

## THE COVENANT OF GOD

### COVENANT Part One<sup>1</sup>

A covenant is a contract or agreement between two parties. In the Old Testament the Hebrew word \_berith\_ is always translated covenant. \_Berith\_ is derived from a root which means "to cut, " and therefore a covenant is a "cutting, " which is a reference to the cutting or dividing of animals into two parts, and the contracting parties passing between them, in making a covenant.

Gen 15:18 On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates—

Jer. 34:18-19 And I will give the men who have transgressed My covenant, who have not performed the words of the covenant which they made before Me, when they cut the calf in two and passed between the parts of it 19 'the princes of Judah, the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, the priests, and all the people of the land who passed between the parts of the calf—

The word in the New Testament Greek is \_diatheke\_, which is usually rendered "testament" in the Authorized Version. It should be translated the same as the word \_berith\_ of the Old Testament, "covenant." This word is used 1. of a covenant or compact between man and man;

Gen. 21:32 Thus they made a covenant at Beersheba. So Abimelech rose with Phichol, the commander of his army, and they returned to the land of the Philistines.

or between tribes or nations;

1Sam. 11:1 ¶ Then Nahash the Ammonite came up and encamped against Jabesh Gilead; and all the men of Jabesh said to Nahash, "Make a covenant with us, and we will serve you.

Jos 9:6, 15 6 And they went to Joshua, to the camp at Gilgal, and said to him and to the men of Israel, "We have come from a far country; now therefore, make a covenant with us. 15 ¶ So Joshua made peace with them, and made a covenant with them to let them live; and the rulers of the congregation swore to them.

Covenant is used with reference to God's revelation of himself in the way of promise or of favor to men. Therefore God's promise to Noah after the Flood is called a covenant.<sup>2</sup> We have an account of God's covenant with Abraham in Gen. 17:1ff.<sup>3</sup> In conformity with human custom, God's covenant is said to be confirmed with an oath<sup>4</sup> and to be accompanied by a sign.<sup>5</sup> The covenant is called by several names in the Bible; God's counsel, God's oath, God's Promise.<sup>6</sup> God's covenant consists wholly in the bestowal of God's blessing.<sup>7</sup> The term covenant is also used to designate the regular succession of day and night,<sup>8</sup> the Sabbath,<sup>9</sup> circumcision,<sup>10</sup> and in general any ordinance of God.<sup>11</sup> A "covenant of salt" signifies an everlasting covenant, in the sealing or ratifying of which salt, as an emblem of perpetuity, is used.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Part one is a revised and paraphrased version of the entry "covenant" from Easton's Bible Dictionary. Part two is a commentary on the covenants by Dr. Chuck Baynard.

<sup>2</sup> Ge 9:1-15 Jer 33:20 "my covenant".

<sup>3</sup> comp. Le 26:42 of the covenant of the priesthood Nu 25:12,13 De 33:9 Ne 13:29 and of the covenant of Sinai Ex 34:27,28 Le 26:15 which was afterwards renewed at different times in the history of Israel De 29:1ff. Jos 24:1 2Ch 15:1 23:1 29:1 34:1 Ezr 10:1-11 Ne 9:1-38.

<sup>4</sup> De 4:31 Ps 89:3

<sup>5</sup> Ge 9:1 17:1

<sup>6</sup> God's "counsel, " " oath, " " promise" Ps 89:3,4 105:8-11 Heb 6:13-20 Lu 1:68-75

<sup>7</sup> . Isa 59:21 Jer 31:33,34

<sup>8</sup> Jer 33:20

<sup>9</sup> Ex 31:16

COVENANT OF GRACE, the eternal plan of redemption entered into by the three persons of the Godhead, and carried out by them in its several parts. In it the Father represented the Godhead in its indivisible sovereignty, and the Son his people as their surety Joh 17:4,6,9 Isa 42:6 Ps 89:3 The conditions of this covenant were,

1. On the part of the Father:

- a. all needful preparation to the Son for the accomplishment of his work;<sup>13</sup>
- b. support in the work;<sup>14</sup>
- c. a glorious reward in the exaltation of Christ when his work was done;<sup>15</sup>
- d. his investiture with universal dominion;<sup>16</sup>
- e. his having the administration of the covenant committed into his hands;<sup>17</sup>
- f. in the final salvation of all his people.<sup>18</sup>

2. On the part of the Son the conditions were:

- a. his becoming incarnate;<sup>19</sup>
- b. as the second Adam his representing all his people, assuming their place and undertaking all their obligations under the violated covenant of works (The original covenant with Adam as the representative of all his posterity.) ;
- c. obeying the law;<sup>20</sup>
- d. suffering its penalty in their stead;<sup>21</sup>
- e. the mediator of and to fulfill all its conditions in behalf of his people, and dispense to them all its blessings.<sup>22</sup>

COVENANT Part Two

John 1:1 ¶ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.  
2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.

Before the creation of anything Christ existed in all of His glory and divinity. God's plan of redemption precedes creation of man and the fall. The revelation of God's will in saving some rests on the sovereignty of God and the election to salvation of those God elected to salvation in Christ from eternity. The election itself remains within the mystery of God where we cannot enter. The fact of the election is well established in scripture and is accepted by the word of God in faith. Man's understanding of the election nor man's inability to explain to the satisfaction to some or all of the election have no effect whatsoever on the veracity of the election.<sup>23</sup>

A debate that is as old as man centers on the result of this eternal election whereby in Christ God chose some to salvation in Christ. Why does this ancient debate still rage? The whole of the debate concerning the election is grounded in sin and the will of the created to rule himself. Sin first appears in the fall of

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<sup>10</sup> Ge 17:9,10

<sup>11</sup> Jer 34:13,14

<sup>12</sup> Nu 18:19 Le 2:13 2Ch 13:5

<sup>13</sup> Heb 10:5 Isa 42:1-7

<sup>14</sup> Lu 22:43

<sup>15</sup> Php 2:6-11

<sup>16</sup> Joh 5:22 Ps 110:1

<sup>17</sup> Mt 28:18 Joh 1:12 17:2 Ac 2:33

<sup>18</sup> Isa 35:10 53:10,11 Jer 31:33 Ti 1:2

<sup>19</sup> Ga 4:4,5

<sup>20</sup> Ps 40:8 Isa 42:21 Joh 9:4,5

<sup>21</sup> Isa 53:1ff. 2Co 5:21 Ga 3:13

<sup>22</sup> Heb 8:6 9:15 12:24

<sup>23</sup> Eph 1:1-12

Satan<sup>24</sup> who attempted to exalt himself and be as God. Satan carried fully one third of the angels to their eternal destruction in this attempt to be his own god,<sup>25</sup> which is self sufficient or autonomous. Satan uses the same lie to tempt and lead Adam and Eve into this same rebellion against the will of God.

Election can be equated to salvation and will contain all of the saving graces needed to bring it to being in history and to sustain it during the time Christ carries in His return for the final judgment, and present to Himself a holy bride without spot.<sup>26</sup> Covenant does not equal election or true believers and this is the first error made by many in attempting to understand God's covenant. In the covenant there are those who are not, will not be saved because they are not elect. Many on hearing the Good News or the Gospel will eagerly embrace the truth, but are not able to sustain it of themselves and will turn aside at the first tribulation because of the Gospel. Consider the Parable of the Sower.<sup>27</sup>

The means God has chosen to make His covenant visible or tangible among mankind is the church, meaning the patriarchs and nation of Israel in the Old Testament and the church in the New Testament. In the church of both Testaments we find unbelievers or those who are not elect are present and in time fall away and sin against God.<sup>28</sup>

Reformed confessions have always recognized that there is a visible and invisible church and this church has always existed in both Testaments and that the church has different forms being defined by several terms but having the meaning of a visible church on earth and the spiritual church which is all of the elect of God wherever they may be.<sup>29</sup> This acknowledgement of the church having both believers and non-believers within it and that the church is the manifestation of God's people on earth and can rightly be called the covenant should indicate we all agree that to be in the covenant is not the same as being saved eternally by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8-10). This universal agreement that the church in the Old and New Testaments is the same church should also mean we all agree with whom the covenant was made and how it is brought to fulfillment in Christ alone. It does not and the debate continues.

Some have posited that it is merely a matter of terminology. This is not true and it is a problem of when was this covenant made by God and with whom, not how it is made manifest to man in history. The debate for Reformed churches reached its zenith during the so-called second reformation when the Puritans of England wrote the Westminster Confession of Faith<sup>30</sup> wherein they maintain the covenant was

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<sup>24</sup> Luke 10:18 not to be confused with Isaiah 14 which concerns the fall of an earthly monarch, not Satan from heaven though it may allude to that fall. Lucifer is not used in the Bible to speak about Satan, but means more properly the morning star or Venus, a bright star that heralds the arrival of morning.

<sup>25</sup> Re 12:4 His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born.

<sup>26</sup> Romans 8:30 Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

<sup>27</sup> Luke 8:11-15

<sup>28</sup> Ex. 32:28; Mt. 13:26

<sup>29</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Helvetic XVII; Belgic Confession XXVII; Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 21; Westminster Confession of Faith XXV; The French Confession XXVI-XXVII; Waldensian Confession Articles 24-27; Savoy Declaration of Faith XXVI; The 39 Articles of religion XIX; London Confession of Baptist Faith 26.

<sup>30</sup> Westminster Larger Catechism –

Q31: With whom was the covenant of grace made?

A31: The covenant of grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in him with all the elect as his seed.[1]

1. Gal. 3:16; Rom. 5:15-21; Isa. 53:10-11

Q32: How is the grace of God manifested in the second covenant?

A32: The grace of God is manifested in the second covenant, in that he freely provideth and offereth to sinners a Mediator,[1] and life and salvation by him;[2] and requiring faith as the condition to interest them in him, promiseth and giveth his Holy Spirit [3] to all his elect, to work in them that faith,[4] with all other saving graces;[5] and to enable them unto all holy obedience,[5] as the evidence of the truth of their faith [6] and thankfulness to God,[7] and as the way which he hath appointed them to salvation.[8]

made by God with Christ in behalf of the elect as opposed to those of the earlier confessions using various terms to say that the covenant was made with believers and their children. While the debate had raged before and during the sixteenth century reformation it was not a debate between the reformed. Comparing all of the early confessions and how they deal with covenant and church we can see the debate is with those outside the reformed faith more than within the reformed churches. With the addition of the perceived English perception of things in the seventeenth century the debate began in earnest and the English Channel became a line of division within the Reformed churches concerning covenant theology by the generations that followed the Westminster Assembly.

The continental side of the division had little if anything to do with the internal wars of England and the Puritans. Most perceived the Westminster documents to be an attack on their confessions and it was posited by some that the Westminster Confession was a better or more mature confession. When we add Dort and the Second Dutch Reformation to the mix battle lines were established which have not been erased with time.

A close study of all the confessions reveals it is more than a matter of terminology. Both sides use the same words and arrive at essentially the same conclusion in practical application. The difference returns to the one statement in the Westminster Larger Catechism (See foot note 30), which is not in the Westminster Confession itself, nor the Shorter Catechism.

Who is correct in the matter of whom the covenant was made?

The continental side uses the more biblical terminology but in allowing the covenant to only be with believers and their children introduce the concept that covenant equals salvation and that all children are of the elect. While they deny this is the case it is hard to not see that believer and elect are the same persons and that to say that all children are in a covenant which does not have unbelievers present is the same as saying that all children are by birthright of the election. The continental side however does not maintain unbelievers are not in the covenant and agree that the covenant is the church in history. They also await the manifestation of God's grace and the eventual profession of faith by their children, yet maintain all dying before the age of consent are saved. This seems to be inconsistent though it does use the words of the Scripture in its form. This also allows for the nose of the camel, so to speak, entering the tent in that final justification depends on something the person does, confess Christ at an age of consent. This too is denied and is not taught, nonetheless the connection has been made by many to the horror of both sides of the covenant family. Both sides deny any work or merit on the part of man at any age and that salvation is of God alone by grace through faith, which is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8).

The Westminster Standards therefore appears to be a clearer expression of the covenant and how it is applied to the elect efficaciously. The difference then has manifested itself as a theological difference between churches from the English side of the Channel and those of a Dutch or German heritage. Westminster churches hold all documents of the Westminster Assembly and label them the Westminster Standards of Faith. The Dutch and German side of the family (along with some others) adopts the Three Forms of Unity (Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession and Canons of the Synod of Dort). How the covenant is applied to the children being the primary difference in practical application.

Is this a gulf between the two sides of the family that cannot be crossed? It doesn't have to be such a distinct division. The actual wording of Scripture allows for the continental view while the Westminster view is more complete theologically speaking. Both however end with justification being by grace through faith alone. While each side looks at its sister as being in error, it is an error that each side can defend and therefore the election remains in the mystery of God where it belongs and as noted in the Second Helvetic Confession inquiring as to who is elect is a curious question. Both sides baptize their children as Scripture teaches and both sides await the manifestation of justification in God's time as the Holy Spirit works in their children. The only question then is where is the resting place of the soul of a child who has

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1. Gen. 3:15; Isa. 42:6; John 6:27 2. I John 5:11-12 3. John 1:12; 3:16 4. Prov. 1:23 5. II Cor. 4:13 6. Gal. 5:22-23 7. Ezek. 36:27 8. James 2:18, 22 9. II Cor. 5:14-15 10. Eph. 2:18

not professed Christ? The final resting place of all souls has been reserved by God for the last day and the judgment of Christ and should not be a dividing line in the covenant family of God. While it is not a matter of indifference, it is not an essential of the true church of God nor the essence of the invisible church. The argument of culture and tradition hold no weight, as all such standards are secondary to the Word of God. God in His benevolent mercy has allowed the distinction of denominations to continue and proliferate within the covenant family. Therefore each person can find a place where they may worship God in truth and Spirit without an unbiblical binding of conscience. These differences will prohibit organic union perhaps, but they should never hinder unity in Spirit and the unified presentation of the Gospel of God to all mankind.

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