

The Covenantal Backbone

Understanding the Nature of Our Relationships

1. What is the Covenant of Grace?

Westminster Confession

7.3. Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant [*i.e. the covenant of works*], the Lord was pleased to make a second (Genesis 3:15; Romans 8:3; Galatians 3:21; Isaiah 42:6), commonly called the **covenant of grace**; wherein He freely offers unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved (Galatians 3:11), and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life His Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe (Ezekiel 36:26-28; John 6:44-45).

14.2. By this faith [*i.e. saving faith*], a Christian believes to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God Himself speaking therein; and acts differently upon that which each particular passage thereof contains; yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings, and embracing the promises of God for this life, and that which is to come. But the principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the **covenant of grace**.

1689 London Baptist Confession

7.1. The distance between God and the Creature is so great, that although reasonable Creatures do owe obedience unto him as their Creator, yet they could never have attained the reward of Life, but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which he hath been pleased to express, by way of Covenant.

7.2. Moreover Man having brought himself under the curse of the Law by his fall, it pleased the Lord to make a **Covenant of Grace** wherein he freely offereth unto Sinners, Life and Salvation by Jesus Christ (John 3:16; Romans 8:3), requiring of them Faith in him, that they may be saved; and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal Life, his holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe.

7.3. This Covenant is revealed in the Gospel; first of all to Adam in the promise of Salvation by the seed of the woman, and afterwards by farther steps, until the full discovery thereof was completed in the new Testament; and it is founded in that Eternal Covenant transaction (2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 1:2), that was between the Father and the Son, about the Redemption of the Elect; and it is alone by the Grace of this Covenant, that all of the posterity of fallen Adam, that ever were saved, did obtain life and a blessed immortality; Man being now utterly incapable of acceptance with God upon those terms, on which Adam stood in his state of innocency.

Westminster Shorter Catechism

Question 20

Q: Did God leave all mankind to perish in the estate of sin and misery?

A: God having, out of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a **covenant of grace**, to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer.

Question 31

Q: With whom was the **covenant of grace** made?

A: The **covenant of grace** was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in him with all the elect as his seed.

Westminster Longer Catechism

Question 33

Q: Was the **covenant of grace** always administered after one and the same manner?

A: The **covenant of grace** was not always administered after the same manner, but the administrations of it under the Old Testament were different from those under the New.

Question 34

Q: How was the **covenant of grace** administered under the Old Testament?

A: The **covenant of grace** was administered under the Old Testament, by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the Passover, and other types and ordinances, which did all foreshadow Christ then to come, and were for that time sufficient to build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they then had full remission of sin, and eternal salvation.

Question 35

Q: How is the **covenant of grace** administered under the New Testament?

A: Under the New Testament, when Christ the substance was exhibited, the same **covenant of grace** was and still is to be administered in the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper; in which grace and salvation are held forth in more fulness, evidence, and efficacy, to all nations.

Question 36

Q: Who is the Mediator of the **covenant of grace**?

A: The only Mediator of the **covenant of grace** is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, of one substance and equal with the Father, in the fulness of time became man, and so was and continues to be God and man, in two entire distinct natures, and one person, forever.

2. Other Scriptural Support

- a. Genesis 3:15
- b. Genesis 17:7-8 (cf. Galatians 3:15-16 and 29)
- c. Galatians 3:8, 17
- d. Ephesians 2:12-19
- e. Hebrews 8:6-7; 9:15; 13:20

Covenant of/with Creation (Adam), though it was a covenant of works, was still an act of God's grace. The man had nothing to offer to God in any real sense.

These covenants are most helpful to us as we think about our relationship with God and His work of redemption. In a sense, each covenant we have discussed is related to the other and has relationship to all subsequent covenants. The Old Covenant is, in one sense, an outgrowth of the covenant of works (perfect obedience was required, cf. James 2:10); yet it was also a covenant of grace (cf. the sacrifices, etc.).