



## Post Tenebras Lux Covenant Theology...

### The New Covenant Pt. 4...

### Colossians 2:8-15

Now in the study with which we have been engaged, I have tried to explain the historic reformed idea of covenantal theology. I have tried to show that there is an underlying unity in the gracious way God has dealt with His people in the past. I have tried to show that the principle idea behind covenantal theology is that there has always been only the one people of God.

It was my intention to demonstrate to you that God's plan of salvation has always been to redeem His people in the atoning work of Christ on the cross. I spent some time showing that the promises made to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and even Jeremiah all found their fulfillment in the person of Christ. The reason I have done that is to try to negate the popular idea that people in the Old Testament were saved by keeping the law and that people in the New Testament were saved by faith. If I could use one phrase to summarize the content of what I have been trying to say it would be this, "**Moses was a Christian.**"

In using that phrase, I am not trying to be funny or witty or any such thing. I am trying to demonstrate to you to all of the people who were ever saved were saved through faith by the Spirit's application of Christ's precious blood. If

keeping the law of God saved people in the Old Testament, the inevitable conclusion that I would want you to draw is that absolutely nobody in the Old Testament was saved.

Remember what Paul said to the Romans...

<sup>NIV</sup> **Romans 3:20**...Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

But we do know that people in the Old Testament were saved. We know that they were saved by faith in Christ's atoning work. Jesus was so bold as to tell the Pharisees that...and this is in the context of His arguing with the Pharisees about being the sons of Abraham...and in that argument they were saying that being the physical descendants of Abraham was enough to make them right with God when Jesus said this:

<sup>NIV</sup> **John 8:56**...**Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."**

Now how much Abraham actually knew, I cannot say. But when Christ tells us that Abraham saw His day and glad I am not only willing to accept it, I exult in it. And it was the same with Moses. In Hebrews 11 it says this:

<sup>NIV</sup> **Hebrews 11:24**...By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. <sup>25</sup> He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. <sup>26</sup> He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.

One of the things I am certain of is that they knew more than we think they knew. They knew that God's kindness was going to provide for them a coming Messiah...a coming deliverer.

And it was the same for Elijah, and David and Jeremiah. They saw the fruition of all of God's gracious promises being fulfilled in the future. Yet they understood they already experienced a portion of those promises in that God had promised to be their God and that they would be His people.

Now as our study progressed, I fear that I often hurried when I should have gone slower. One of the things that I know was confusing was the different use of the word covenant. I spoke of a covenant of works and a covenant of grace. I then spoke of the Adamic covenant, the Noahic covenant, the Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic covenant, the Davidic covenant and finally the new covenant. And then, in what can only be considered a classic example of how not to teach, I stressed the point that there was really only one covenant. While I believe with all my heart that is true, I should have stated more emphatically what I meant by that. You see the word "**covenant**" is very much like the word "**law**" in that it is used in various ways. Sometimes it is used to speak of individual administrations like the Adamic or Davidic covenant. At other times, it is used in an inclusive sense to speak of something as large as the Old Testament as a whole. Context has to be the guide to determine the underlying meaning. The WCF makes that distinction fairly clear.

If you don't mind I would like to ask you to turn your Trinity Hymnal to page 852 so we can look at what the Confession says.

This covenant was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the Gospel: under the law it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all fore-signifying Christ to come; which were, for that time, sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation; and is called the Old Testament.

Under the Gospel, when Christ, the substance, was exhibited, the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed are the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper: which, though fewer in number, and administered with more simplicity, and less outward glory, yet, in them, it is held forth in more fullness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy, to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles; and is called the New Testament. There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations. (WCF, Trinity Hymnal Pg. 852, Chapter 7:5-6)

I think that is fairly clear. The point that is being made is that God dealt graciously with His people in Christ in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Perhaps, I could clarify it with a graphic.

Covenant of Works established with Adam in which God promised life for continued perpetual obedience.	Covenant of Works (Grace) established with Christ in which God promised life for continued perpetual obedience.
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Now, I don't think I have to spend much time expanding the idea of the covenant of works with Adam simply because the result of that covenant is written on the tombstones of history. Indeed, the Bible pretty much limits its discussion of it to only three chapters of Genesis and a good portion of Romans chapter 5..

But this second covenant of works constitutes the rest of the story of the Bible. Now in a very a real sense, it is a covenant of works but it is a covenant made with Christ. Christ obeyed the law perfectly and fulfilled all the obligations for its recipients. Because He fulfilled that covenant on our behalf graciously in His kindness, we chose to call it the covenant of grace.

There is a sense in which you could say there were two covenants of works. The first was made with Adam and failed and the second one was made with Christ and succeeded. Now in working out the covenant of grace, God used a number of various covenants to bring it to pass. He was not under any obligation to do so. But He chose to do so and He chose to reveal that He was doing so.

Covenant of Works established with Adam in which God promised life for continued perpetual obedience.	Covenant of Works (Grace) established with Christ in which God promised life for continued perpetual obedience.	
	Old Testament	New Testament
	Adamic	New
	Noahic	
	Abrahamic	
	Mosaic	
	Davidic	

Now in these individual covenants, there is certainly a measure of discontinuity. Not all of the covenants are administered the same way. Not all of the covenants are alike. The covenants themselves are built one upon another but there are differences and there are similarities. I feel like I spent such a long time on that particular aspect that to continue to do so would be beating a dead horse. But let me just summarize by saying that each one of those individual covenants found their fulfillment in Christ in the new covenant.

**NIV 2 Corinthians 1:20...**For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God.

The point that Paul is making here is that all of the promises that God has made in the various covenants are fulfilled in the person and work of Christ. Now while it is true of each individual covenant it is most clearly true of the covenant God made with Abraham. Certainly Mary, the mother of Jesus, thought the covenant with Abraham was fulfilled in Jesus.

The section is called the Magnificat and is the prayer of the mother of Jesus when she found out she was going to bear Him as her son.

**NIV Luke 1:47...**and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, <sup>48</sup> for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, <sup>49</sup> for the Mighty One has done great things for me-- holy is his name. <sup>50</sup> His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. <sup>51</sup> He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. <sup>52</sup> He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. <sup>53</sup> He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. <sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful <sup>55</sup> to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers." <sup>56</sup> Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about

three months and then returned home. <sup>57</sup> When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son.

Now what is the point of Mary's prayer? What is the logic that she so relentlessly applies in her interpretation of the events that are unfolding around her? Well simply this. Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham.

And later in the same chapter Zacharias just a few verses later, the father of John the Baptist, comes to the same conclusion:

**NIV Luke 1:68... "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people. <sup>69</sup> He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David <sup>70</sup> (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), <sup>71</sup> salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us-- <sup>72</sup> to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, <sup>73</sup> the oath he swore to our father Abraham: <sup>74</sup> to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear <sup>75</sup> in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.**

Do you see the point Zachariah is making? He is saying, **"This baby is the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham."** Mary believed that. Zacharias believed that...and so did Paul. Listen to what Paul says:

**NIV Galatians 3:14...**He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

You see his point is that in Christ the promise that God made to Abraham is fulfilled...fulfilled to the farthest regions of the earth. Mary believed that. Zacharias believed that. Paul believed that and so did Jesus Himself.

**<sup>NIV</sup> John 8:56...Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."**

Jesus even promised that Gentiles will be numbered with Abraham. The context of the passage is that wonderful scene where a Centurion comes to Jesus to plead for his servant. Look at what Jesus says:

**<sup>NIV</sup> Matthew 8:11...I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>12</sup> But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." <sup>13</sup> Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! It will be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that very hour.**

In fact, I think you could argue that Jesus not only saw Himself as the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant but every covenantal promise ever made. He admonished the Jews about being the point of Scripture.

**<sup>NIV</sup> John 5:39...You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me,**

He was arguing with the Pharisees that He was the point of the Old Testament. Later on after His resurrection, He admonished the disciples on the road to Emmaus concerning the same thing.

**<sup>NIV</sup> Luke 24:26...Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" <sup>27</sup> And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.**

Now, I am making the point because after our lesson together on Hebrew 8 some of you asked me about the emphasis on the discontinuity of the covenants. It was

a fair criticism based upon my failure to define the various meanings of the word covenant.

Let me just recommend this one thing. Go to Hebrews 8 and see what is being argued. The point of the writer's argument is that Jesus is a better High Priest. He is arguing about the abolition of the sacrificial system. He means something very specific about what is being abolished. That is fairly clear from the reference to the tabernacle and the veil and the offerings of bulls and goats. The things that are being abolished are the shadows and types that have been fulfilled in Christ.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Hebrews 8:13**...By calling this covenant "**new**," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear. <sup>NIV</sup> **Hebrews 9:1**...Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary. <sup>2</sup> A tabernacle was set up. In its first room were the lampstand, the table and the consecrated bread; this was called the Holy Place.

What I think is being argued to the Hebrews is that they are in danger of missing the blessing of the new covenant if they persist in the idea of going back to the system that includes the sacrifices and the sacrificial rituals. The writer seems to be arguing that all those old things are passed away and have found a better fulfillment in the perfect atoning work of Christ. He seems to be saying, "**Don't go back to an inferior priesthood because you already have the perfect priest in Christ.**"

I don't think it means that the promises made to Adam, Abraham and David are discontinued. I think it means that all those promises are fulfilled.

Now, in addition to all that, we have other passages where Christ is pointed to as the fulfillment of both the Passover and circumcision.

<sup>NIV</sup> **1 Corinthians 5:7**...Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast-- as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. <sup>8</sup> Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.

Do you see what he is saying? He is saying that Christ is the fulfillment of the Passover. He is saying that Christ is the true Passover. Christ doesn't do away with the Passover...He fulfills it. And Paul does the exact same thing in Colossians 2:8.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Colossians 2:8**...See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. <sup>9</sup> For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, <sup>10</sup> and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. <sup>11</sup> In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, <sup>12</sup> having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

Now, I think this last verse is particularly pertinent to those interested in the issue of infant baptism. You see it seems to me that Paul is arguing that the whole typological point of circumcision is fulfilled in Christ. Here the equation between circumcision and baptism is made directly. Paul says that we the uncircumcised are actually circumcised in the death of Christ. He goes on to add that that circumcision is fulfilled in our baptism. All that circumcision hoped to accomplish, that is the removal of sinfulness, was accomplished in His death and applied in our baptism.

Of course, there are a myriad of interpretations concerning this passage but it seems that it is a good starting place for a continued study on your part. Perhaps later in the year, I'll be able to come back and do a four week study on infant baptism by itself.

At any rate, here is the essential rub of the argument that covenant theology makes.

The covenant of grace is a unity.

Prior to the atoning work of Christ, the sign of initiation into the covenant people of God was circumcision. After the resurrection the sign changed to baptism. That is why the sign of circumcision was not to be imposed on the Gentiles. It was the sign of the shadow. After the resurrection the sign is more inclusive and is given to Gentiles and to women.

Now I have no doubt that you will want to study the issue at much greater length and perhaps we can come back and do that in the future. But by way of giving you some further resources I want to recommend two or three things. First, I want to recommend *Christ of the Covenants* by O. Palmer Robertson. It contains a really good discussion of the continuity and discontinuity of the covenants and will provide you with a solid understanding of what covenant theologians have taught since the Reformation.

Secondly, I want to recommend *To a Thousand Generations* by Doug Wilson. This particular book is an examination of the case for infant baptism and will

hopefully answer some of the questions that might have been raised and have been left unanswered.

Finally, for those of you who don't have the inclination to read let me recommend the tape series from Ligonier ministries of the debate between Alister Begg and R.C. Sproul on the subject of infant baptism. It will provide a fair assessment and critique of both positions by two of my favorite people. Begg takes an hour to present the believer's baptism only side and Sproul takes an hour to present the believer's + infant baptism side. Then there is a third tape where they discuss the differences between their two points of view. I will have copies of the debate made and placed in the library so you can continue your study.

Finally, allow me to admonish you all to a spirit of graciousness especially to those of you who have embraced the overall idea of the covenant theology. It seems to me that if the covenant of grace is the backbone of our theology graciousness ought to be the backbone of our attitude in dealing with those who fail to accept it.

Now, let's pray.