, the thing that I think is most important is to focus upon those terms "works" and "grace"... We might say that the covenant of works is all about the law, whereas the covenant of grace proclaims the gospel to us. But even in saying that, it's important to see their relationship, because it's not as if God simply cancelled out the covenant of works after our fall. It's not as if God said, "Well, sin doesn't really matter," or "Obeying my law doesn't really matter." Part of the good news of the covenant of grace is that Christ has actually come and he has satisfied God's law. Christ has done all that the covenant of works demanded. He has obeyed God's law perfectly and he's also suffered the penalty of disobeying that law. And so, as we look to Christ in the covenant of grace, we are fleeing to him and believing in him as one who has actually fulfilled all that God originally desired humanity to fulfill.**

— Dr. David VanDrunen

From the perspective of providence, God could have utterly condemned humanity when we sinned. But as we've seen, that wouldn't have accomplished his purposes for us. Unfortunately, the covenant of works didn't provide a way for covenant disobedience to be forgiven. Worse, God couldn't simply ignore the covenant of works, because a covenant is a solemn oath. And God can't break his oaths.

So, God presented the covenant of grace as a solution to the problem. We can think of the covenant of grace as an expansion and continuation of the covenant of works. The covenant of grace incorporates all the terms of the covenant of works, including its divine benevolence, requirements of human loyalty, and consequences. In this way, it preserves the covenant of works. But it also introduces additional divine benevolence, additional requirements of human loyalty, and additional consequences. And it's these additions that provide the way for our redemption.

Having seen that divine providence required the covenant of grace as a response to human sin, let's focus on Christ's role as mediator of the covenant.

## **MEDIATOR**

The covenant of works took the form of a typical suzerain-vassal treaty, with a fairly simple relationship between the covenanted parties. God was the suzerain, and humanity was the vassal. And Adam served as the head or representative of God's vassal people.

In the covenant of grace, these same parties retained their positions. God was still the suzerain, humanity was still the vassal, and, at least at first, Adam was still the head or representative of humanity. But in addition to these parties, God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, joined the covenant as its mediator. As the mediator, the Son intercedes for God's covenant people. He reconciles us to God by taking both the blame and the punishment for our sins. He preserves the integrity of the covenant, and the lives of his people, by suffering the covenant curses on our behalf. Similarly, through his obedience to the covenant's requirements of human loyalty, the Son *earns* the covenant blessings for himself. And then shares them with the sinners he redeems.

Louis Berkhof had the Son's role as mediator in mind when he referred to the covenant's "Surety" in his *Systematic Theology*, part 2, section 3, chapter 3. Listen again to this part of his explanation:

**This covenant may be called ... gracious ... because ... God allows a Surety to meet our obligations; [and] because He Himself provides the Surety in the person of His Son.**

The Son began to mediate the covenant of grace when it was first made — back in the Garden of Eden, when God first offered redemption to Adam and Eve. And he's continued to mediate ever since. Throughout the Old Testament age, his mediation provided forgiveness and salvation for the Old Testament saints, all on the basis of his promised future work. No one was ever saved on the basis of his or her own merit or worthiness, since no works of obedience can erase our sin. And no one was ever saved on the basis of sacrificed animals, since no animal's death could really be a sufficient substitute for a human being. The author of Hebrews put it this way in Hebrews 10:11:

**Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins (Hebrews 10:11).**

As Paul explained in Colossians 2:17:

**These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ (Colossians 2:17).**

**You know, one of the questions we ask ourselves very instinctively when we realize that we are saved on the basis of Christ's historical work, what about the Old Testament saints? Were they saved? Were**

**they saved through this achievement of Christ even though it had not yet happened? Or was God perhaps operating by different ground rules back then? The Bible tells us that they were saved by their faith, their faith in the promises that God had made to them. Now, that was sufficient for their salvation, but on what basis could God offer salvation to an Old Testament saint who had expressed saving faith? Unknowns to them, the necessary and singular basis for all salvation is the merits of Jesus Christ. So, in a sense, they were anonymous Christians. They would not be fully informed about the basis for their salvation in their lifetimes, but let us be sure that there is no other name under heaven whereby anyone, before or after the cross, can be saved.**

— Dr. Glen G. Scorgie

The Old Testament ordinances were symbols that God's people performed in faith. But the power of these ordinances was the mediatorial work of the Son. That's why Abraham rejoiced to see Jesus' day, as we read in John 8:56. And it's why so many figures in the New Testament claimed that Moses and the prophets explained the work that Jesus would come to do. Abraham made this claim in Jesus' parable of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16:29-31. Phillip said the same thing in John 1:45. Paul said it in Acts 26:22 and 28:23. And after his resurrection, Jesus explained it on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24:27, and to the gathered disciples in Luke 24:44.

The Son's mediation of the covenant of grace centered around his incarnation as Jesus, his life of perfect faith and obedience, his death on the cross, his resurrection from the dead, and his ascension into heaven. As mediator of the covenant of grace, he fulfilled the covenant of works on our behalf, and guaranteed that we would receive its blessings.

In Romans 5:12-19, Paul contrasted Adam's role in the covenant of works with the Son's role in the covenant of grace. And he did this to show how the Son's role as mediator fulfilled both covenants. He began in verses 12-14 by explaining that Adam's sin had thrown the entire human race under the curse of sin and death. And at the end of this passage, he indicated that Adam and Jesus held similar covenant roles. In Romans 5:14, he wrote:

**Adam ... was a pattern of the one to come (Romans 5:14).**

Then, in Romans 5:15-19, Paul argued that Adam and Jesus had parallel but opposite histories as our covenant representatives. Adam's history revolved around sin, failure, condemnation and death. In Adam, humanity received the only covenant consequence available to us: condemnation. Listen to Paul's words about *Adam* in Romans 5:15-19:

**The many died by the trespass of the one man ... The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation ... [B]y the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man ... [T]he result of one**

**trespass was condemnation for all men ... [T]hrough the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners (Romans 5:15-19).**

All humanity was condemned in Adam because the covenant of works was based entirely on justice. It didn't provide a mechanism for mercy and forgiveness. It didn't provide a mediator. So, once we were condemned, there was nothing anyone could do within the covenant of works to reverse our condemnation.

But in this same passage, Paul also explained that Jesus succeeded where Adam had failed. Jesus' righteous works benefited us because the covenant of grace *does* provide a mechanism for mercy and forgiveness. And that mechanism is the mediation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As a result, Jesus' history centers on obedience, righteousness, justification and life. Now listen to what Paul said about *Jesus* in Romans 5:15-19:

**God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow[ed] to the many ... [T]he gift followed many trespasses and brought justification... [T]hose who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness [will] reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ... [T]he result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men... [T]hrough the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous (Romans 5:15-19).**

Redemption is possible under the covenant of grace because Jesus isn't just our representative; he's also our mediator. And that enables him to take away our personal, individual guilt. As we read in Hebrews 9:15:

**Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance — now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant (Hebrews 9:15).**

And 1 Timothy 2:5-6 says:

**There is ... one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom (1 Timothy 2:5-6).**

**Jesus' role as the mediator of the covenant of grace is really surprising. I would say, first of all, that the Lord Jesus is priest and sacrifice that initiates the covenant of grace, or the new covenant, if you will... And at the Last Supper, the Lord Jesus in the Gospels explained that his sacrificial death had significance at two levels. Yes, it was an atoning sacrifice in which he suffered the wrath of the holy God for our sins in our place so that we could escape it, but he also described his death as a covenant-initiating sacrifice. His blood**

**initiated the new covenant, he says in Matthew and Luke very clearly. So, his death is that sacrifice that brings about the new covenant era. So, Jesus is, on the one hand, the priest offering the sacrifice, and yet surprisingly, he is the sacrifice himself.**

— Dr. Charles L. Quarles

Jesus' role as our fully divine and fully human covenant mediator is what enabled him to atone for our sin by dying in our place. And because this solution to human sin will always be available in the covenant of grace, there will never be a need for divine providence to introduce another covenant, another covenant representative, or another mediator.

So far in our lesson, we've considered the covenant of grace in terms of God's eternal counsel and divine providence. Now let's turn to our third major topic: the covenant's elements.

## ELEMENTS

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We began our study of theological anthropology by focusing on the origin of humanity. As part of our discussion, we described humanity's original covenant with God in terms of three elements common to ancient Near Eastern suzerain-vassal treaties. These treaties consisted of: the benevolence of the suzerain toward the vassal, the loyalty the suzerain required from the vassal, and the consequences of the vassal's loyalty or disloyalty to the covenant. With these elements in place, ancient Near Eastern covenants became binding laws between nations.

And something similar was true of God's covenants with humanity. The original covenant with Adam — the covenant of works — was based on God's divine benevolence toward us. For instance, he created our first parents, assigned them authority over creation, and gave them food and shelter. God also required human loyalty in the form of heartfelt priestly and royal obligations. Among other things, God expected Adam and Eve to serve him in the Garden of Eden, and to expand the borders of his kingdom to fill the earth. And the consequences of the covenant included the blessing of greater life if Adam and Eve trusted and obeyed the covenant, and the curse of death and condemnation if they distrusted and disobeyed. The covenant of grace maintains all of these elements from the covenant of works. But it also expands them to account for humanity's sinful nature and Christ's mediation.

We'll explore each of these expanded elements in order. First, we'll consider divine benevolence in the covenant of grace. Second, we'll reflect on the human loyalty it requires. And third, we'll address its consequences. Let's begin with divine benevolence.

## **DIVINE BENEVOLENCE**

In many ways, God's benevolence is the most prominent feature of the covenant of grace. Goodness and kindness motivated the Father to send the Son as our mediator, and motivated the Son to rejoice in that assignment. Benevolence moved God to create a covenant arrangement in which he himself would fulfill the conditions that we couldn't fulfill, so that we could be given rewards that we could never earn. It's what makes the announcement of the gospel such good news — that the priceless gifts of forgiveness and life are available to us for free. We serve a great and loving God, who has sworn a solemn covenant vow to be good to us.

God's benevolence is the first part of the covenant of grace that Scripture reveals. In Genesis 3:14-19, when God first enforced the consequences of the covenant of works, he displayed tremendous benevolence. The covenant of works stated that Adam and Eve, and all humanity with them, could justly be put to death if they ate the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. But when God rendered his judgments, he tempered his justice with mercy, goodness and kindness. The first benevolence was that he let humanity live. He allowed us to continue to multiply and fill the earth. He permitted us to continue to cultivate the ground, and to produce sufficient food for our survival. And most importantly, he promised to send us a redeemer that would reverse the curse of sin. As he told the serpent in Genesis 3:15:

**The woman[’s] ... offspring ... will crush your head, and you will strike his heel (Genesis 3:15).**

As you'll recall, this judgment was a figurative way of saying that, ultimately, a human being would conquer Satan's kingdom and rescue us from the curse of sin. This provision alone would have been an amazingly benevolent gift. But God increased his benevolence even more when this redeemer turned out to be God the Son himself. Jesus agreed to bear our sin in his own person on the cross. And even before his incarnation, he agreed to serve as mediator or "surety" for the covenant of grace. Beyond this, the Holy Spirit contributed benevolence as well when he agreed to work within sinful humanity to bring us to faith, so that we would receive redemption. Paul talked about this aspect of the Holy Spirit's work in 1 Corinthians 2:12-14, where he wrote:

**We have ... received ... the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us... The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:12-14).**

We find similar ideas in places like John 6:63-65 and Ephesians 2:8, 9.

Of course, theological traditions don't always agree on how the Spirit works to bring us to faith. We can illustrate the Spirit's work of conversion in terms of two roads or paths. One path represents receiving Christ as Savior. And the other represents rejecting him. All evangelical Christians should agree that the Holy Spirit providentially



causes people to encounter the gospel, and to be faced with this decision. But there are at least three major views regarding the Spirit's involvement in this process.

First, some theological traditions believe that human beings have the natural ability to choose either the path to salvation or the path to destruction. In this view, the Spirit's providential work focuses on bringing us into an encounter with the gospel.

The second view agrees that the Holy Spirit orchestrates our lives so that we encounter the gospel. But it also believes that fallen human beings lack the natural ability to respond positively to the gospel. In our fallen state, we would always choose the path of destruction. So, in this view, the Holy Spirit provides prevenient grace, or grace that comes before saving faith, that enables us to choose the path of salvation. Once we receive this grace, both paths are open to us, and we can choose either to receive or to reject Christ.

The third major view agrees that the Holy Spirit causes us to encounter the gospel and that we lack the natural ability to choose life. But, in this view, the Holy Spirit provides *irresistible* grace to those he chooses to save. This grace not only *enables* us to choose the path of salvation, but actually *ensures* that we will. But regardless of the view we take, all Evangelicals should agree that the Spirit's work is an act of goodness and kindness toward us.

Having considered divine benevolence as one of the elements of the covenant of grace, let's turn our attention to human loyalty.

## HUMAN LOYALTY

The covenant of grace requires absolute obedience to God, just as the covenant of works did. In fact, the requirements of human loyalty actually increased in the covenant of grace. We'll look at this idea in more depth when we explore the covenant's administration later in this lesson. So, for now, we simply want to make the point that the covenant of grace requires heartfelt human loyalty.

Under the covenant of works, the requirement of human loyalty had to be fulfilled twice. First, it had to be fulfilled by Adam, our covenant representative. If Adam had been fully loyal to God, his obedience would have been counted as humanity's corporate obedience. And although Adam failed in this regard, the covenant of grace continues to hold us accountable to this standard. We can't avoid its judgment simply because we're unable to change our past.

Second, the covenant of works also required our personal loyalty. For instance, Eve wasn't judged only as part of Adam's race. She was also judged for her own actions. This indicates that God required her personal obedience. It might have been possible, for instance, for Adam to have obeyed God but for one of his descendants to have fallen into sin. In such a case, while this sin wouldn't have condemned all humanity, it would have condemned the sinner.

But one of the beautiful benevolences in the covenant of grace is that Jesus acts as our covenant head and mediator. As our covenant head, he's already fulfilled the requirement of corporate human loyalty through his perfect obedience to God. And as our mediator, he's stood in the place of each of us, and thereby fulfilled the requirements of

personal loyalty. Wherever we've sinned, he's taken the blame. And wherever he's been faithful, he's credited his faithfulness to our account. So, even though the requirements of human loyalty have *increased* in the covenant of grace, they've become much *easier* to meet — because Jesus, our mediator, fulfills them on our behalf.

**I think the first place to start when we think about this issue of our loyalty to God is to realize that apart from the grace of God that has been demonstrated in the person of Jesus Christ that we will not have the ability to be loyal to God. I think that's the first place to begin in realizing that we need to rely on a power or a grace that is outside of us... And what we need to understand is that if we think that the loyalty comes from within us apart from what God has done for us in the person of Jesus Christ then we will fail even though we're trying so desperately to be loyal. So we need to look at the loyalty of another. We need to look at the fact that Jesus Christ was the perfect servant who came to meet the demands of the radical nature of the law, and that loyalty, and that fidelity, and that allegiance, and that obedience, and that service now gets imputed to us.**

— Dr. Stephen Um

Theologian John Wesley, who lived from 1703 to 1791, described God's requirement of human loyalty in section 1, part 8 of his *Sermon 6: The Righteousness of Faith*. Listen to what he said:

**Strictly speaking, the covenant of grace doth not require us to do anything at all, as absolutely and indispensably necessary in order to our justification; but only, to believe in Him who, for the sake of his Son, and the propitiation which he hath made, “justifieth the ungodly that worketh not.”**

Here, Wesley appealed to Romans 4:5 as proof that the only thing the covenant of grace absolutely requires of us personally is to have faith in God for our salvation in Christ. In this regard, Wesley concurred with the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapter 7, section 3, which we read earlier. Listen again to what it says:

**The Lord was pleased to make a second [covenant], commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein He freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved.**

Evangelicals agree that the only thing we absolutely have to do to be saved is possess saving faith in God. And this is in full agreement with the teaching of Scripture. As just one example, recall Paul's second missionary journey, recorded in Acts 15:36–18:22. During that journey, Paul and Silas were jailed in Philippi for preaching the gospel. But around midnight, an earthquake freed them from their chains. The jailor

assumed they had fled, and was about to kill himself, when Paul shouted for him to stop because the prisoners had chosen to remain. The jailor was so impressed by their concern for his life that he immediately wanted to convert to Christianity. Listen to the conversation between the jailor and Paul and Silas in Acts 16:30-31:

**[The jailor] brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:30-31).**

Christ’s mediation in the covenant of grace is so effective that it fulfills all God’s covenant requirements for us. Even our faith doesn’t count as a positive work that we’ve done. Our faith is just the means God ordinarily uses to credit Christ’s righteousness to us. But that doesn’t mean that God has lessened the requirements of his covenant. And he certainly doesn’t tell us that we’re free to sin. On the contrary, as Jesus told his disciples in John 14:15:

**If you love me, you will obey what I command (John 14:15).**

The English Puritan pastor Walter Marshall, who lived from 1628 to 1680, addressed this matter in “direction” or “chapter” 8 of his book, *The Gospel-Mystery of Sanctification*. Listen to what he said:

**It is, indeed, one part of our salvation, to be delivered from the bondage of the covenant of works; but the end of this is, not that we may have liberty to sin (which is the worst of slavery) but that we may fulfil the royal law of liberty ... What a strange kind of salvation do they desire, that care not for holiness! They would be saved, and yet be altogether dead in sin, aliens from the life of God, bereft of the image of God, deformed by the image of Satan, his slaves and vassals to their own filthy lusts, utterly unmeet for the enjoyment of God in glory. Such a salvation as that was never purchased by the blood of Christ.**

There have always been Christians who believe that as long as we profess faith in Jesus, we don’t have to worry about obeying God. But Scripture makes it clear that true believers are still required to demonstrate loving, sincere loyalty to God. We do this partly by continuing to have faith in Jesus, and partly by obeying God’s covenant law. We see this in places like James 2:22-25; and Revelation 14:12.

Now, it’s true that if we really believe the gospel, we can’t fail to be saved. Jesus’ sacrifice ensures that we’ll never fall under God’s curse. And his perfect loyalty ensures that we’ll receive many covenant blessings as gracious gifts — things like forgiveness and eternal life. But our actions still have covenant consequences for this world and the next. For example, Hebrews 12:5-11 teaches that God lovingly disciplines us in this world when we sin. Moreover, our personal loyalty — even though it’s imperfect in this world — earns rewards from God in the next world. We see this in Matthew 6:20; Mark 10:21; and Luke 12:33, 34.

So, when we think about human loyalty in the covenant of grace, it's critical to remember that Jesus has entirely taken away our curse. As long as we remain faithful to him, we can never suffer the everlasting negative consequences of God's covenant. But we're still obligated not to sin. In a similar way, many of our blessings are purchased by Christ, and aren't dependent on our personal loyalty. Even so, the covenant still obligates us to obey him.

**We're saved by grace through faith in Christ Jesus — no other way to be saved. Some might ask, "Then what motive do you have to obey him? What motive do you have to love?" I think the motive actually comes in the next couple verses. This all comes out of Ephesians 2, of course, where it says, well, "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works." So, if we're saved by grace through faith — I think you just keep on tracking that down — we're going to be doing good works. Now, the question comes, if we're *not* doing good works, what are we? I think it's a fair question: Are we really saved by grace through faith in Christ Jesus?**

— Dr. Matt Friedeman

Now that we've looked at the elements of divine benevolence and human loyalty, let's address the consequences of the covenant of grace.

## CONSEQUENCES

From a legal perspective, the covenant of grace includes and expands on all the consequences of the covenant of works. As Paul taught in Romans 5:12-14, death is still a corporate result of Adam's sin, just as it was in the covenant of works. And we still have to suffer for our personal sins, too, just as Adam and Eve did in Genesis 3:16-18. Moreover, the covenant curses have been increased now that Christ has come. As we read in Hebrews 10:28-30:

**Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? (Hebrews 10:28-30).**

In the same way, the blessings of the covenant of works have also been included and expanded in the covenant of grace. In the covenant of works, Adam and humanity would have received everlasting life on earth if they had obeyed God. In fact, their banishment from the Garden of Eden was designed to keep them from the Tree of Life, to make sure that they *wouldn't* live forever. And the covenant of grace restores this

blessing in the form of eternal physical and spiritual life. It promises that ultimately we'll live in the earthly paradise of the new heavens and new earth. We'll even have restored access to the Tree of Life, just as John foresaw in Revelation 21:1–22:5.

But more than this, our redemption under the covenant of grace increases our blessings beyond those offered in the covenant of works. For instance, in our final state of redemption, the possibility of sin and its consequences will be completely removed.

In an earlier lesson, we referred to the teaching of Augustine, the bishop of Hippo who lived from A.D. 354 to 430. He described humanity's original, sinless state as *posse non peccare*, meaning that humanity had the ability not to sin. But under the covenant of works, they also had the ability to sin, or *posse peccare*. Augustine taught that, through our redemption in Christ, we'll eventually reach the state of *non posse peccare*, which is Latin for the inability to sin. This state will be far better than even our best condition under the covenant of works, because it will secure us forever in God's blessings.

Moreover, under the covenant of grace, our blessings now include union with Christ. Paul was so engaged with this idea that he referred to it constantly throughout his writings. Phrases like "in Christ," "in Christ Jesus," "in the Lord" and "in him" appear well over a hundred times in his works. Some theologians understand this union with Christ to be a matter of covenant representation. Others understand it in terms of a spiritual union. And others believe it includes both. But in all cases, our union with our mediator Jesus Christ creates a personal relationship that transforms every aspect of our lives for the better. And its blessings far exceed anything we would have received in the covenant of works. After all, now we receive the blessings that Christ himself earns as God's perfect Son and king over his kingdom, instead of just the blessings we could have earned ourselves.

And of course, we can't forget the blessing that if we have faith in Jesus, he bears the covenant curses in our place. When we sin, we still violate God's covenant and earn its negative consequences. But instead of punishing *us*, God assigns our punishment to *Jesus*. And Jesus already dealt with it on the cross. So, for believers, the covenant of grace has no curses; it only has blessings! Because of this fact, older theologians sometimes referred to Adam's sin as a "fortunate" or "happy" event. Certainly his sin was evil, and God rightly condemned it. But redemption in the covenant of grace is so much better than humanity's original condition that we're actually better off for Adam having sinned.

The scholastic theologian Thomas Aquinas, who was born around 1225 and died in 1274, described this fact in his *Summa Theologica*, part 3, question 1, article 3, reply to objection 3. Listen to how he put it:

**There is no reason why human nature should not have been raised to something greater after sin. For God allows evils to happen in order to bring a greater good therefrom; hence it is written: "Where sin abounded, grace did more abound." Hence, too ... we say: "O happy fault, that merited such and so great a Redeemer!"**

The covenant of grace adds so many wonderful elements to God's relationship with his people that its blessings are nearly limitless. God's benevolence is tremendously increased by his offer of redemption and his appointment of his own Son as our mediator.

The covenant requirement of human loyalty is met by our mediator on our behalf, and we receive his Holy Spirit to strengthen our growth in faith, obedience and holiness. For those who believe, the covenant curses are completely erased, while the covenant blessings are magnified by our share in Jesus' own inheritance. Adam's failure in the covenant of works placed humanity in a terrible position before God. But the redemption that we receive through the covenant of grace far more than makes up for it.

So far, we've discussed the covenant of grace in terms of its relationship to God's eternal counsel, its origin in divine providence, and its elements. Now let's turn to our final major topic: its historical administration.

## ADMINISTRATION

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The covenant of grace was governed, or administered, by various covenant representatives. As we consider the historical administration of the covenant of grace, it's important to recognize that different theological traditions define these administrations in different ways. And often, these differences revolve around how they define God's covenant people. For instance, some believe that only believers are included in the covenant of grace. Others believe it includes believers and their children. Others approach this topic from a different perspective. They describe a cumulative sequence of covenant administrations that initially included all humanity and became more exclusive with each successive covenant. And there are other views as well.

**When we think of the kingdom of God across the canon of Scripture and across redemptive history ... there's changes in the administration of it as you work through the biblical covenants and reach their culmination in Christ. So, for instance, particularly in the Old Testament, as God brings his salvific plan through the nation of Israel into the old covenant, he's working primarily with a nation, he's working primarily in terms of a theocracy, a visible representation in terms of that nation, where, through them, they will bring about the coming of the Messiah, the coming of the Lord Jesus, and you see a lot of the administration of that kingdom tied to them in a particular place, location, land, under particular rule and government and so on. And then, as you think of its fulfillment in Christ, as you bring the kingdom to pass in the new covenant, there are some changes. Christ obviously is the king. He is the one who fulfills the type and shadows of the Old Testament. He fulfills the role of David and Moses. And he's the one who, in his life and death and resurrection, inaugurates the kingdom, brings God's saving reign to this world, and then brings about an international community — what we call the church, the “one new man,” Jews and Gentile together — so that he now rules in and through the church. Even though he's ascended back to heaven, he rules in and through the**

**church but not in a kind of theocracy in the same way that it was with Israel... And so, some of those are the changes that have occurred as God's rule breaks in through the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, culminating now in Christ in the church as the church now takes the gospel of kingdom to the uttermost parts of the world, announcing that, "The King has come! Enter his saving reign now before he comes again and will finalize salvation and also will execute judgment."**

— Dr. Stephen J. Wellum

For our purposes in this lesson, we'll focus on those areas of the covenant's historical administration where Evangelicals generally agree. Specifically, we'll look at the development of God's covenant under its prominent representatives or heads — Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and Jesus. We'll also look at the way its historical development pointed toward the fulfillment of God's purposes for humanity.

### ADAM

As we've already seen, the covenant of grace was instituted with Adam in Genesis 3:15, immediately after he fell into sin. Because Adam was the covenant head at this point, theologians often refer to this as the "Adamic administration" of the covenant. This administration provided human beings with the immediate opportunity to reconcile our relationships with God. Through this reconciliation, we could once again focus on building God's kingdom throughout the world. This goal is evident not only through God's refusal to destroy us, but also in the subsequent account of Adam's faithful descendants in Genesis 4:25–5:32. Listen to how this passage begins in Genesis 4:25-26:

**[Adam's wife] gave birth to a son and named him Seth ... Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh. At that time men began to call on the name of the Lord (Genesis 4:25-26).**

That humanity "began to call on the name of the Lord" shows that they were determined to fulfill their covenant obligations to him. And the genealogy that follows demonstrates that they were fulfilling their obligation to multiply and fill the earth with images and likenesses of God. In fact, the very words "image" and "likeness" are used in Genesis 5:1, 3.

### NOAH

Following Adam, the covenant was confirmed with Noah after the flood. The Noachic administration is mentioned in Genesis 6:18 and 8:21–9:17. As we saw in an

earlier lesson, this administration explicitly incorporated all the terms of Adam's administration. You'll recall that, in Genesis 6:18, God told Noah:

**I will establish my covenant with you (Genesis 6:18).**

Here, the word establish translates the Hebrew verb *qum*. This is the normal word for confirming an *existing* covenant.

The Noahic administration also expanded the covenant blessings by adding God's promise never again to destroy the earth with floodwaters. God even provided the rainbow as a sign of this covenant. In this way, he guaranteed there would always be a platform for life on earth, so that his faithful people could pursue his covenant blessings. God also reaffirmed his kingdom purposes for humanity by giving Noah and his family the same command he had given to Adam and Eve. In Genesis 9:1, he told them:

**Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth (Genesis 9:1).**

## ABRAHAM

After Noah, Abraham was the next prominent representative of God's covenant people. The Abrahamic covenant administration is mentioned in Genesis 15:1-21 and 17:1-21. Under Abraham, the covenant included the terms from the Noahic administration. And it added things like God's promise to turn Abraham's descendants into a mighty nation, and to bless all nations through them. During this administration, God revealed that he would fulfill his purpose for humanity through Abraham's descendants — especially the nation of Israel. Specifically, they would be charged with expanding God's kingdom throughout the earth. As Paul wrote in Romans 4:13:

**Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world (Romans 4:13).**

**The words of Paul — that the promise or that the inheritance of Abraham would be taking the whole world — is really, I don't think, anything new. He's not offering a new interpretation. He is continuing the story that God began with Abraham. And the redemptive covenant work that God starts with Abraham encapsulates the whole program, really. And I think you can find it all in a kind of a seed-form in Genesis 12, in the first three verses. And you see specific promises made to Abraham for his own person: he would be a great nation; his seed would become this nation; his name would be great. And then finally, it extends in verse 3 to encompass the whole world: "In you all the families of the earth will be blessed." And so, we see Abraham kind of setting the contours of the whole program that would spread to the whole world at one point. And so, Paul, with the**



**beginning of the new work of God by a pouring out of the Spirit in the church, we have seen a new phase or a new piece of this redemptive plan come to fulfillment.**

— Dr. Mark Saucy

## MOSES

The next major covenant representative after Abraham was Moses. The terms of the Mosaic administration are summarized in places like Exodus 19–24, and described in great detail throughout the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

With Moses, God built on the Abrahamic administration, confirming his promises to Abraham in places like Deuteronomy 4:31 and 7:8-13. He also provided structure for the nation of Israel, and gave them the first extensively codified version of his law. And of course, he redirected them to the task of building his kingdom throughout the world. As Moses told the people in Deuteronomy 28:1:

**If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth (Deuteronomy 28:1).**

In Moses' day, much of the earth had been filled with human images of God. But it wasn't yet ready to serve as God's kingdom because humanity was in rank rebellion. So, under the Mosaic covenant administration, Israel was to bring redemption to all nations through its message of God's truth. And if they were successful, God's faithful people would rule over the world on his behalf.

## DAVID

Following Moses, the next major covenant development occurred with David. The Davidic administration is described in 2 Samuel 7, and Psalms 89, 132. In David's day, God confirmed the Mosaic administration. But he also revealed that the greatest covenant blessings would be fulfilled under the kingship of David and his dynastic heirs. As we read in Psalm 89:3-4:

**I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant, "I will establish your line forever and make your throne firm through all generations" (Psalm 89:3-4).**

## JESUS

After David, the next and final covenant representative was — and still is — Jesus. Unlike the prior administrations of the covenant, which are named after their representatives, Jesus' administration is typically referred to as the "new covenant." This

name originally comes from Jeremiah 31:31, which is quoted in Hebrews 8:8. Jeremiah taught that God would eventually establish a permanent, unbreakable covenant in which his people would receive all his covenant blessings. And on the night Jesus was arrested, during the Last Supper, the Lord himself said that his crucifixion would ratify this new covenant. Luke 22:20 records Jesus' words to his disciples:

**This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you (Luke 22:20).**

The Hebrew and Greek words for “new” in the phrase “new covenant” — *chadash* in Hebrew and *kainos* in Greek — can also be translated “renewed.” And “renewed” is certainly the meaning intended when Scripture speaks of the new covenant as an administration of the covenant of grace. The idea is that God is renewing or reaffirming his covenant with his people through a fresh covenant administration, not that he's abandoning the covenant he's sworn to keep.

The renewed nature of this covenant administration is evident throughout the book of Hebrews, which contrasts the old Mosaic administration of the covenant of grace with the new and final administration under Christ. For instance, Hebrews 5–7 contrasts the old Levitical priesthood with Jesus' new priesthood — a priesthood that revives the tradition of the Old Testament priest-king Melchizedek. Hebrews 8 quotes Jeremiah 31 to show that the new covenant will be better than the old covenant. And the context of Jeremiah 31 makes it clear that the original prophecy referred to the restoration and renewal of the blessings of the Mosaic covenant administration.

**In Hebrews 8, the author finally introduces the term “covenant,” the covenant ensured by the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. Notice that what he says is that Jesus has done a great ministry, because now he is the mediator of a better covenant, which means that the covenant itself is better. This can be understood as a discontinuation of the previous covenant and, therefore, understood as a completely new covenant. But others believe it is a continuation, a fulfillment of the Old Testament covenant. The author talks in chapter 8, and following, about the covenant that Jeremiah the prophet mentioned in chapter 31. He says that there will be a time when the Lord establishes a new covenant. Let me make it clear that, for Jeremiah, the new covenant would take place in the future. So, here we are looking at a contrast: Is it a continuation or something completely new? There's the dilemma. As Christians, we think differently about this issue. My personal opinion is that the new covenant is a continuation because, as I see it, the Lord has always worked in his people — in his Jewish people and later in his Gentile people — throughout the history of mankind. Salvation has always been by grace. The difference is that, in the Old Testament, Jesus had not made his sacrifice yet, so the people of the Old Testament could not look back at it like we can. We have a better covenant now because salvation is already accomplished, and we should not be afraid to fail, because Jesus has already**

**achieved forgiveness for our every sin. Therefore, the covenant is better but it is also new in the sense that now there are no barriers or limitations imposed by the law. We don't need the same sacrifices; we don't need the same laws about food; we don't need to have the same celebrations, etc. Now *everything* is through faith, trusting in Jesus. So at the end of chapter 8, the author says that the new covenant has made the last covenant obsolete and that that which is obsolete and aging will soon disappear. Therefore the old covenant is over and the new covenant is its continuation.**

— Dr. Alvin Padilla, translation

The renewed nature of the new covenant is also evident in Hebrews 9:15, where the author said:

**Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance — now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant (Hebrews 9:15).**

As this verse indicates, the “new” covenant administration maintains continuity with the “first” or “old” administration. Specifically, the new administration pays the old debt of sin and fulfills the old promises of inheritance. And it accomplishes this through its mediator.

The great expansion presented in the new covenant is that the mediator finally fulfills the terms of the covenant on behalf of his people. For instance, he underwent Abrahamic circumcision in Luke 2:21. He affirmed and kept the Mosaic Law, as we read in Matthew 5:17-19, Luke 24:44, and Romans 8:4. And he inherited the Davidic office of Messiah, as demonstrated in Matthew 1:1-25.

Moreover, by keeping all these covenant terms, Jesus inherited all their associated blessings. We see this in Romans 4:3-25, Galatians 3:14-16, and many other places. But the most remarkable part is that Jesus obtained these blessings in order to share them with us, his faithful covenant people. In Christ, our covenant mediator and covenant head, *all* the human loyalty required by *every* covenant administration is fulfilled, and we receive every blessing of every administration.

Christ hasn't shared all his blessings with us yet. But as Paul wrote in Ephesians 1:13, 14, he *has* given us the Holy Spirit as a deposit guaranteeing our future inheritance. And when Jesus returns, he'll share all his blessings with us in God's earthly kingdom. This will happen when humanity's task of kingdom building is finally completed in the new heavens and new earth described in Revelation 21:1–22:5. In the meantime, the Spirit empowers us to build God's kingdom, and to prepare our hearts to enjoy his presence forever.

## CONCLUSION

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In this lesson on the covenant of grace, we've explored God's eternal counsel by looking at its timing, the roles of the persons of the Trinity, and the fulfillment of God's counsel in the covenant of grace. We've considered the covenant as a work of God's providence by focusing on human sin, and on Christ as our mediator. We've described the elements of the covenant of grace as consisting of divine benevolence, human loyalty, and the consequences of blessings and curses. And we've surveyed the historical administration of the covenant of grace under Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and Jesus.

Throughout this series on theological anthropology, we've traced humanity's condition from our original state as sinless images of God, to our cursed state as fallen sinners, and to our gracious redemption in Jesus Christ. We've also seen that God's purposes for bringing us through these stages are good and benevolent — he didn't allow us to suffer the consequences of sin without first determining to rescue us. And in our redeemed state, we're in just the place he wants us so that he can complete that plan. We've been spiritually empowered to continue the kingdom-building commission of our first parents. We've been forgiven for every transgression, reprieved from every covenant curse, so that now all that's left to do is to praise him for his benevolence, to live in loyalty to his covenant, and to await our final blessings in the new heavens and new earth.

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