

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 31

Halifax, 2 March 2008

Q. 31 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.

Last week, we began looking at the covenant of grace.

- For several weeks (or was it months) we studied about the covenant of works...
 - The covenant of works is the name we give to the relationship that God established with Adam and all his descendents in the Garden of Eden...
 - Before the whole human race fell, we had a promise from God of blessing and life if we would but continue in obedience to Him as our Maker.
 - But there was also a threat of death if we should choose to rebel against Him and go our own way.
 - As the representative of us all, Adam transgressed.
 - The result?
 - The entire human race was corrupted—we were alienated from God and became incapable of obedience and became worthy of condemnation...
 - The dreadful curse fell upon us, the curse that would culminate at last in eternal torment in Hell.
- I showed you last week that God might justly have left us in that miserable estate to perish...
 - The sentence was a just sentence that could not be overturned without perverting justice—something the Lord would never do.
 - But God did not leave us to perish in the estate of sin and misery...
 - He established a second covenant which is commonly called the covenant of grace...
 - The reason is because this covenant is made with those who are unable to meet the conditions that were required for us, as human beings, to live before God...
 - Therefore, rather than obliging fallen sinners to meet what God requires (which would be utterly impossible for them),
 - God Himself meets that demands of His justice for all those He saves by this covenant.

- He provides a redeemer who bears the curse for them and also fulfills the obedience that is required of them.
 - From the start to finish, the covenant is all of grace...
 - It is about what God does to save His people rather than about what they do to save themselves.
 - It is all of grace.

But tonight we come to a very important question...

- With whom was this covenant—this covenant of grace—made?
- The answer?
 - It was made with “Christ as the second Adam, and in Him with all the elect as His seed.”
 - To understand this, we have to be willing to think outside of the categories of this present age of individualism and egalitarianism...
 - We have to be able to see things from a biblical, covenantal, perspective.
 - Our society is by nature individualistic which means we do not easily see how it could be that we should all be condemned for Adam’s sin...
 - In our minds, we have no connection with our first parents, but each one of us stands on his own...
 - And it does not seem right to us that Christ’s righteousness should be imputed to others—
 - Everyone must acquire his own righteousness.
 - Individualism suggests that everyone is in it for himself.
 - And, at the same time, we are egalitarian so that it is difficult for us to see how God could justly save a few and not all.
 - In our minds, He must treat everyone the same.
- But I want to insist tonight that you be done with your individualism and your egalitarianism so much as it collides with what is clearly taught in the Bible.
 - God did not make His covenant with us as individuals, but He made it with us in Christ...
 - The whole church stands or falls if Christ stands or falls, just as the whole human race stood or fell according to what Adam did.
 - God deals with us federally—we have those whom He has appointed to represent us.
 - Yet, at the same time, not all are brought into this covenant, but only those whom God has elected from before the foundation of the world.

- Even many who are in the church are not elect—only the elect obtain salvation.
 - So God does not deal with everyone the same, and we have to get used to that.
- Our goal is to think biblically rather than according to the spirit of this age.
 - So let's look further at what the Bible says—how this is set forth to us.

I. First, I want you to see that the covenant was made with one person—as our representative.

A. The one person, of course, is Christ.

1. In Galatians 3:16, Paul expressly states that He is one.

- **Gal 3:16: Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as of many, but as of one, “And to your Seed,” who is Christ.**
- Paul is showing by this that even back in the time of Abraham when the covenant of grace was established with him,
 - Christ was already the principle figure in the covenant.
 - He was the one in whom all the rest of the covenant members would stand or fall.

2. That the covenant was made with Christ is seen repeatedly in scripture...

- a. For example, in Genesis 3:15, the seed of the woman is referred to as an individual “he” who will crush the head of the serpent.
 - Gen 3:15: “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.”
- b. Then, with David, in Psalm 89:19-37, you can see that there is a seed (one particular son of David whose title among the Jews became the Son of David) that will come,
 - and the promise to that one individual is that He will sit on the throne forever.
 - Turn to Ps 89:19-37 and look at it with me...
 - **Psalm 89:19: Then You spoke in a vision to Your holy one, and said: “I have given help to *one who is mighty*; I have exalted one chosen from the people.**
 - You see that it is just one individual that is spoken of—one specially chosen and exalted.

- You see that as our mediator, He is at the same time viewed as one of us, struggling under the curse, but also emancipator who overcomes...
 - **20-26: I have found My servant David; with My holy oil I have anointed him, with whom My hand shall be established; also My arm shall strengthen him. The enemy shall not outwit him, nor the son of wickedness afflict him. I will beat down his foes before his face, and plague those who hate him. But My faithfulness and My mercy *shall be* with him, and in My name his horn shall be exalted. Also I will set his hand over the sea, and his right hand over the rivers. He shall cry to Me, ‘You *are* my Father, My God, and the rock of my salvation.’**
 - In verse 27, the Father begins to make covenant promises to this one Son of David...to Christ:
 - **27-37: Also I will make him My firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth. My mercy I will keep for him forever, and My covenant shall stand firm with him. His seed also I will make *to endure* forever, and his throne as the days of heaven. If his sons forsake My law and do not walk in My judgments, if they break My statutes and do not keep My commandments, then I will punish their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless My lovingkindness I will not utterly take from him, nor allow My faithfulness to fail. My covenant I will not break, nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips. Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David: His seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before Me; it shall be established forever like the moon, even *like* the faithful witness in the sky.”**
 - The throne of David is established forever in the seed of David, in the one who comes along with the power of an endless life to bring life to all His people forever.
- c. In Psalm 2, the promise of ultimate victory over the nations (all brought under His dominion) is given to the Son...to Him as one individual.
- Psalm 2:7-9: “I will declare the decree: the LORD has said to Me, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel.’ ”
- d. And similarly in Isaiah 49, the salvation of the nations is seen to be a promise made not to the nations, but to Christ, the Servant of the Lord:
- **Isa 49:1-9: “Listen, O coastlands, to Me, and take heed, you peoples from afar! The LORD has called Me from the womb; from the matrix of My mother He has made mention of My name. And He has made My mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of His hand He has hidden Me, and made Me a polished shaft; in His quiver He has hidden Me. And He said to me, ‘You are My servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.’ Then I said, ‘I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and in vain; yet surely my just reward is with the LORD, and my work with my God.’ And now the LORD says, Who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, to bring**

Jacob back to Him, so that Israel is gathered to Him (For I shall be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, and My God shall be My strength), indeed He says, 'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.' " Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, their Holy One, to Him whom man despises, to Him whom the nation abhors, to the Servant of rulers: "Kings shall see and arise, Princes also shall worship, because of the LORD who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel; and He has chosen You." Thus says the LORD: "In an acceptable time I have heard You, and in the day of salvation I have helped You; I will preserve You and give You as a covenant to the people, to restore the earth, to cause them to inherit the desolate heritages; that You may say to the prisoners, 'Go forth,' "

- You see here that it is Christ who brings blessing to all the people of God.

B. It was made with Christ alone because only He could meet its conditions in such away that God's blessing could come upon the church...

1. Only He could fulfill the righteousness

- **Jer 23:5-6: "Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. in His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS."**
- We could not be accepted in God's sight until we had this one to represent us who would rule in righteousness...
- He brings righteousness to the entire body.

TRANS> But this had to be more than ruling in righteousness—He also had to make satisfaction for the sins of the whole church...

2. Only He could provide a satisfying sacrifice that brings forgiveness:

- This is brought out in Hebrews 7:20-25
- **Heb 7:20-25: And inasmuch as He was not made priest without an oath (for they have become priests without an oath, but He with an oath by Him who said to Him: "The LORD has sworn and will not relent, 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek' "), by so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant. Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.**

II. Now secondly, I want you to see that the covenant is also made with many.

A. Interestingly, in Galatians 3, after showing that the seed was Christ in verse 16,

- in verses 26-29, Paul shows that we are all Abraham's seed.
1. Let's go back to Gal 3 and look at this...
 - **Gal 3:26-29: For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.**
 - Here you see that all those who believe and are baptised are said to be Abraham's seed and so heirs according the covenant promise.
 - yet, in verse 16, we saw that it was Christ alone who was the seed.
 2. So which is it?
 - Is the covenant made with Christ alone?
 - YES—Gal 3:16
 - Is the covenant made with all the elect as His seed?
 - YES—Gal 3:26-29
 - You see that the covenant is made with Christ and with all the elect.
 - We are in it together.
- B. How can it be both Christ and the elect?
1. Because Christ is joined to His people in order to represent them.
 - a. Gal 3:26 shows that it is by faith that we are joined to Him...
 - Faith that is outwardly represented by baptism...
 - In this way, we are all one in Christ Jesus—one body represented by Him.
 - b. So the covenant can be spoken of as being made with Christ, but because we are united to him—we are one body.
 - c. This is brought out very clearly in Isaiah 53.
 - Here, we see that the unity is so close between Christ and His seed that all of our iniquities are laid upon Him...
 - And that His punishment is counted as our punishment.
 - SEE Isa 53:
 - d. It is in this that he is called the second Adam...
 - Adam corrupted the people he represented who had been righteous...
 - Christ justified the people He represented who had been sinners.

- **1 Cor 15:22: For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.**
2. This is why, for example, the servant in Isaiah sometimes appears to be Christ and other times appears to be all of God's people.
- We are one with Christ as our representative.
 - Our sins are imputed to Him and His righteousness is imputed to us.
 - **2Co 5:21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.**
 - This is why Christ confesses sins and we are able to plead our righteousness.

III. Finally, I want you to see that there is a sense in which the covenant is made with the whole visible church, yet in another only with the elect.

A. This can be seen looking at Israel

1. First, let's look at Romans 11.
 - a. You can see the tension right away in verse 1—
 - **Rom 11:1: "I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin."**
 - Outwardly, the covenant was made with Israel and the promises were given to them...
 - Yet, so many of them were cast away when Jesus came...
 - Does that mean that God did not fulfil His promise to Israel?
 - b. Paul insists that the answer is no...
 - He explains that savingly, or effectually, the covenant was only made with the elect who were truly united to Jesus Christ.
 - He illustrates that it is the same as it was with Elijah...
 - It is only because of election that any among Israel are saved.
 - They are the true recipients of the covenant.
 - **SEE Romans 11:1-7 "I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, "LORD, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life"? But what does the divine response say to him? "I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." Even so then, at this**

present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then *it is* no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if *it is* of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work. What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded.”

- c. He even explains that God deliberately blinded many of those who were only outwardly in the covenant.
 - Rom 11:8-9:
 - 1) They, in one sense, did not keep the covenant...
 - But in another sense, the covenant did not keep them because it never really had them...
 - If they had been elect,
 - The covenant involved giving them a new heart such as would not depart from God...
 - It is impossible for it to fail.
 - 2) But the non-elect who are in the covenant community are like chaff.
 - They are there with the grain, even supporting it...
 - But when judgement comes, they are found to be without life, without faith and are cast away.
- 2. Paul had already made the distinction he makes here back in Romans 2.
 - a. There he speaks about those who are Jews outwardly—those who are circumcised and so stand in a covenant relationship with God...
 - They consider themselves to be in good standing, but in fact, as verse 24 puts it, they cause God’s name to be blasphemed among the nations.
 - They stand under the symbol of cleansing grace, yet they act as if they are self-cleansed—or even as if they need not cleansing.
 - b. Paul shows here that those who are truly elect are those who have the cleansing that God gives—the cleansing that is promised in the covenant...
 - **Romans 2:28-29:** “For he is not a Jew who *is one* outwardly, nor is circumcision that which *is* outward in the flesh; but *he is* a Jew who *is one* inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise *is not* from men but from God.” (NKJV)
 - c. Does that mean there was no advantage to be in the covenant if it is only the elect who are saved anyway?
 - Paul says—of course there is an advantage!

- God brings the promise to His elect within the covenant by means of the covenant—
 - This is brought out in 3:1-3
 - **Rom 3:1-3: “What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God. For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect?”**
3. Let me add further that those who are in the covenant but are not elect are worse off than those who are outside...
- a. They are worse off, not because they had the oracles of God—that is to their advantage...
 - but because having these, they were hardened in their unbelief.
 - Their judgement will be greater because they did not keep the covenant by continuing in the promise.
 - b. This is brought out especially in Hebrews 3:16-19.
 - READ> Heb 3:16-19

TRANS> But now let’s move on to the great question—here is the point where some stumble in this doctrine.

B. Are things different in the New Testament?

1. In the New Testament is all the chaff purged away so that there are no longer unbelievers in the covenant who break the covenant and are cast out?
 - For example, look at Hebrews 8:7-13...
 - READ> Heb 3:7-13:
 - You see clearly here that God is going to take care of their hearts so that all are saved.
 - Ah, but it is clear that this is talking about what the covenant does with the elect...
 - What it always did with the elect—as in Elijah’s day.
 - It is new and it is better because it surely brings salvation to the elect...
 - but still, there are many in the kingdom who will be cast out.
2. This is shown abundantly throughout the pages of the New Testament...
 - a. Even right in this book of Hebrews...

- One of the main themes is that of warning to those who are numbered among the covenant people...
 - that they must make sure that they have the new life that God promises to give to every last one of His elect...
- In Hebrews 3, he is using the fact that many who were outwardly in the covenant were unbelievers to warn those who were baptised:
 - Look at Hebrews 3:12-15...
 - READ Heb 3:12-15:
 - The concern here is that the same thing will happen to many of them that happened to Israel of old.
 - In Hebrews 10:26-29,
 - He warns that the judgement of those who are in the New Covenant as unbelievers will be worse than it was for Israel...
 - READ> Heb 10:26-29.
- b. Now if you will go back to Romans 11 again, you find here that Paul applies the warning to the Gentiles in the New Covenant...
 - that it is only when they have the life that God promises in the covenant—the life that causes them to hold to Christ—that they will be saved.
 - If not, they will be cut off just like unbelieving Israel...
 - Romans 11:17-22.
- c. It is not surprising to find that this is at the very heart of much of the teaching of the Lord Jesus...
 - 1) He was preaching to the house of Israel, most of whom were not elect...
 - And in His teaching about the kingdom He came to establish,
 - He continually sets forth the doctrine that many who are in the covenant will be cast out.
 - 2) Consider a couple of examples...
 - First, in the Sermon on the Mount He speaks about the wide gate and the narrow gate...
 - These are all covenant people, but most of them enter by the wrong way and end up being destroyed.
 - Isn't that exactly what we see in the visible church—among those who are baptised?
 - We can say that they never should have been baptised—

- but that does not unbaptise them...
 - The same was true in Israel—if there had been proper discipline, many would have been cut off and their children would not have been circumcised.
 - They are all the more condemned by their baptism.
- Now look at Jesus' parables...parables of the kingdom!
 - What do you find here?
 - Most them warn about the fact that there are two sorts in the kingdom...two sorts in the covenant community...
 - There are the virgins with oil, and the virgins without oil...
 - There are the wheat and the tares...
 - There are the seeds that bring forth fruit and there are the ones on the stony ground or the congested ground that never bring forth fruit
 - Among the fish caught in the dragnet, there are the good and there are the bad which are separated at the end.
 - There is an idealistic spirit that wants to have a church that is pure,
 - and I say that the elders in every congregation are to labour to exercise proper church discipline according to God's command...
 - but the truth is, it is beyond our power to unbaptise all the baptised...
 - It does no good to unbaptise them...
 - Instead, we must call them all to repentance...
 - We must call them all to seek the cleansing that is promised in baptism—and to rest in Christ...
 - lest they at last be found to be covenant breakers who are cast out from the kingdom.

So you see that the covenant of grace is, in one sense made with the whole covenant community, but in another sense, only with the elect.

- The difference is that the elect, the true sheep, hear the voice of Christ and come to Him.
- The false sons boast in their covenant status and perish.