

# The Covenant

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[ 0 : 00 ] a word we meet often in both the Old and New Testament. It doesn't in itself have any special technical or spiritual meaning. It's an ordinary secular word.

We read of covenants between individuals such as David and Jonathan. We read of commercial contracts, even of perhaps between various nations, which means that the Bible has taken an ordinary secular word and given it a special spiritual meaning.

I want first of all to emphasize three very general points. To begin with, that in covenants between God and man, there is always a very firm emphasis on God's initiative and God's sovereignty.

The covenant is not ever a pact between equals. It isn't some kind of negotiated settlement.

We find always that God takes the first step. God takes the initiative. We find, for example, in Genesis 9, that the covenant with Noah is established very much in terms of God's own initiative.

[ 1 : 33 ] God said to Noah. It happens also with regard to Abraham. Again, God makes the first approach and takes the first step.

So that always the covenant in redemptive and spiritual terms has as its background God's own grace.

God always imposing his own terms and conditions of salvation. That is especially true, of course, in the Christian covenant because man doesn't negotiate his own salvation with God.

God announces his own terms, his own method of salvation. The whole process has its origin in the sovereign grace of Almighty God.

That means that the redemptive covenant is always, shall I say, asymmetrical. It isn't a compact between equal parties.

[ 2 : 44 ] It is an announcement and an imposition which derives from God as sovereign and is accepted by man very much as God's vassal.

And this asymmetry is an essential element in the redemptive covenant. God imposing his own will upon man, even at the point of man's salvation.

My second general point is that, notwithstanding this divine initiative, the covenant is always two-sided.

I try to emphasize the importance of God's sovereign initiative. That is sometimes done in such a way as to minimize the importance of man's response.

But a covenant is, by definition, bilateral or two-sided. And when it comes to the redemptive covenant, this is no less so.

[ 3 : 57 ] It is true that God takes the initiative. It's true that God bears the brunt, that God pays the cost. And yet, the human response always remains an important element.

If we go back, for example, to the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 17 and so on, we find firm emphasis on the part played by Abraham's faith.

There is no covenant without this human response, this human input. In the same way, with regard to the Christian covenant, our own faith as believers remains something of indispensable significance.

If we go to John 3.16, for example, we learn that God so loved the world. That's God's sovereign initiative. And yet, God's salvation reaches only those who believe.

so that whoever believes should not perish, but should have everlasting life. And there are forms of gospel proclamation today which convey the impression that we simply announce God's unilateral, God's one-sided accomplishment of salvation.

[ 5 : 25 ] We are told to announce to men that their sins are forgiven, that they're all sons of God, and there is no emphasis at all on the human response.

Now, in the Bible, there is a firm emphasis on whosoever believes. There is an emphasis, the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the gospel. that means that the essentials of the human covenant as a two-sided agreement or treaty, that essential characteristic remains even in the redemptive covenant between God and man. And when we say covenant and covenant theology, we are specifically emphasizing that the human response is an important and indispensable element in our participation in salvation, because covenant means not only God's initiative, it also means the human response, because the covenant to that extent is always two-sided.

Let me put it to you in these terms, we are told today by many theologians that covenant does not mean contract, it means something very much more like a marriage agreement.

[ 6 : 56 ] Now, of course, a marriage is not commercial, it is not, in that sense, political, yet marriage, intensely human though it is, is always a two-sided agreement.

And that means that not only is the husband under obligation, but so too is the wife. And in the same way, the redemptive covenant involves not only divine input and divine imposition, it involves also the human response of faith and obedience.

So indeed, there is the asymmetry of divine sovereign initiative and cost bearing, but there is also equally importantly, there is the two-sided emphasis involving especially the significance of the human response Abraham believed God.

and at that point he became righteous. My third general point is this, that it is due to the fact of covenant that our human lives have a substantial element of predictability.

It is the divine covenant that makes our human life predictable. let me put that to you in this context. If we contrast the people of God under the Old Testament with the surrounding nations, then we find in this situation that those surrounding nations worshipped a great multiplicity of gods.

[ 8 : 49 ] And those gods behaved in an extremely arbitrary fashion. they were irascible, they were unpredictable, they were given to outrageous behaviour, controlled by passion and mood, and that meant that ancient man never knew which way the gods were going to turn.

And so ancient man lived in a world, an environment which was in essence demonised and those demons made the whole of human existence utterly irrational and utterly unpredictable.

You never knew what the fury of the gods might entail from one day to the other. Now that is a great contrast to the state of things within the Old Testament, the Old Covenant people of God.

Israel had one God and that God lived in covenant and that covenant gave a great framework of predictability.

You go back to Adam. Adam knew where he stood with God. Adam knew that provided he observed God's directive that he would remain in a stable and loving relationship with his creator.

[ 10 : 24 ] You take Abraham and all his descendants, they had the same privilege. They knew the terms of the covenant, they knew that if they kept that covenant then they would know the blessing of God.

You go back to the covenant with Noah, there again God tells man where he stands. God gives man certain assurances. you come down to the New Testament and you find the same thing.

The people of God are in covenant with God. They know the terms of that covenant. They know the great promises of God. They even know that all things work together for good to them that love God.

And I think that is a great factor in our religious security. as we live in relation to our environment we have confidence based on the covenant of God.

As we face history we have the same privilege. We don't know the future but we know the God of the future. We know that he's in control. We know the terms of his covenant.

[ 11 : 37 ] So there is this basic word covenant where those three general considerations redemptive covenants have their origin in the sovereign initiative and clemency of God.

Secondly the redemptive covenant is always two sided involving the human response as well as the divine initiative.

And thirdly covenant brings predictability. Now against that background let me take you briefly through the four great basic biblical covenants.

Four basic covenants. There is first of all the Adamic covenant announced in Genesis 1 to 3.

God laid before the first man certain stipulations nations. And in particular God announced to the first man that if he ate a certain fruit then his whole life would be totally destabilized.

[ 12 : 51 ] In fact he would face death. Now this is a rather peculiar covenant because in essence it is not so much a conditional promise as a conditional threat.

God tells him the day you eat thereof you shall die. Now bear in mind that that covenant itself involved immeasurable security for mankind because man knew that provided he observed this one condition then he was secure with his God.

And bear in mind all the elements of grace, the abundance of God's provision for man in terms of all the other fruit of the garden. Bear in mind too the ability that God had given to man to observe his covenant because man was made upright.

And here was a very very gracious covenant only one tree forbidden an abundant ability given to conform with all of God's stipulations no privation no pressure at all upon mankind.

And this gracious promise implicit too that provided man avoided this one fruit he would continue not only to exist but to exist in fellowship with God.

[ 14 : 21 ] Remember God did not say to man the day you eat this fruit you will cease to exist. He said to man if you eat this fruit then you will cease to live that is in fellowship with me.

In other words God was giving man this solemn promise that if he avoided this one fruit then he would continue to enjoy forever this stable loving immeasurably rich relationship with his God and his creator.

And man as we know under the devil's promptings violates God's conditions and comes under the operation of God's threat.

In other words man loses all that he has but he loses it covenantally. he loses it despite the tenderness and generosity of God's stipulation despite the abundant permission God made of grace by which to comply with all stipulations despite knowing full well where he stood with God man violates that stipulation man forfeits the life that God gave him.

Now some people have enormous trouble with this because they find the whole notion of a covenant of works they find that notion distasteful. Now it is certainly true that man dies and man is expelled from the garden because of disobedience but there is nothing whatever inherently improper in a covenant of works.

[ 16 : 20 ] I'll come back to it in a moment for this reason that our own salvation rests on that obedience of the last Adam which represents his compliance with a covenant of works.

Christ saved us by finishing the work given to him to do. He said I have finished the work he was obedient unto death by the obedience of the one man the many are made righteous.

Now I'm seeing at one level there are gracious elements in the Adamic covenant. There is the graciousness of the abundant provision which made the eating of that fruit so utterly unnecessary. There is the graciousness of the abundant ability given to resist temptation. There's all that and yet we must accept that the primary relation between God and man is our relationship of works and of obedience and in a way that has never been abrogated.

It is still in essence true that the man who does the things written in the law shall live by the law and more important it remains true that Christ saves us by himself putting over against Adam's disobedience his own personal obedience.

[ 18 : 07 ] So first of all there is the Adamic covenant this so-called covenant of works Adam forfeited life by violating God's stipulation by breaking God's covenant.

covenant Secondly there is God's covenant with Noah the covenant of Genesis 9. Now this is a very important covenant and I want to spend a little time on it.

It's sometimes called the covenant of preservation. It's also called the covenant of nature. And in essence it is this.

It is God's gracious and sovereign announcement to us that so long as the world lasts it will never again be destabilized the way it was at the time of the deluge.

It's a covenant that God makes not only with man but he tells us with every living creature. Genesis 9-10.

[ 19 : 28 ] Now bear in mind the psychology of this. Here was Adam in the aftermath of the deluge trembling quaking because he'd been face to face with the elemental forces of destruction.

He had seen the havoc wrought by this flood on a scale that passes out imagining even at this time in our own recent tragic history.

Here was a cataclysm on not only an unprecedented but unanswered possible scale. man must have felt very powerfully the pressures of ecological fears.

The terror of his own environment. What kind of world was he living in? Where such havoc could be wrought and where life in all its forms could be brought so close to extinction.

And into that trauma into that almost despair of no. I suppose bear in mind too that here he was in the aftermath of the trauma when all the strain and all the pressure was off and when there was even more possibility psychologically of us relapsing into depression.

[ 20 : 54 ] His taught nerves relaxing and in the absence of the incentive and stimulus collapsing into despair.

And into that God projects his great assurance that while the world would last there would never again be caricatism on this scale.

You see how it is put various points in this ninth chapter. Verse 11 never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood and never again shall be a flood to destroy the earth.

Never again will all flesh be destroyed. You have also the closing part of the eighth chapter. While the earth remains God says there be seed among harvest summer winter day and night these things shall not cease.

And you see to us as said that this covenant is made with the whole human race. Verse 9 I establish my covenant with you your descendants after you and with every living creature that is with you.

[ 22 : 04 ] Now here is the great divine pledge which I think is particularly and even point and relevant to our troubled 20th century.

A century which is acutely aware of the perils of ecology and very aware of the pressures of conservation and so on.

We know the forces latent in the world around us. We know how delicate the balance of those forces is.

We know how close we are to environmental disaster and we're troubled. And don't we need this reassurance on God's part as we reflect upon the greenhouse effect and the threat to the ozone layer and the perils of nuclear energy nuclear weaponry all these things that have come out of the bottle and that will not go back into the bottle we've got to live on this knife edge of insecurity unless we recall God's great pledge that never again until the end of history will God allow global disruption of the seasons the unleashing of these unprecedented forces of destruction so that at last only Noah and his family were left now

I do not want to project this as a blanket comfort world it does not mean that we cannot have localized famine localized flood localized to war of appalling ferocity in humanity and magnitude it does not preclude the possibility of nuclear war because we've had nuclear war already in our history it means to me that God is promising that at least there will be no global catastrophe commensurate with that of the flood now I'm not prepared yet to say that this gives me the comfort that we cannot have catastrophe a nuclear war on an unimaginable scale I do not find that that kind of faith has any warrant in a divine promise but

[ 24 : 47 ] I am brought face to face with this God who is saying to me that by some process or other he's going to secure that never again will there be disruption of the seasons disruption of day and night disruption of the earth's fertility and the nuclear shadow must be limited by these divine promises one of the great nuclear horrors we face is the possibility of a nuclear winter in which there is darkness and sub-zero temperatures and the eclipse of all life now that kind of scenario in my judgment will not fit into the kind of promise God is giving us in this particular chapter God is promising us here seed time and harvest cold and heat summer and winter day and night these things shall not cease it is also interesting that precisely at this point

God in his covenant should bring in the whole dimension of population control because that today is perhaps the most common reaction of man to environmental problems the phrase of darling for example as with lectures in which he opened up this whole theme for western man very very much emphasized that the pollution was to large extent the consequence of man's search for food hence you had overgrazing and deforestation and other phenomena and the answer he argued was to limit population not to limit the demand for food and that's an ongoing scenario now you can understand again you see Noah's fears Noah wasn't worried at all about overpopulation but he was concerned about the kind of world he lived in and he might very well have said who which same man would wish to bring children into this kind of world that's a very common contemporary argument which made very good sense in the shadow of the deluge as it does in the shadow of the greenhouse effect and the shadow of nuclear holocaust and at that very point you see

God says to man that he is to be fruitful and to multiply verse 7 you he says be fruitful and multiply bring forth abundantly and you know it was until I understand a challenge to Noah's faith now I'm not advocating on a single moment that we use our sexuality without regard to rationality because we are not beasts but I am saying that any population control which is a reflection of unfaith that is of lack of confidence in the sovereign provider that that is illegitimate to a Christian we cannot as believers refuse to have families because of ecological fears of this particular kind that's what this covenant is arguing against it is coming

I say right into Noah's existential situation into his fear it is coming also by Amara's providence into our 20th century fears the shadow of world war and the shadow of rapidly expanding population and the shadow of nuclear horror and the shadow of ecological horror it's coming and saying to us be fruitful and multiply and that is an expression of your faith in God and your confidence in the future of the earth and of mankind not for a single moment does that discharge me from my environmental responsibility I must use my environment rationally as I use my sexuality rationally but there it is you see there is this covenant and I might even say one of its stipulations is that we should not fearfully refuse to procreate can I say two more things about this covenant or one thing which involves the second thing within itself and that is this great reference you have here you see to the covenant to the sign of the covenant the bow verse 12 this is a sign

God says of the covenant I set my bow in the cloud and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth and when I see the bow I will remember my covenant now it's a beautiful thing it's a reminder to ourselves that that same rainbow I don't know what astrophysical changes this represented but I'm saying that the the rainbow there is the son of God's covenant may simply be that God used an already existing phenomenon it may be that the rainbow was always there just as circumcision and baptism were there before God given some special symbolism but that rainbow is a great sign to us of God's covenant of preservation God's covenant of or with nature but I take it up for this reason that in revelation 4 where you have that great vision of the throne

[ 30 : 52 ] I beheld a throne and him that sat upon it there is a lovely allusion to this rainbow you remember that round the throne there was a rainbow and that is so important for us with our belief again in the sovereignty of God to remind ourselves that God's sovereignty is set in the rainbow it's set in the covenant of peace and preservation it is reminding us that God will never never use sovereignty in a way that's destructive of mankind or destructive of the universe in which we live now of course one day God will regenerate that universe but that's not destructive that's recreative and so I'm saying to you there is this God he's given to us we live in a universe which is rational because our God is rational our God is a God of covenant and this

God is committed to the maintenance and preservation of the world in which we live and he's given us this sign that he's at peace with us the sign of the rainbow I had in mind too that at the baptism of Christ you have an allusion less directed to the same deluge symbolism when the spirit of God comes upon the man the last Adam comes upon him in the form of a dove just as that dove reminded Noah that the strife which invoked the deluge was at an end so here is the baptized Christ assuming our sins and the dove of God's peace coming to remind him that through his ministry there will be peace between God and man so this whole chapter did play I think a very important part in later biblical theology so we've seen the

Adamic covenant we've seen the covenant with Noah thirdly there's what I call the covenant of redemption now this covenant of redemption is specifically the covenant between God the father and God the son I distinguish it from the covenant of grace now there is no direct statement in the New Testament to the effect that such a covenant actually exists and some theologians of the unquestioned orthodoxy have refused to accept the idea of a covenant of redemption now in my view this covenant is essential it underlies the covenant of grace and it's essential because without it we can't make sense of the relation between

Christ and his father or of the relation between Christ and his people that we take those two factors first of all this covenant is essential if we are to understand the relation between Christ and his father why is Christ in the world he is in the world to shed his blood the blood of the new covenant he's in the world because of a specific relationship with the father the father sent him and the father gave him commandments and the father gave him promises he was able to go to the father and say I have finished the work now you fulfill the promises he has an inheritance he is the heir of all things heir inheritance these imply a last will or a testament now

I cannot begin to understand the relation of the work of Christ to the will of God unless I bring in this covenant which means that in my judgment the work of Christ on earth is the effecting of a pre-temporal pre-incarnation agreement between God the father and God the son in which the son agrees to come to do to complete a specific task the father promises to uphold him and the father promises to reward him and that's how Christ can claim I have finished the work that's how we understand the service of Christ his service is covenantal service he knew where he stood with [ 36 : 27 ] God he knew exactly what he had to do he knew what God promised him he knew what God required and so he says that he comes as the servant of the Lord and he is summed up by Paul in these terms he was obedient unto death obedient to what he was obedient to the covenant stipulation now in the same way we need this covenant of redemption this agreement between God the father and God the son to understand the relationship between Christ and his people because he is his people representative he is his people substitute he is the bridegroom of the church how does that relationship come to exist does it exist simply by divine decree by divine decree divine fiat does

God simply announce that he is head of his people it comes about because there is a people given to him and there is a people assumed by him he loved his church he becomes by agreement the head of the church he becomes the representative their vicar and their substitute that relationship the headship of Christ cannot be understood apart from the consent and the agreement of God now the parties to this covenant as I said are God the father and God the son the stipulations of the covenant are that Christ shall do everything that is necessary for the salvation of his people let me put it to you this way what we receive freely in the covenant of grace

Christ earns by his works in the covenant of redemption it is a covenant of obedience that's what Christ did as the last Adam he kept the covenant as the last Adam he endured the covenant anathema which had been incurred by the first Adam he bears the covenant curse he fulfills the covenant stipulation that is his righteousness his righteousness his covenant righteousness as the last man as the second man he has kept the covenant and the covenant breaking of the first Adam the covenant breaking of mankind it's covered by the covenant keeping of the last Adam the Lord Jesus Christ this is my blood of the new covenant that's what Jesus did he put his obedience over against our disobedience his law keeping and his covenant keeping over in the place of our law breaking and our covenant breaking so for him the covenant is a covenant of works he was righteous he fulfilled all righteousness he was obedient unto death he did and he suffered all that the covenant required that is the covenant is modified by the covenant breaking of Adam because mankind wasn't back in paradise mankind stood before God with all the abilities of a broken covenant

Christ has to bear the abilities of that breach without any personal failing on his own part and we are righteous because in the covenant of redemption he kept faith with God and on the cross he cries it is finished I have finished the course Paul said Christ said even more emphatically he ran with endurance the race that was set before the parties are God the father and God the son the stipulation is obedience and what are the promises promises well the promises are the promise is the salvation of his people everything necessary for the salvation of his people that was a promise all that pertains to grace and salvation now we can see some of it fairly easily and obviously that the promise was if you bear sin if you atone for sin if you endure the curse then there is forgiveness for your people and all that goes along with a change of state we all see that that Christ purchased forgiveness and Christ purchased justification and Christ purchased adoption a change of relationship we must also however bear in mind that by his covenant keeping

[ 43 : 13 ] Christ also purchased everything that belongs to a change of spiritual condition in other words he purchased on that cross the new birth he purchased the gift of faith he purchased the gift of sanctification of perseverance of glorification if you can follow me for a moment let me put it to you this way what is required in the covenant of grace is provided in the covenant of redemption you see at one level faith is required God requires faith God requires repentance but do you know that Christ has actually secured these for his people let me come closer to home on the matter this great business of sanctification we are indeed called upon to struggle mortifying sin and growing in grace and so on but you know how magnificent it is that on that cross

Christ purchased sanctification Christ purchased holiness for you and me now that is a very very exciting I think an enormously stimulating idea it doesn't in the least modify the importance of the struggle towards holiness and yet so often the new testament links the cross not with justification

but with sanctification Christ loved the church that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word and present to himself a glorious church without spot a wrinkle you see on the cross Christ did not only purchase for you the forgiveness of your sins but it purchased for you a complete salvation he purchased faith that's what the cross achieved that's what God promised God promised him the salvation of his people he was on that cross as their covenant head he obeyed in their place and by his obedience he secured everything they need objectively subjectively can I go into the terminology again forensically ontologically change in relationship change in nature justification sanctification these things were given to Christ and secured by Christ in this great covenant between himself and his father ontologically change in relationship change in nature justification sanctification these things were given to Christ and secured by Christ in this great covenant between himself and his father and you remember how that can show itself in dynamic terms in the new testament especially in the book of acts where we're told for example with regard to pentecost

Christ that Christ being by the right hand of God exalted has shed forth this which you now see and hear to give repentance to Israel as well as the remission of sins you see he he has been given not only forgiven as remission of sins but also the repentance which is the personal link and act by which we experience forgiveness so a compact between father and son requiring the son's obedience and promising the salvation of his people and then there is the covenant of grace now what have we seen there is the Adamic covenant there is the Noahic covenant there is the covenant of redemption and there is the covenant of grace now it's a strange thing but in some ways this is the most difficult of all the covenants to understand let me remind you again of the problems that we face with covenants there are two major questions or three major questions the parties and the stipulations and the promises now there is a very serious difficulty involved in ascertaining who the precise parties to the covenant of grace are

God the father is one party but you will find in your own confessions and catechisms very great uncertainty and some measure of confusion on this particular issue and the standards are quite non-committal is it God and the sinner is it God and the elect is it God and mankind or is it God and the believer now my decision is that the covenant of grace is between God and the believer and I take that decision because the archetypal biblical revelation of the covenant of grace is the covenant of God with Noah with Abraham now Abraham at the point of covenant institution Abraham is not there as an elect person he is not there as a sinner he's not there simply as a man but he's there as a believer and my view is that there is this covenant between

God and the believer between God and me between God and you and I do think it is an enormously helpful and encouraging way of understanding our own salvation our salvation is our being in covenant relationship with God there is a covenant a contract between God and me now that means above all that God is committed to me God and the believer now maybe a very humble believer a very young believer very untalented believer there is no such thing as a completely untalented believer or giftless believer but there are variations in gifts and talents but every believer is in covenant with God it's a marriage bond it's a treaty it's a contract it's as tight as tight can be and it is so secure because

[ 50 : 11 ] God is righteous and God being righteous means God is a covenant keeper you have that great word in the old testament the word loving kindness well that loving kindness means that God never reneges on a contract God never breaks a covenant never goes back on a promise so here we are individually and collectively as a church as churches we are in covenant with God God and the believer in covenant God and the believer married my maker is my husband that is as true on the personal level as it is on the collective and corporate level so the parties I decide for the moment are God and the believer the stipulation I shall leave that for a moment the promise is this the promise again is salvation but it's put in various intriguing marvelous ways in the covenant of grace

God promises the believer life it's sometimes called the covenant of life it's put for example this way I will be your God that's what God said to Abraham and you know that's said we're back in Genesis in the very first half of Genesis and there is no more glorious statement even as revelation unfolds and develops there is nothing more precious than this I shall be your God I spoke of commitment well that's commitment you shall be my people of course it's bilateral it's two-sided we are for him we're committed to him we speak of covenant of commitment today so much he's a committed Christian well of course there is no other kind but do we see our covenant our commitment in

covenantal terms we have no option we are contracted to be committed Christians because that's the covenant you shall be my people and God is committed to being our God I shall be your God your very personal God and Martin Luther said that religion consists in personal pronouns Paul said my God shall supply all your need well see the glory of that it is tantamount to this God saying I shall use my Godness for you all my Godness is yours all my wealth of attributes of prerogatives and functions all my wealth all I am all I have is yours that is God's commitment I shall be you God God and that is as true as if no other single entity being existed God is for you with a totality of his own excellence and his own resources or again you have the great promise of Galatians chapter 3

God tells us there or Paul tells us in God's name there that the blessing of Abraham has come upon the Gentiles and then explains it in these terms we have received the promise of the spirit through faith what is the blessing the promise of the spirit well I mention that because today you see the whole charismatic movement is making such a distinction between having Christ and having the spirit and it is saying to us that we can be Christians and yet lack the spirit in the richer manifestations of his work and operation whereas here is the apostle Paul saying to us that what we Christians have is the blessing of Abraham that blessing consists in the promise of the spirit that's what God promised the spirit and we get that through faith in other words if we are Christians at all if we are in covenant with God at all then we have the spirit because the spirit is a covenant blessing now that is why

I have in my own ministry taken a very firm stand against charismatic theology I do not think at all that the debate should be pitched at the point of tongue speaking that is not the central issue the central issue is this can you be in Christ and not be in the Holy Spirit our relationship with Christ and our relationship with the spirit in the New Testament are symmetrical we can discuss that and then go on to discuss things like tongues and gifts and so on I have said often enough that the church by definition is charismatic in the New Testament sense and I would abide by that because it is tremendously important but I am also saying this we cannot divorce being in Christ from being in the spirit because being filled with the spirit is a fundamental covenant blessing so the covenant promise says I shall be you God the covenant promises the promise of the spirit the covenant promises this all the promises of God are ye and amen in Christ Jesus all the promises because I am in Christ and I am back again at this problem you see of the way that people are constantly eroding the importance of being in Christ that is what very evil

[ 56 : 25 ] Catholicism did that is what Galatian Christians were doing that again is what the modern charismatic movement is doing there is underestimating minimizing eroding the importance and significance of being in Christ now in Christ we have all the promises of God we are heirs of God and we are joined heirs with Christ so the parties are God and the believer the promise is life involving I shall be you God the promise of the spirit all the promises of God being ye and amen in Christ Jesus and the stipulation is the faith God requires now I spoke at the beginning of the importance of seeing the covenant as a two-sided arrangement and I can back to that hence I am saying

God requires now there has been debate over whether faith is a condition and at one time I would have said no it isn't a condition today I quite frankly am and fast if you do call it a condition because so much modern theology has minimized the importance of the response of faith the human need to be born again that I am even prepared to speak of faith as a condition but Archicentism the Catechism has the ideal word for it the Catechism says God requires of us faith in Jesus Christ repentance unto life and the diligent use of the means of grace now that is the ideal word faith and repentance are requirements of the covenant that is what we must do this is our response whoever believes that's what evangelism is about it is not about saying to people all you people you are all saved it is saying to people

I have salvation for you if you believe in Christ what must I do to be saved believe in the Lord Jesus Christ that faith is a covenant stipulation it's something man must do if he wishes to experience the salvation of God but may I point out the asymmetry the disproportion between the input of God and the input of man between the grace of eternal love which offers its own son and this little thing that we bring the empty hand that receives there is disproportion there is no balance and no correspondence between what God did and what God requires and yet what God requires is an essential element in the arrangement small insignificant thought is now you say to me if the covenant is two sided if the human response is so significant where then does the grace come in

well the grace comes in you know in this in that great prayer of Augustine which I'm sure I've quoted before when he said to God Lord give what thou dost command and command what thou wilt God requires faith this is his commandment that ye believe he commands and yet you know he gives it it is the gift of God and that is where the whole tension between grace and works is finally resolved that faith is required that faith is my faith it's my doing I do it and yet I do it by the grace of God because God gives me give what thou dost command God commands faith God gives faith or again put it this way the stipulation of the covenant of grace is faith but that faith has been purchased in the covenant of redemption

Christ has secured that his people will believe that his spirit will give this gift to those in whose place he stands well I have to close it virtually there I just do want to mention one more thing briefly and it's this very familiar passage that you have there in the closing words of Matthew's gospel it is often described simply as a great commission go ye therefore and teach all nations there is a remarkable thing about these words and it's this that these words are cast in the form of an ancient covenant they have a preamble all authorities given to me in heaven and in earth they have stipulations go teach all the nations and they have a promise I am with you always if it is matter the most serious concern to us that if we expect if we live for look for pray for the presence of God with us we are being told there you see that that presence is covenantal

[ 62 : 33 ] I am with you I am with you as you go because you go but if we divorce the presence from the stipulation there is no presence the preaching of the word the evangelizing of the nations extension outreach bring God's word to bear upon the lostness and blindness around us that's covenantal that is the precondition and prerequisite of enjoying the presence of God I have heard a church say to you not to me but to a group we are not ready for evangelism we won't go in the words until we have the presence that is an immersion of the biblical order it is the going church which alone has a covenant promise that God will be present and it is certainly touching that we can end up priding ourselves on orthodoxy and having a message and yet not having a go and imagining and I say imagining imagining that we can have him with us while we violate his own basic situation and do not go that too is covenant for our shame and there will be a variety of things that you want to follow up that you're certainly welcome to follow up whatever you want to as long as I allow you to yes you were saying that the covenant of grace between God and the believer and baptism and I think the covenant of baptism is assigning the seal of that covenant what better to understand about the children of the believer and their relationship to the covenant of grace and the fact of the covenant of the covenant well as I see it we baptize infants because they're the physical seed of believers and that is the

Old Testament arrangement God told Abraham to circumcise his own physical descendants and I don't think we can go very very far beyond that there is no more radical probing as to the logic of infant circumcision it did not mean that all such infants were elect or that their new birth was inevitable because we know that some of them and maybe many of them in fact never believed in God at all effectively and I'm reluctant to seek a rationale that goes beyond this simple proposition that there were some of them because there were physical descendants of believers that applied in the Abrahamic covenant and is deemed to apply in the New Testament because we still live under Abraham's covenant according to Galatians chapter 3 but I do not feel able to believe that all the children of believing parents are themselves elect or are all destined to be born again that is not borrowed by the biblical evidence the two limitations of sovereign election and sovereign regeneration apply even at the point of infant circumcision and infant baptism and we proceed because it is God's ordinance to a large extent unexplained that we put the covenant sign on the physical seat it's a spiritual covenant and yet the sign is put on the physical seat and I am reluctant to go beyond that and try to rationalize it 1 Timothy chapter 2 verses 3 and 4 suggests that God wants all men to be saved and come to knowledge of the truth would that then suggest that in essence that he wants all men to be part of the covenant of grace

I think I would have to say yes in response to that but all men in that context is defined I think very very carefully it is a reference I think to prevailing class distinctions that in the church of that day men weren't praying for the upper classes kings and politicians and so on because they thought that they were beyond salvation and so Paul's response is to pray for all in authority all the aristocracy because God will have all men to be saved not simply the poor which was their way of seeing things but all kinds and classes of men and that's my fundamental response to that but I do also believe that although it is true that God loves his own people his elect people in a very special

way that he loves all men in the sense that he offers

Christ to all of them and that he pleads in the gospel that they should all come to Christ but I also believe that men will not by themselves respond to that offer and that there is a proportion of mankind large or small people that God loves so much that he is determined to save them and that he will in fact not only preach Christ to them and offer him to them but he will irresistibly call them to himself now he doesn't do that to all men but he does that to a proportion whom he loves in a very very special way so I do say that he loves all men but he loves his chosen people in this particularly intense way that he will see to it that they are in fact brought into the covenant if you go back again to Augustine's principle give what the rest command

God commands all men to have faith but God does not give faith to all men now why God does not give it to all men none of us understands but that is certainly the position that we find ourselves in and it means that at last the differentiation between lost and the saved lies in a distinction within God's own love but some he does call to himself and some other she doesn't call to himself we don't know which side is more or which side is few but I'm saying therefore that God wants all classes to be saved I'm saying too that God loves all men in the sense of offering Christ to them and I'm saying again that God loves some men and women so much that he actually draws them to himself resistibly it's not remarkable that God said he would set his bow in the cloud to remind him of the flood but is it not rather as much as anything it was to remind man of the grace of God that this bow set there was the word of promise from

[ 71 : 14 ] God that another flood would not come on it and that even after all these years man knows from Adam from the newest time that this there was an evidence of a flood even by the bow it is a sign to man beyond question and we ought to make more of that dimension that the bow reminds us of God's commitment to us as a race and to our whole universe in fact in the Bible the idea of a memorial before God occurs quite often but it's only a human way of speaking about God as if we needed some reminder of his covenant but sacrifice and even the Lord's Supper at one level has the same function that it serves us a memorial before God of his commitment to his own people but when he says when I see the bow I remember my covenant that is really poetry not simply propositional theology

I'm intrigued by the lack of questions tonight and I wonder if it's got something to do with most of us being a little bit uncomfortable with the idea of covenant and if that is that we're not hearing enough about it from the pulpits and well I'm trying to frame a question as I go along would you have any would you think that that might be some sort of right assessment and what would you want to say to that situation if it were I think it's absolutely right and I think it's also very very sad if I can put it this way our own confessional theology is peculiarly covenant theology so called federal theology and the old preaching did emphasise the covenant to a very marked degree now at some point along the line we lost that whole orientation

I do not know where we lost it because until recently the ministers were trained on Holch's theology and Holch was very much a covenant theologian and it is still true that today there is little said about the covenant of redemption or the covenant of grace or the noai covenant I know there's been a reaction in the liberal tradition against covenant theology but I don't say that's a very old tradition and I am at a loss I mean for myself I'm a very old fashioned 17th century covenant theologian I abide almost the entire detail of the system of vizios and cocaeus and the confession but even a man like professor John Murray was fairly unhappy with covenant structures and denied for example the Adamic covenant as a covenant but I can understand that night silence is due to the fact that folk are quite unfamiliar with many of those concepts and maybe that's my fault too but it is possible to subsume almost the entire bible under the concept of covenant and that's been done by for example such a liberal scholar as

Eichrod in his Old Testament theology because he speaks for example of God as the covenant God the church as the covenant people the law as the covenant ethic and so on Christ as the covenant messiah and you can bring almost every single element or strand of biblical thought within your covenant concept as a master concept as what I would call an architectonic principle now I don't like such master principles because they impose constraints on the word of an artificial kind but the covenant is in my view the single most important unifying factor within biblical revelation and I'm at a bit of a loss as to why we've lost it but I would have to concede that it is not a very common concept in the synoptic gospels in

Christ's own teaching where instead the kingdom of God concept is dominant and it isn't all that dominant in Paul's thinking either so maybe a church which has begun to preach almost entirely on the new testament is maybe losing its root age in old testament covenant theology I just don't know but I do hope that as we access it especially in terms of covenant with Noah and so on that it does remind us just how rich this old covenant idea is and maybe although it is new or difficult or unfamiliar that you may be able to begin to reflect upon it and to bring it to bear upon large masses of biblical teaching my position on that is that it was the old testament principle it is not withdrawn by the new testament and in galatians 3 the abrahamic covenant to which that principle belonged is said to be the prevailing covenant even in the new testament but the blessing of abraham has come upon the gentiles and what paul denies in that chapter you recall is that the church is under the mosaic covenant and he says we aren't under sinai we're under the abrahamic covenant and it is all i'm saying is that it is an unabrogated principle under the covenant to which it belonged is still the prevailing covenant we are still abraham's children but there is no specific new testament warrant for infant baptism or of course for some other things as well but i think there are general principles that do support the practice one final question it seems like what constitutes the newness of the new covenant well i meant to spend some time on the revelation of the covenant as the old and new testament i do want to start by emphasizing again the unity of covenant between old and new testament we're still under the abrahamic covenant arrangements the newness consists in a clearer revelation of the truth and in a closer experience of the holy spirit as indwelling every one of god's people and a more widely prevalent confidence and assurance but i would be in very great difficulty if i were to suggest that we in the new testament possessed privileges that weren't possessed by old testament saints if you go to the psalms you find all references to forgiveness and so on and you also find a remarkable degree of assurance and peace such as very very few free church believers possess like the lord is my shepherd that intensely personal pronoun there and that's the way back 1200

[ 79 : 57 ] BC you've got that affirmation and that's quite remarkable so i think that by and large the difference is greater light because the king has come and fulfilled the old testament and more peace and more comfort but not different blessings the old testament people were under the same covenant god under the same covenant and enjoyed in substance the same covenant blessings as as the new testament people of god do well i think perhaps we'll leave things there for this evening and just one or two things to say and after that perhaps the reventy and mackenzie will close our session with prayer for us please