

The Covenants of God

A study of the covenants of promise
made between God and His people.

Ephesians 2:11-22

PROVIDENCE REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

Lesson 2 – A Covenant in the Garden

Sunday School Series: The Covenants of God

Lesson 2 – A Covenant in the Garden – Genesis 2:15-17; 3:15

References:

Systematic Theology – John Frame

Covenant Theology – Greg Nichols

Covenant Theology: From Adam to Christ – Nehemiah Coxe &
John Owen

The Distinctives of Baptist Covenant Theology – Pascal Denault

Lesson 2 – A Covenant in the Garden

Most studies on the covenants of Scripture, or of Covenant Theology, begin with the Covenant of Grace, or the Eternal Covenant (Plan) of Redemption. However, for this study we are going to start “In the beginning.”

For background, John Frame writes, “The events of the biblical story do not begin in history, or even with God’s first act of creation in Genesis 1:1. Other passages tell us things that happened before that creative act” (Frame, pg. 59).

For example - John 17:5 Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

Lesson 2 – A Covenant in the Garden

In eternity past, God the Father gave a people to His Son (John 17:6).

“He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4), “by predestining us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will” (Eph. 1:5).

Jesus the Son came to accomplish the salvation of God’s chosen people and then the Holy Spirit was sent by the Father and Son to bear witness of Christ and to teach the disciples things to come (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13). Thus, the Spirit is the author of regeneration who sets God’s people free from sin and condemnation.

“All of this was planned before the foundation of the world” (Frame, pg. 59).

Lesson 2 – A Covenant in the Garden

Now, back to the beginning (because a study of God's decrees would be a whole other series), we will look at how each of the Biblical covenants fit into God's eternal plan of redemption as we look at them one by one.

The Covenant of Works – or the Edenic Covenant.

Is there a covenant in the creation account? Those who believe so refer to an agreement between God and Adam, called the Covenant of Works. The idea of this covenant originated in the late 16th century. However, not all reformed theologians agree that a covenant of works exists. The account of creation given in Genesis does not refer to God's command or commission to Adam as a covenant, so if there is a covenant here, it is not formally announced or referred to as such.

Lesson 2 – A Covenant in the Garden

If there is a Covenant of Works, or Edenic Covenant as Frame prefers to call it, presented in Genesis 1-3, how do we understand the parties, stipulations, and promises of the covenant?

Frame explains that this covenant would culminate at creation as a fulfillment of God's decrees from eternity past. The covenant includes a cultural mandate, a divine blessing, and a gift of land (the whole earth) which was to be filled with human seed.

Adam must work and keep the garden, keep God's creation ordinances, and obey one command related to the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The curse of death would be the consequence for disobeying this command.

Lesson 2 – A Covenant in the Garden

Genesis 2:15 Then Yahweh God took the man and set him in the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. 16 And Yahweh God commanded the man, saying, “From any tree of the garden you may surely eat; 17 but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat from it; for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.”

Along with the commission to rule over creation, Adam was given a test of faithfulness in the command. He failed the test, breaking the covenant and forfeiting his life and the lives of his posterity as a result.

1 Cor. 15:21 For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.

Lesson 2 – A Covenant in the Garden

What if Adam had passed the test? He would have the blessing of life, and the blessing of not being cursed. Access to the Tree of Life surely would have given him immortality as long as he obeyed.

In this covenant, the blessing was earned/maintained or lost by Adam.

The violation of the covenant command resulted in the curse upon Adam and Eve, as well as the rest of creation (Gen. 3:1-19; Rom. 8:19-23).

If we understand the idea of the command as “do this and live” (Lev. 18:5), and see that the “wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23; Heb. 10:28) we see both the blessing for obedience and the curse for disobedience that is reflected in the other covenants of Scripture.

Lesson 2 – A Covenant in the Garden

Does the Covenant of Works still exist today? Again, within the camp of those who believe there is a covenant of works, there is disagreement as to whether it still exists today. Frame posits that since Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden, they and their posterity would be unable to tend and keep it. And now there was no danger from eating the fruit from the forbidden tree. When the covenant was broken all that remained was its curse.

The creation ordinances, the basis for human ethics, are still applicable to all of mankind everywhere, even after the fall:

1. Labor – Gen. 1:28; 2:15; 2 Thess. 3:10
2. Marriage – Gen. 2:23-25; Exodus 20:14
3. Sabbath Rest – Gen. 2:1-3; Exodus 20:11; Mark 2:27-28

Lesson 2 – A Covenant in the Garden

Interestingly, a comparison of the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith reveals that the Baptists removed almost all references to the covenant of works that were present in the WCF. The exceptions are found in chapter 19.6 (which appeals to the idea of the covenant of works, but not to the covenant itself) and 20.1 (The covenant of works being broken by sin, and made unprofitable for life, God was pleased to promise Christ, the seed of the woman, as the means of calling the elect and bringing to life within them faith and repentance. In this promise the substance of the Gospel was revealed and shown to be the effectual for the conversion and salvation of sinners).

Within a Presbyterian framework the Covenant of Works was contrasted by the Covenant of Grace, revealed in two administrations of the Old and New Covenants. The Covenant of Works is the law, and the Covenant of Grace is

Lesson 2 – A Covenant in the Garden

Within a Presbyterian framework the Covenant of Works was contrasted by the Covenant of Grace, revealed in two administrations of the Old and New Covenants. The Covenant of Works is the law, and the Covenant of Grace is, well, grace (Denault, pg. 44).

In a Baptist framework, the Old Covenant is the law, contrasted with the New Covenant, which is the ultimate revelation of the Covenant of Grace (Denault, pg. 45).

Before Christ ratified the New Covenant with His blood, it existed as a promise, revealed little by little throughout the other covenants of Scripture until it's final realization at the Cross.

Lesson 2 – A Covenant in the Garden

Second London Baptist Confession of Faith, 1689

Chapter 7. God's Covenant

1. The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience to Him as their Creator, yet they could never have attained the reward of life except by some voluntary condescension on God's part, and this He has been pleased to express in the form of a covenant.

Luke 17:10; Job 35:7-8

Lesson 2 – A Covenant in the Garden

2. Moreover, as man had brought himself under the curse of the law by his fall, it pleased the Lord to make a covenant of grace. In this covenant He freely offers to sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring from them faith in Him that they may be saved, and promising to give to all who are appointed to eternal life His Holy Spirit to make them willing and able to believe.

Gen. 2:17; Gal. 3:10; Rom. 3:20-21; Rom. 8:3; Mark 16:15,16; John 3:16; Ezek. 36:26-27; John 6:44,45; Psa. 110:3

Lesson 2 – A Covenant in the Garden

3. This covenant is revealed through the Gospel; first of all to Adam in the promise of salvation by the seed of the woman, and afterwards by further steps until the full revelation of it became complete in the New Testament. The covenant of salvation rests upon an eternal covenant transaction between the Father and the Son about the redemption of the elect. It is solely by the grace of this covenant that all the descendants of fallen Adam who have ever been saved have obtained life and blessed immortality, because man is now utterly incapable of gaining acceptance with God on the terms by which Adam stood in his state of innocency.

Gen. 3:15; Heb. 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 1:2; Heb. 11:6, 13; Rom. 4:1-2; Acts 4:12; John 8:56

Lesson 2 – A Covenant in the Garden

So, is there a covenant in the Creation account? Whether or not God's command and commission to Adam can be properly referred to as a covenant, there is still a covenant here in the Scripture in Genesis 3:15.

“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.”

Here we find, not the formation of a covenant, but the promise of one!

2LBCF – 7.3 “This covenant is revealed through the Gospel; first of all to Adam in the promise of salvation by the seed of the woman...”

Lesson 2 – A Covenant in the Garden

The Covenant of Works has no means of atonement or remedy once the covenant is broken. The Old Covenant, which also required total, absolute obedience, did provide a remedy in the multitude of sacrifices for sin.

Whether it is the promise of the Seed of woman who would crush the serpents head, or the foreshadowing of the Passover Lamb and all the other sacrifices in Israel, we find that God's eternal plan of redemption rests upon Christ.

He kept and fulfilled all the law so that we could be justified even though we are law breakers. And He made atonement for our sin, propitiating the wrath of God, so that we have been freed from the curse and condemnation of Adam's sin.

Lesson 2 – A Covenant in the Garden

Galatians 3:10 For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse, for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to do them.” 11 Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident, for “The righteous shall live by faith.” 12 However, the Law is not of faith; rather, “He who does them shall live by them.” 13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”— 14 in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Next: Lesson 3 – God’s Covenant with Noah