

UNDERSTANDING COVENANT THEOLOGY

Richard D. Phillips

Second Presbyterian Church, Greenville, SC

- IV -

The Covenant of Works & the Gospel

What Is the Covenant of Works?

- “The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience” WCF, VII.2.
 - Works principle: why?
 - Life promised to obedience, death threatened for disobedience.
 - Made with Adam and his posterity
- Biblical Basis:

“And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die’” (Gen. 2:16-17).

“But like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me” (Hos. 6:7).

“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Rom. 5:12, KJV).

The Adamic Covenant (Works)

- *Parties Involved:* God and Man
- *Condition:* Perfect, Personal Obedience
- *Promised Blessing:* Life
- *Sanction:* Death
- *Sign:* Two Trees

Adam as Federal Head / Covenant Representative

- **Principle of Federal Headship/Covenant Representation**

- Noah's family (Gen. 7:1ff)
- Abraham's house (Gen. 17:7 – "I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.")
- Achan's sin (Jos. 7:24-25).
- Lydia's household (Acts 16:15).
- We are relational beings, and God is a relational God.

- **Adam as "the first man."**

"The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. . . . The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven" (1 Cor. 15:45-47).

"Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come" (Rom. 5:14).

Adam as Federal Head / Covenant Representative

- Adam as our natural father.
- Adam as an our covenant representative

“The covenant being made with Adam as a public person, not for himself only, but for his posterity, all mankind, descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him, and fell with him in that first transgression” (WLC, 22; WSC 16).

- Adam as an ideal representative

“See what a glorious condition man was in, when God entered into covenant with him. He was placed in the garden of God, which for the pleasure of it was called paradise (Gen. 2:8)... He was full of holiness. Paradise was not more adorned with fruit than Adam’s soul was with grace. He was the coin on which God had stamped his lively image. Light sparkled in his understanding, so that he was like an earthly angel; and his will and affections were full of order, tuning harmoniously to the will of God. Adam was a perfect pattern of sanctity. Adam had intimacy of communion with God and conversed with him, as a favourite with his prince. He knew God’s mind, and had his heart. He not only enjoyed the light of the sun in paradise, but the light of God’s countenance. This was Adam’s condition when God entered into a covenant with him; but this did not long continue... His teeth watered at the apple, and ever since it has made our eyes water.” (Thomas Watson: *A Body of Divinity*, pp. 130, 131).

Adam's Fall (and Ours)

What are the results of Adam's Fall?

- **Results for Adam**

- **Guilty before God**

“of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat” (Gen. 2:17).

- **Alienated from God**

“I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” He said, ‘Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?’” (Gen. 3:10-11).

- **Subject to death**

“for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:17).

- **Cut off from true life**

“He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life” (Gen. 3:24).

Adam's Fall (and Ours), cont.

- Results for Adam's Offspring

- **Guilty before God**

- “death spread to all men because all sinned” (Rom. 5:12).

- **Corrupted in sinful nature**

- “They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart” (Eph. 4:18).

- “I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Ps. 51:5).

- **Under death's power**

- “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned” (Rom. 5:12).

- “deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery” (Heb. 2:15).

- **Cut off from true life**

- “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (Eph. 2:13).

“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men in that all sinned” (Rom. 5:12).

Christ, the New Adam

Christ, the Fulfiller of the Covenant of Works

- Jesus' Redeems Us from the Curse
 - “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal. 4:4-5).
- Jesus Upholds God's Law
 - “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Mt. 5:17).

Christ, the New Adam

- **Jesus Placed Himself under the Curse**

- “John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness” (Mt. 3:14-15).

- **Jesus Achieved Righteousness under the Covenant of Works for Us**

- “Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous” (Rom. 5:18-19).

“Mankind have disobeyed; we have all sinned, and are therefore all under condemnation. Nothing but a perfect obedience can gain God’s favour. Hence the covenant, and hence the incarnation and sacrifice of Christ; hence the substitution of the just for the unjust. The Gospel is not an exception to the Law, “This do and thou shalt live;” the Gospel is founded on that Law. This Law Christ came not to destroy but to fulfill.” (William Arnot).

Adam & Christ in Romans 5:12-21

Two Covenant Heads: Adam & Christ

- **Death in Adam, Life in Christ**

“If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:17).

- **Grace vs. Works**

“And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification” (Rom. 5:16).

- **Christ's Obedience the Foundation of Grace**

“Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous” (Rom. 5:18-19).

- **Obedience – Righteousness – Justification - Life**

“by the one man's *obedience* the many will be made *righteous*” (Rom. 5:19).... “one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men” (Rom. 5:18).

The Covenant of Works & the Gospel

Faith in Christ...

- Places us “in” or “under” Christ, instead of Adam.
- Gains Christ’s imputed righteousness, so that his fulfillment of the covenant of works is credited to us.
- Gains forgiveness of our sins by his blood
- Makes us sons of God.
- Restores us to life in the eternal city, where Christ is the Tree of Life, with perfect communion with God, in the endless light of his glory.

“You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel” (Heb. 12:22-24).