

**“The ABC’s of the Christian Life: (11) Following Jesus Christ Rightly –
#7: Understanding Law and Grace (cont.)**

Let us begin by reading the first promise of the gospel recorded in the Bible. It is God’s declaration directly to the serpent, but indirectly and more broadly to all mankind over which the serpent had usurped control. God gave forth this promise after Adam and Eve had fallen in to sin. He declared,

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.

Through sin, Adam had lost God’s blessing as His prophet, priest, and king, who reigned with God, on behalf of God, in paradise, the Garden of Eden. By yielding to the temptation of the serpent, Adam had rebelled against God. Adam gave over his kingdom to the devil, to whom Adam (and his race) had now become enslaved. The kingdom of satan had ascended over man. All mankind would thereafter labor with hardship, the earth itself resisting him. Man would suffer the injustice from others even as he perpetrated injustice upon others. He would endure a difficult life of pain and sorrow, until the day that he returned to the dust from which he had come.

But here in the beginning God gave a word of promise. It is the first word of the gospel in Holy Scripture. This is why this promise is commonly referred to as the *protoevangelium*, “the first gospel”. He would save a people unto himself, delivering them from under the authority of the devil who will have made their life difficult and miserable. He would call forth a people, who would be opposed to the devil and he toward them. And then one day he would cause a Seed of the woman, which we know to be Jesus Christ, who would strip the devil of his authority that he had gained over fallen man. This Seed would “bruise your head”, God declared to the devil, even as the devil would but bruise the heel of this Seed, which, of course foretells the death of Jesus Christ upon His cross. Here is the first word in Scripture of the salvation that God purposed to bring to His people, and it reflects that this work of salvation is a manifestation of the covenant of grace that God makes with His people.

Now last week we began to address a very important teaching of Holy Scripture that the Christian must understand in order to follow the Lord Jesus Christ rightly. This important doctrine is a biblical understanding of law and grace. Because we had a more than full service last week, we were unable to complete our study notes, which I regret having occurred. And so, on the one hand I hesitate to pick up where we left off for it would mean that those who received our notes through the internet would today have a section of their notes repeated from last week. But on the other hand, the subject is of such importance that I do not want our own church family to miss out on its full treatment; after all, I am responsible chiefly for this local church before the Lord. And so, after we rehearse what we considered last week, we will continue where we left off on this very important subject, understanding the nature of and distinctions between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.

Now in order for us to better understand this important Christian teaching, I wish to rehearse before us the essence and nature of covenant theology that is taught in the Holy Scriptures. First, we established last week that...

I. God created the human race in covenant relationship with Him and one another.

In order for mankind to have a relationship with God, he must enter into covenant with God, a covenant that God Himself prescribes, initiates, and maintains. The reason that God ordained that He would relate to us by means of a covenant relationship is due to the vast difference and distance between the infinite God, who is our Creator, and human beings, and His creatures.

Again, what is a covenant? A covenant is like a contract, which sets forth the terms and conditions on which two parties can have a relationship with one another. When we say that God relates to us based on a covenant, we are saying that

Because God is so vastly different in essence and glory from His finite creatures, He must come to us of His own will and He must reveal Himself to us and set the terms or grounds by which we may approach Him, know Him, and relate to Him.

There are many different covenants that are identified in the Bible. Each of these covenants may be classified into one of two kinds of covenants. A covenant may be said to be either a covenant of works or a covenant of grace. A covenant of works is a relationship with God based upon what we do; a covenant of grace is a relationship with God based upon what He has done on our behalf through Jesus Christ. God had originally made a covenant of works with Adam in the Garden of Eden. But when God established that covenant of works with them, He also set in place that the entire human race that would be born to Adam and Eve would also relate to Him based upon this covenant of works. This occurred because Adam was the legal representative for the human race, or as it is commonly said, Adam was the federal representative of all humanity. Therefore when he sinned, the entire human race had sinned in him. And when God cursed Adam for his sin, God also cursed the entire human race for having broken the covenant of works in Adam.

But thankfully, after the fall of Adam into sin, God made known His promise of another covenant, which is the covenant of grace that He planned and purposed in eternity, through which God calls sinners to receive salvation by His grace. A relationship with God upon a covenant of grace is not based upon what man does for God, rather, it is based upon what God does for man, wholly due to His love for man and His sovereign desire to have mercy upon man.

These two kinds of covenants upon which God relates to human beings are very different in nature from one another.

1. A covenant of works

A covenant of works is based upon doing the works of God's law in order to earn or deserve God's favor and favorable treatment. Again, when God made this covenant with Adam, God bound the entire human race through all of history to this covenant. Every one born into this world comes into the world relating to God based on a covenant of works that God made with the human race. Our confession of faith states it this way:

God gave to Adam a law of universal obedience written in his heart, and a particular precept of not eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; by which he bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience; promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it, and endued him with power and ability to keep it.¹

God established His covenant relationship with Adam and his descendants ***conditioned on Adam keeping God's law***. When God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden He had said to them,

¹⁵The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it. ¹⁶And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷but of the tree

¹ *The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*, Article 19, paragraph 1. The verses cited to support this statement include: Gen. 1:17; Ecc. 7:29; Rom. 10:5; Gal. 3:10, 12.

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. 2:15-17)

The requirement God placed on Adam in his covenant was *obedience*. The failure to keep this covenant, that is, to disobey or transgress God’s law, would result in death. Under the covenant of works Adam’s obedience to God’s law gained access to life from God and before God. God rewarded obedience with life. But God required complete obedience. The least infraction of God’s law would result in death. By Adam’s obedience, he would have earned everlasting life by keeping works before God. But we read of Adam’s rebellion against God as seen in his breaking of his covenant of works with God his Creator. He incurred guilt and the sentence of death and damnation for himself and for the human race he represented.

Actually, when Adam sinned against the one command that God had expressly given him, he broke all of God’s law. James wrote, “For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all” (Jam. 2:10). What is meant by this is the entire weight of the law comes against the one who breaks one specific law. But often times the transgression of one law can contain in itself a number of infractions against other laws of God. Now God’s law is summarily recorded in the Ten Commandments. **Arthur Pink** quoted one who had written that Adam broke all Ten Commandments when he ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Three hundred years ago that profound theologian James Usher pointed out that it had wrapped up in it “the breach of the whole Law of God.” Summarizing in our own language what the Bishop of Armagh developed at length, Adam’s violation of all the Ten Commandments of the moral Law may be set forth thus. The first commandment he broke by choosing him another “god” when he followed the counsel of Satan. The second, in idolizing his palate, making a god of his belly by eating the forbidden fruit. The third, by believing not God’s threatening, therein taking His name in vain. The fourth, by breaking the sinless rest in which he had been placed. The fifth, thereby is dishonouring his Father in Heaven. The sixth, by slaying himself and all his posterity. The seventh, by committing spiritual adultery, and preferring the creature above the Creator. The eighth, by laying hands upon to which he had no right.² The ninth, by accepting the serpent’s false witness against God. The tenth, by coveting that which God had not given to him.

After Adam had broken the covenant of works, in order for mankind to be saved from his sin debt that mankind owed to the justice of God had to be paid; God’s holy justice must be satisfied. But it is clear no fallen human being would ever be able to achieve this requirement. After Adam transgressed God’s law, and incurred the law’s penalty, no works of the law performed by a sinner could satisfy God’s holy justice. Man is still under the covenant of works before God, but man cannot redeem himself through the covenant of work, for it can only damn him. All religions of the world, apart from biblical Christianity, are in error in this respect. The people of these religions are taught and they believe that their performance of the works of their religion, the “law of God” as they understand it, will enable them to acquire and sustain a relationship with their god or gods. No one can be saved on the basis of a covenant of works. Adam’s one sin rendered that way of relating with God impossible for fallen man, that is, impossible, unless a sinless man came forward, one who could represent His people, who would both atone for the sins of His people and keep the covenant of works on their behalf. And of course, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born without sin, in order to accomplish this great work of redemption for His people. And so, as God had promised fallen Adam and Eve, He would brought to pass their salvation through...

2. A covenant of grace

Thankfully other than a covenant of works, God has purposed to relate to man based on another kind of covenant, the covenant of grace. In the covenant of grace God does for man that which man could not do for himself; ***God Himself brings His salvation to His people***. This covenant of grace was formulated, if we can

² This is in Arthur Pink’s, *The Depravity of Man*.

use that term, in “the covenant of redemption” having been devised and committed to before creation by the three persons of the Holy Trinity. In that covenant of redemption, God made provision to save guilty sinners. It is as though in eternity each of the persons of the holy Trinity committed to work out this covenant of grace in history. We have spoken of this before. I will commonly use as a benediction of a church service Hebrews 13:20f which speaks of this covenant of the holy Trinity, which was formulated and decreed in eternity. It reads,

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. (Heb. 13:20f)

Let us consider the details of the terms *the covenant of grace*, or *the covenant of redemption*. They may be understood from the standpoint of each of the persons of the Blessed Holy Trinity. Here is a fictional conversation of the Trinity with respect to the planning of the covenant of grace.

(a) The terms of God the Father

Although it is not explicitly stated in Scripture, **Charles Spurgeon** very aptly depicted the teaching of Scripture in the following way. With regard to God the Father, it was as if He declared:

“I, the Most High Jehovah, do promise to give to You, my dear Son, a people, countless in number, drawn from every nation on earth. I will, on account of You, cease my warfare with them, and become to them a God of Peace, for I will pardon and wash them from their sin, deliver them from the power of sin and thereby the wrath which is upon them due to their sin. I will give them unto you, and will deliver each and every one of them into your kingdom which I will cause you to establish. I covenant by oath, and swear by Myself, that I will do this thing. This people Whom I have chosen will be given to you, every one of them; not one will be lost. Them I will forgive through the merit of your life and the payment of your blood on their behalf. But I too, do swear, that upon your death on their behalf, due to your righteousness, that I will raise you from death to reign forevermore, giving you a name above every name. And all of these whom I have given You, will be with You and Me, for I will give eternal life so that they will ever be with You and Myself, dwelling and reigning with us through eternity.”

(b) The terms of God the Holy Spirit

“I, the Holy Spirit, will in time ensure that these given to You of the Father will come to You. I will make them alive, give them a heart to seek you, put faith in their minds and hearts to believe You. I will work in them every grace, sanctifying them, preserving them, unto Your kingdom.”

This was one side of the covenant, the contractual agreement. The Son concurred, and committed Himself to certain terms:

(c) The terms of God the Son

“My Father I will become one of them. I will take upon myself the form and nature of the fallen race. I will live in their wretched world, and for my people will I keep Your Law perfectly. I will be obedient to You, even to death, as I work out a spotless righteousness, which shall be acceptable to the demands of thy just and holy law. And when that time comes I will suffer and die on behalf of these you have given me. On behalf of My sheep, I will be the Good Shepherd and lay down My Life.”

Based on this eternal covenant of grace, which is commonly called the covenant of redemption, God decreed creation and has ordered all the events of history. The Father has been true to His Word, the Holy

Spirit has been true to His Word, and the Lord Jesus has been true to His Word. And if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, trusting in the merits of His life and death, if you are numbered among His sheep, hearing His voice and following Him, then this God, is a God of peace to you, through the blood of the eternal covenant, which is a covenant of God's grace.

II. The history of the Bible is a record of God's dealings with mankind; God relating to man based on these two covenants--the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.

We already stated that when Adam was serving God in the garden of God, he was on probation, for he related with God according to a covenant of works. Had Adam been successful in obeying God, his work of obedience would have earned for him and his posterity eternal life with his God. He was laboring to enter into what might be described as "rest", which was portrayed by God Himself having rested after His 6 days of work in creation. The Sabbath rest becomes a symbol or the goal of mankind. God's rest is an emblem of eternal life, an eternal Sabbath rest with God. This is reflected in Hebrews 4.

Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His *rest*, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. ²For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it. ³For we who have believed do enter that *rest*, as He has said:

"So I swore in My wrath,
'They shall not enter My *rest*,'"

although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. ⁴For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all His works"; ⁵and again in this place: "They shall not enter My *rest*."

⁶Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience, ⁷again He designates a certain day, saying in David, "Today," after such a long time, as it has been said:

"Today, if you will hear His voice,
Do not harden your hearts."

⁸For if Joshua had given them *rest*, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day. ⁹There remains therefore a *rest* for the people of God. ¹⁰For he who has entered His *rest* has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. ¹¹Let us therefore be diligent to enter that *rest*, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. (Heb 4:1-11)

After Adam had sinned, and the curse of God came upon him and his posterity, God graciously announced His intention to deliver a people for Himself from their sin. God Himself gave the first mention of the gospel in **Genesis 3:15**. God said to the woman:

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. (Gen. 3:15)

God declared that He would destroy what the devil had succeeded in doing, deceiving Eve and enticing Adam to sin. God would see to it that He would have a people that He would save for and to Himself, who would be separate from all others who continue in their lost and damned condition. But then the day would arrive, however, when God Himself would strip the devil of his power and deliver His people from their damned condition.

Now the history of the world has been described as *a dramatic stage* on which the drama of God bringing redemption to His people is played throughout history.³ It has been said, that if the world is a theater or stage, then the story being played out is *a courtroom drama*. There is a divine witness in this courtroom setting, who testifies of God's goodness and faithfulness, and the rightness of all His dealings with man. This faithful witness is the **Holy Spirit**. But there is also a false witness, who is the **devil**. He advocates lies against God and promotes idolatry as a substitute for the true God. The story of the Bible is that of God making a covenant with man his servant in His garden, the covenant that he broke, but then it tells of the redemption that God brings to save His people from the fate they deservedly brought upon themselves.

The story of the Bible records the loss of paradise, the Garden of Eden, due to man having broken the covenant of works that God had made with Him. The story of the Bible as a whole is that of God restoring fallen man to paradise through the covenant of grace that He works out through history. In the early account of Genesis, we read of a beautiful creation, a paradise, a land in which the Adam and Eve live as kings and priests in the kingdom over which God reigns. But the original paradise land was lost to mankind through sin. Nevertheless, at the conclusion of the biblical story in the Revelation, we read of a more glorious new creation, which is the habitation of mankind. It is a glorious land, even a city, in which God dwells with his people whom he has redeemed from sin through Jesus Christ. It is a glorious kingdom over which Jesus Christ reigns, a reign that he shares with his people. So it may be said that in the biblical story "Eden is presented as the inaugural kingdom, and the New Jerusalem is presented as the consummated kingdom, where the kingdom of the world is the kingdom of God."⁴ The holy Scriptures record the journey of mankind from his exclusion from the Garden of Eden to his gracious entrance and enjoyment into the renewed and eternal paradise, and there dwelling with all the people of God in a glorious city that God has made, a city made "without hands." The city was not made by man's works, but it is built by God's grace. The Bible records that the people of this age, who are redeemed by Jesus Christ, are on pilgrimage through this life, journeying to the heavenly city, the Promised Land that he has prepared, in which they will dwell eternally with their God. The new heavens and earth will be the Promised Land in which the kingdom of God is fully realized and enjoyed by God's people to the blessing and glory of God.

The plot we described is repeated in the story of the Bible on both a small scale and a larger scale also. *"In every subplot of the Bible we discover echoes of this trial of the covenant servant in the cosmic courtroom."*⁵ In fact the entire history of God's dealings in the Old and the New Testaments, may be seen as a duplication of what unfolded in the garden.

The clearest example of this is with the entire history of *the nation of Israel*. It began with God's gracious call of **Abraham**, who would become the father of the nation of Israel. God called Abraham and gave him many great promises, all promises of grace, things that God committed that He would do for him and his descendants. When God brought Israel from Egypt, God established His covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai. This was a manifestation of God's *covenant of grace* in that God had graciously saved Israel out of bondage in Egypt. God gave His law to His people as the standard by which they were to order their life after entering the Promised Land that God gave them by way of His promise to their Fathers.

But there was also an aspect of the covenant of works in the giving of God's law at Sinai. This is a difficult matter to sort through, but it is important. This aspect of God giving His law to Israel at Sinai has been sometimes called a republication of the covenant of works.

The Westminster divines (those who wrote the Westminster confession and catechism) also believed that the Mosaic covenant looked back to Adam's state in the garden. The divines explain, "God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works, by which he bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience" (West. Confession, 19.1). They go on to say in the next paragraph, "This law" referring to the law that was given to Adam, "after his fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness, and, as such, was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments, and written in two tables"

³ This metaphor is commonly used, but I have borrowed the terminology directly from Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith*, p. 408f.

⁴ Ibid, p. 17.

⁵ Ibid, p. 410.

(West. Conf., 19.2). In this regard, the divines saw that the law given to Adam was of a piece with what that given to Israel at Sinai. In other words, in some sense, the covenant of works was republished at Sinai. It was not republished, however, as the covenant of works per se, but as a part of the covenant of grace, which pointed to the person and work of Christ.⁶

Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) had given a good description of the Mosaic covenant as a manifestation of *the covenant of grace*, just as The Westminster Confession asserts. But Bavinck also wrote how the Mosaic covenant was in a manner a republication of *the covenant of works*, in that it set before Israel the need for keeping God's law perfectly, or else the need for sacrifice to prevent their own death. It was designed to lead Israel to look beyond themselves and their system to the Savior who would come and do for them that which they could not do for themselves. Here are Bavinck's words:

This covenant (i.e. the covenant of grace) with the ancestors continues, even when later at Sinai it assumed another form... The covenant with Israel was essentially no other than that with Abraham. Just as God first freely and graciously gave himself as shield and reward to Abraham, apart from any merits of his, to be a God to him and his descendants after him, and on that basis called Abraham to a blameless walk before his face, so also it is God who chose the people of Israel, saved it out of Egypt, united himself with that people, and obligated it to be holy and his own people. The covenant of Mount Sinai is and remains a covenant of grace. "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Exod. 20:2) is the opening statement and foundation of the law, the essence of the covenant of grace...

Just as Abraham, when God allied himself with him, was obligated to "walk before his face," so Israel as a people was similarly admonished by God's covenant to a new obedience. The entire law, which the covenant of grace at Mount Sinai took into its service, is intended to prompt Israel as a people to "walk" in the way of the covenant. It is but an explication of the one statement to Abraham: "Walk before me and be blameless" (Gen. 17:1), and therefore no more a cancelation of the covenant of grace and the foundation of a covenant of works than this word spoken to Abraham. The Law of Moses, accordingly, is not antithetical to grace but subservient to it and was also thus understood and praised in every age by pious men and women. But detached from the covenant of grace, it indeed became a letter that kills, a ministry of condemnation.⁷ Another reason why in the time of the Old Testament the covenant of grace took the law into its service was that it might arouse consciousness of sin, increase the felt need for salvation, and reinforce expectation of an even richer revelation of God's grace. It is from that perspective that Paul views especially the Old Testament dispensation of the covenant of grace. He writes that Israel as a minor, placed under the care of the law, had to be led to Christ (Rom. 10:4; Gal. 3:23f; 4:1f) and that in connection sin would be increased and the uselessness of works for justification and the necessity of faith would be understood (Rom. 4:15; 5:20; 7:7f; 8:3; Gal. 3:19). On the one hand, therefore, the law was subservient to the covenant of grace; it was not a covenant of works in disguise and did not intend that humans would obtain justification by their own works. On the other hand, its purpose was to lay the groundwork for a higher and better dispensation of that same covenant of grace to come in the fullness of time. The impossibility of keeping the Sinaitic covenant and meeting the demands of the law made another and better dispensation of the covenant of grace necessary. The eternal covenant of grace was provoked to a higher revelation of itself by the imperfection of the temporary form it had assumed in Israel. Sin increased that grace might abound. Christ could not immediately become human after the fall, and grace could not immediately reveal itself in all its riches. There was a need of preparation and nurture. "It was not fitting for God to become incarnate at the beginning of the human race before sin. For

⁶ Bryan Estelle, J. W. Fesko, and David Van Drunen, *The Law is Not of Faith* (Presbyterian & Reformed, 2009), pp. 10f.

⁷ This is what Israel had done. Rather than viewing the law as a manifestation of God's grace, a standard by which the people were to order their faith and life as they anticipated the Savior who would come, they regarded the law of Sinai as a covenant of works, believing wrongly that because they possessed the law God would give them "a pass" in His judgment, or they believed that by the law they could earn their own righteousness that would save their souls from damnation and earn eternal life. Thus the law, which was intended to be a way of life for them, became that which condemned them to death and damnation (cf. Rom. 7:9, 10).

medicine is only given to the sick. Nor was it fitting that God should become incarnate immediately after sin that man, having been humbled by sin, might see his own need of a deliverer. But what had been decreed from eternity occurred in the fullness of time.”⁸

Bavinck speaks of the Mosaic Law once “detached from the covenant of grace”, in other words, *when Israel viewed the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of works rather than of grace, the law became a condemning letter to them.* Once Israel viewed the law, either in their very possession of it as their righteousness, or their keeping it as their righteousness (which Paul addressed in Romans 10:2-4), then it condemned them as a covenant of works.

To put in other, more simple words, even though God had given His law, His Ten Commandments, at Mount Sinai to His people as a manifestation of His grace toward them, they were to order their national life in faith and love by keeping God’s commandments, at the same time that law served to show them their need for a Savior. It did so in that God showed that through His law:

1. That God by all means might stir up men to perform obedience.
2. That every mouth might be stopped, and all the world might be made subject to the condemnation of God for not performing perfect obedience (Rom. 3:19).
3. That he (God) might manifest man’s sin, and naughtiness (Rom. 3:19-20; 7:7-11).
4. That he (God) might thrust us forward to seek to be restored in the covenant of grace (Gal. 3:22; 5:23).⁹

Now again, as we read the biblical record, we see the same event of what happened in the garden played out repeatedly in redemptive history. What occurred in the garden is replayed over and over again as history moves toward its destination determined by God. Israel repeats the experience of the trial that Adam had undergone, and Israel failed just as Adam had failed. God held forth to Israel the hope of dwelling in a place of security and blessing in the Promised Land, the place of “rest”, which is likened to paradise, the garden of God, just as God had held forth everlasting life in his garden paradise had he remained obedient to God. Just as God had made a covenant with Adam, so God made a covenant Israel. And as Adam, Israel would go through a trial or probationary period, which took place in the wilderness from Mount Sinai as they traveled to the Promised Land. And just as Adam was to be God’s steward as prophet, priest, and king to the world in which God placed him, Israel, too, was to be God’s prophet, priest, and king to the entire world, modeling before the world what life lived out in righteousness before God to the glory of God should look like. But just as Adam “the son of God” (Luke 3:38) failed, so, Israel, the son of God failed also (Numb. 24:18).

And then of course, we see later in the biblical record in the New Testament, a reduplication of both Adam and Israel’s trials in the person of the Lord Jesus. In the presence of Israel’s failure to keep God’s covenant, just as Adam had failed to keep God’s covenant, God had promised a new covenant through His *prophets. But the new covenant that God promised would come through His Messiah, His Son, would be a replacement of the former covenant that had failed to deliver Israel from its sin.* It would be a fulfillment of God’s initial promise that gave directly to Eve. It would be realized through her promised seed, who was the Lord Jesus Christ. We read of the promise of the new covenant in **Jeremiah 31:31ff.**

³¹Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah-- ³²not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. ³³But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ³⁴No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the

⁸Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 3, pp. 220, 222.

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 11.

greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” (Jer. 31:31-34)

The coming Messiah Himself would be the ground of this new covenant. **Isaiah 42:6ff** declares,

“Behold! My Servant whom I uphold,
My Elect One in whom My soul delights!
I have put My Spirit upon Him;
He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.
²He will not cry out, nor raise His voice,
Nor cause His voice to be heard in the street.
³A bruised reed He will not break,
And smoking flax He will not quench;
He will bring forth justice for truth.
⁴He will not fail nor be discouraged,
Till He has established justice in the earth;
And the coastlands shall wait for His law.”

⁵Thus says God the LORD,
Who created the heavens and stretched them out,
Who spread forth the earth and that which comes from it,
Who gives breath to the people on it,
And spirit to those who walk on it:

⁶“I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness,
And will hold Your hand;
I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people,
As a light to the Gentiles,
⁷To open blind eyes,
To bring out prisoners from the prison,
Those who sit in darkness from the prison house. (Isa. 42:1-6)

The coming Messiah Himself would be the one who secures this new covenant on behalf of God’s people. The coming Messiah would be God’s **Prophet, Priest, and King** to the God’s creation, even His new creation that would one day come. As God’s Mediator, Jesus Christ communicates God’s will to the world, represents God to the world and the world to God, rules over God’s world on behalf of God.

The New Testament sets forth Jesus Christ as the faithful Son, over against Israel, the unfaithful son.¹⁰ As God had called forth His “son” Israel out of Egypt, God had called His Son, Jesus, to come forth from Egypt (cf. Matt. 2:15). As God had sent Israel through a probationary trial in the wilderness, in which it failed miserably, so the Spirit of God drove Jesus into the wilderness to undergo His trial of the devil, but Christ, in contrast to Israel (and Adam), came forth tried and tested and victorious. Just as God had given His law to Israel at Mount Sinai, so our Lord gave forth the new Torah to His disciples in His Sermon on the Mount. But Israel suffered under the weight of its own sin incurring the wrath of God for having broken its covenant, in contrast the Lord Jesus also suffered God’s wrath, but He did so vicariously, not for His sin, but for the sins of His people that He might redeem them from sin, remove God’s curse from them, and restore them to God.

But of course, Jesus Christ too is set forth as the **second Adam**, or better, the **last Adam**, who successfully accomplished what Adam failed to fulfill in the garden. But where Adam was God’s federal head representing the human race in this present world, our Lord Jesus is the last Adam who is God’s federal representative over all of God’s people with view to the promised new creation.

¹⁰ This is demonstrated particularly in Matthew’s Gospel.

¹²Therefore, just as through *one man* sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned-- ¹³(For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. ¹⁴Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of *Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.* ¹⁵But the free gift is not like the offense. For if *by the one man's offense many died*, much more the grace of God and the gift by *the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ*, abounded to many. ¹⁶And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification. ¹⁷For if by the *one man's offense* death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through *the One, Jesus Christ.*)

¹⁸Therefore, as through *one man's offense* judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through *one Man's righteous act* the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. ¹⁹For as by *one man's disobedience* many were made sinners, so also *by one Man's obedience* many will be made righteous. ²⁰Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, ²¹so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom. 5:12-21)

When the Lord Jesus sat with His disciples the night He was betrayed, He passed that cup to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins", He was urging His disciples to see that in His life, which was seen in His blood, was about to pour out upon the cross whereby He would bring to pass all of the promises and of God and all of the purposes of God in His creation. All of redemptive history centers here on the cross of Christ, in which He gave an atonement for sin.

One final word is in order. The entire Bible reveals to us that there is only one who could keep God's law as God had imposed upon His creation. Jesus Christ alone kept God's law fully without any infraction or failure. He, as God's Mediator, enables His people also to keep God's law, not perfectly, but for the most part faithfully, as He teaches them--Christ as our Prophet--, intercedes for them--Christ as our Priest--, and rules over them--Christ as our King. When the Lord Jesus established a new covenant with God on behalf of His people, He promised to confirm them in faith and obedience to God. He did not give a new law whereby we are now able to keep God's law. Rather, He gives His people the Holy Spirit, whereby His life can flow into them and He can live His life through them. We read in the Old Testament that this was God's provision.

²⁴"For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. ²⁵Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. ²⁶I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them." (Ezek. 36:24-27)

Again, Jesus Christ alone can keep God's law. You can only keep God's law to the degree that Christ dwells in your hearts through faith and He manifests His life through you by means of the Holy Spirit. Paul stated it this way:

²For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have

the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. ¹²So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” ¹⁶The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. (Rom 8:2-17)

So what are we to do? See in Christ alone not only our justification but also our sanctification. He is not only alone the one who can bring us forgiveness; He alone can enable us to live righteously. Trust Him to manifest His life to you and through you by means of the Holy Spirit. Pray and trust Christ to do in you that which you cannot do apart from Him.

III. The blessings of the believer whose relationship with God is based on the covenant of grace

1. The believer in the covenant of grace with his God is *forever justified before* God. In other words, he is in a right relationship with God. God does not regard the believer as a guilty sinner, but as his son or daughter, albeit perhaps on occasion a wayward son or daughter.

2. The believer in the covenant of grace with his God is *forgiven of all of his sins*, in that he will never suffer the wrath of God for his sins.

3. The believer in the covenant of grace with his God is *free from God’s condemnation of His law*. Romans 8:1 reads, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” For the believer in the covenant of grace with his God, God’s Law has no more ability or authority to condemn him.

4. The believer in the covenant of grace with his God may be assured that he will stand in *righteousness* on the final Day of Judgment. “For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith” (Gal. 5:5).

5. The believer in the covenant of grace with his God is in a state of *peace* with God. “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1).

6. The believer in the covenant of grace with his God may be assured of *God’s presence and protection*. The Lord has promised His people, “For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’” (Heb. 13:5).

7. The believer in the covenant of grace with his God is *forever secure* by what Jesus Christ did on his behalf.

“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20)
