

CHRIST THE COVENANTER
1. CHRIST IN THE COVENANT WITH ADAM
GENESIS 1-3

INTRODUCTION

There are a number of books on Covenant Theology. Very few of them are on Christian best-seller lists. Most of them are gathering dust in minister's libraries! Why? I would suggest two reasons.

Firstly, there is the general neglect of the Old Testament in many Church pulpits and in many Christian's lives. There are gold mines in Johannesburg which, many years ago, were hives of activity with thousands of people blasting, digging and sifting for gold. The vast slag-heaps surrounding the city are testimony to the work that was done to extract the precious metal. For years these "mountains" of earth and rock have sat silently while the mining continued elsewhere. Recently, however, new processes have been developed to extract the gold which has lain hidden and silent in these heaps for decades. For many Christians, the Old Testament has become like these vast slag-heaps. We know that in the past Christians worked hard in that part of the Bible, and extracted much precious and enriching truth from it. However, it seems that the Christian world has moved on to other "mines". The Old Testament lies largely silent and neglected with precious treasure waiting to be discovered. Is there a "process" which might encourage a return to these mountains of truth. Yes, there is. It is called Covenant Theology. This is the "process" which can help Christians mine and enjoy the "hidden" treasures of the Old Testament. Also, a happy "by-product" is that Covenant Theology also sheds new and brilliant light on many parts of the New Testament.

The second reason for the absence of Covenant Theology in our pulpits and pews is the difficulty of communicating the rich Biblical teaching on the covenants in language that can be easily understood by modern Christians. Many books on the subject are full of technical terms and jargon which effectively says to the non-academic "No Entry". So, this series of articles is intended to provide a simple introduction to Covenant Theology. By focussing on the covenant signs in particular, I hope to provide a pictorial aid to understanding and remembering. This series is nowhere near exhaustive. To be exhaustive would be exhausting – for writer and reader alike. If I have to err, I would be happier to be accused of erring on the side of over-simplification rather than over-complication for the former is more likely to encourage further study than the latter. Indeed, the success of the series will be judged on whether it acts as a stepping stone to further study of Covenant Theology. A progressive study of the subject would follow the reading of this booklet by *Designed for Dignity* by Richard Pratt, then *the Covenant of Grace* by John Murray, then *The Christ of the Covenants* by O Palmer Robertson.

Finally, a correct understanding of Covenant Theology will not only enrich our personal relationship with the Lord Jesus, but will also deliver us from the twin dangers of legalism and lawlessness in the Christian life.

Before going any further though, a confession! This chapter is wrongly titled. Instead of "Christ in the Covenant (singular) with Adam", it should read "Christ in the Covenants (plural) with Adam". As we shall discover, God made a covenant with Adam before his fall into sin. In addition, God gave him a revelation of the *Covenant of Grace* after he had sinned. This revelation was the first ever Gospel sermon, a sermon that was preached by God Himself!

Before proceeding to study these covenants, though, let us summarise the first three chapters of Genesis in which they appear. In Genesis 1-2, God spoke and His Word brought light, life and order. In Genesis 3:1-7 the Devil spoke and his word brought darkness, death and chaos. In Genesis 3:8ff God graciously spoke again, to begin the restoration of life, light and order.

We shall first of all consider God's original perfect order and how the Devil destroyed it. Then we shall examine how God, in His love, began to restore the original order by announcing the destruction of the Destroyer.

I. THE DEVIL DESTROYS

When we study the original Divine order and the original relationship between God and Adam, we are struck with the awesome grace of God. We see God's grace in creation itself; His creating of creatures He Himself had no need of. We see God's grace in providence; His providing for all the needs of all He created. We see God's grace in endowing Adam with a religious nature – a soul – and giving Himself to fill and satisfy this. So, by God's grace, Adam enjoyed a created relationship, a providential relationship and a spiritual relationship with God. In addition to all this, God also graciously entered into a covenant relationship with him. This covenant is known as the *Covenant of Works*. The Shorter Catechism (Q.12) calls it a *Covenant of Life*, because "life" would have resulted from the keeping of it:

Question: What special act of providence did God exercise toward man in the estate wherein he was created?

Answer: When God had created man, He entered into a covenant of life with him, upon condition of perfect obedience; forbidding him to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, upon the pain of death.

We would like to pause and study this *Covenant of Works* (Genesis 2:15-17). However, we would especially like to emphasise the grace of God even in the *Covenant of Works*.

1. Grace in the initiation of the covenant

As a creature of God, Adam was bound to keep the moral law of God. Although transgression of that law would entail punishment, obedience could not entitle him to any special reward. It was simply his duty. In the *Covenant of Works*, God graciously covenanted to enable Adam to improve his condition and merit a special reward by a specific act of obedience. The framers of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* put it this way:

The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which he has been pleased to express by way of covenant. (WCF 7.1).

2. Grace in the simplicity of the command

Adam had the moral law written in his heart. Being perfect, he not only had an aversion to that which was immoral, he also would have found it easier to obey than disobey. This was especially true when the command was framed in such simple terms. There was nothing elaborate or complicated about it: "Don't eat of that tree!"

3. Grace in the clarity of the threat

Adam was not left in the dark about the consequences attending disobedience. The threat was clear, stark and solemn: "If you eat, you die." Though the world had not known death, yet God gave Adam knowledge of all that death would mean. It was not only or even primarily physical, but spiritual; his relationship with God would die.

4. Grace in the immensity of the promise

A creature's obedience is a debt owed and does not bring the Creator into the creature's debt. By rendering obedience, Adam was giving what was God's already. However, in the *Covenant of Works*, God promised Adam that his obedience regarding the forbidden tree would "bring God into his debt". God bound Himself to promise life in return for obedience, a Divine reward far in excess of the human obedience rendered. The reward included an increase in the length, security and quality of Adam's life. It is this element of meriting which gives this covenant its name, the *Covenant of Works*.

5. Grace in the greatness of the opportunity

God promised to allow Adam's obedience to merit life not only for himself but for all his descendants (Rom.5:12-19; 1 Cor.15:22). The test was limited to one man acting for all, instead of being indefinitely repeated forever in each individual life. How much greater was Adam's motivation to obey, with him knowing that He could earn length, security and quality of life not only for himself, but for billions of his descendents. What an opportunity!

6. Grace in the brevity of the test

God could have continued the test for ever and so held Adam in unsettled suspense forever. However, God limited the length of the probation, and allowed the temporary obedience of one to earn eternal life for many. The Bible implies that had Adam passed the temporary test, God would have confirmed him and his descendents in a permanent state of holiness.

7. Grace in the provision of the covenant sign

Where is Christ in the *Covenant of Works*? In one sense, the answer is, "Nowhere," as the name "Christ" is related to the Divine provision of a Messiah and Mediator for sinners, and Adam was not a sinner while under the *Covenant of Works*. However, if we change the question to, "Where is the Son of God in the *Covenant of Works*?" we may answer, "He is signified in the Tree of Life as the source of His people's spiritual and eternal life." In the New Testament, this symbolic identification of Christ with the Tree of Life is made explicit:

To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God...In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations...Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city (Rev.2:7; 22:2, 14).

From the words of Genesis 3:22-24, it would appear that the prospect of eating the fruit of the Tree of Life was kept before Adam during his probation. The Tree of Life was a covenant sign which signified the blessing of life he would earn and so encouraged him to hold fast in his obedience.

We marvel at the grace and love of God in this *Covenant of Works*. However, it was not long before the hater of God and all His creatures appeared on the scene, in the form of a serpent, to destroy God's covenant and God's creation. As we all now know, Adam broke the terms of the covenant and brought himself and all those descended from him by ordinary generation into an estate of sin and misery.

Despite Adam's sinful covenant failure, God did not leave him and all his descendants to perish in sin and misery. Instead, as the *Westminster Confession of Faith* explains, He announced another covenant by which He would save His people from their sins

Man by his fall having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace: whereby he freely offers unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved; and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto life his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe (WCF 7.3).

Though not revealed to humanity until after the fall, the *Covenant of Grace* was made before it, and indeed before the world began. The *Covenant of Grace* was made between the persons of the Godhead and is therefore unbreakable. In it, God the Son agreed to take up the broken *Covenant of Works* and not only to render the obedience required, but also to suffer the penalties Adam incurred in order to secure life for all His people. By faith in Jesus Christ, the last Adam, we can gain life in all its fullness (Rom.5:12f).

It is important to remember that the *Covenant of Grace* is both conditional and unconditional. Christ fulfilled the conditional elements of the covenant in order to make an offer of unconditional blessings to sinners. So, just as there was grace in the *Covenant of Works*, we can also see works in *the Covenant of Grace*. However, it is the works of Christ that we see, not our own. It is a *Covenant of Grace* because God allows another to meet our obligations; because He Himself provides the covenant keeper; because He gives the faith we need to receive the covenant blessings.

This one *Covenant of Grace*, contracted by Christ for His people, is revealed and administered to His people through His covenants with various Old Testament characters. However, we must always remember that these covenants are all, essentially, revelations or administrations of the one *Covenant of Grace*. It is these "covenants" which we would like to turn our attention to. We shall be looking for the Christ of the Covenant (singular) of Grace in His covenants (plural) with post-fall Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and also in the *New Covenant* predicted by Jeremiah. But, first of all, we turn to the post-fall *Covenant with Adam*.

II. THE DEVIL DISGRACED

Against the black backdrop of the broken *Covenant of Works*, the *Covenant of Grace* begins to be revealed in Genesis 3:14-15. Though there were serious consequences for the snake as an animal, they were symbolic of the fatal consequences God had ordained for the Devil who had used the snake to do such evil. God revealed what He would do to the snake and the Devil, and on the basis of that exhorts Adam and Eve to put their faith in Him.

1. You are cursed above all animals

The snake is addressed by God, but it is for the benefit of man. By "eavesdropping" we can hear the first Gospel sermon, the first inkling of the existence of the *Covenant of Grace*. Though the whole creation and all creatures suffered loss as a result of the fall and

subsequent curse, the snake was singled out for “special treatment” as symbolic of the supreme curse upon the Devil. That the Divine imprecation is upon the head of the Devil is the greatest encouragement to the Christian who is battling against his wiles and strategies. As Charles Spurgeon said:

He with whom we have to contend has the curse of God upon him even now. God has blessed his people, but he has cursed their great enemy. The curse of God blights and blasts...and has fallen upon that foul spirit who represents evil: it could not justly be otherwise. This is his shame and your strength. The next time you are fighting with Apollyon, here is a keen shaft to hurl at him. Tell him he is accursed of God; and what has he to do with those whom the Lord has blessed? He whom God blesses is blessed, but he whom God curses is cursed indeed.

2. Upon thy belly thou shalt thou go

The punishment fitted the crime. Before the fall, the snake was perhaps one of the most gifted and beautiful creatures (Gen.3:1) and was made, as were all the other animals, to serve humanity. Its crime was in exalting itself above humanity in allowing itself to be used to give instructions to Eve. The punishment, therefore, was to be changed into a disgraced, debased and disgusting creature, living its life in the lowest place. He is thrown down where he belonged, just as a loving father might snap in two the sword which killed his son.

Similarly, the Devil was originally created as one of the most beautiful angels in the service of God. His crime was to attempt to exalt himself above both God and his God-given role. The punishment, therefore, was to be thrown down out of heaven and eventually down into the bottomless pit prepared for him and his agents. In his commentary on this passage, G J Wenham also links the punishments on the snake and the Devil:

The Judge pronounces a doom: first, on the material serpent, which is cursed above all creatures. From being a model of grace and elegance in form, it has become the type of all that is odious, disgusting, and low....next, on the spiritual serpent, the seducer. Already fallen, he was to be still more degraded and his power wholly destroyed by the offspring of those he had deceived.

3. Dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life

While crawling in the dust, the snake would find itself swallowing dust and rubbish in perpetuity. Just as he had tempted Eve to eat what she should not, so the snake was made to eat what he would not.

As applied to the Devil, this was not only a sordid sign of disgrace and degradation but also the ultimate humiliation heaped upon a defeated enemy (Ps.72:9).

The rest of the Bible, and indeed the rest of redemptive history is all about the Lord feeding the Devil bigger and bigger mouthfuls of dust. The Devil “ate dust” when Christ defeated His temptations, when Christ rose from the dead, when the Holy Spirit was poured out, and when thousands were converted in one day. Charles Spurgeon said:

When the nations were converted, and the idols were broken, and the truth mightily prevailed; then did Satan remember the words, “Dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life.” He has more humiliation yet to come. Arise, and preach

Christ and win souls, and the great enemy of souls shall find his power diminished, and his name abhorred, and again he shall lick the dust.

The sign of the *Covenant of Works* was the Tree of Life, a sign to encourage faith and obedience. The first sign of the *Covenant of Grace* was the changed appearance, posture and behaviour of the snake and its aim is to encourage faith and obedience. Every snake we see should encourage us to turn from the disgraced and defeated foe the snake represents (the Devil), and put our trust in the Christ of the *Covenant of Grace*. The temporary outward sign of disgraced and defeated snakes represent a permanent spiritual reality promised in the *Covenant of Grace*.

III. THE DEVIL DETESTED

Next, God announces the injection of enmity into certain relationships (Gen.3:15).

1. Enmity between the snake and the woman

“I will put enmity between thee and the woman” may be interpreted as God addressing the snake as an animal. God is saying that the harmony between the animal kingdom and the human race is broken. From now on, the snake, in a special way, will be hostile to humanity. In a similar manner, humanity will have a hatred of all that slithers like serpents. As often as the snake bites young and old, and as often as the sight of a snake (its movement, its head, its feel) revolts us, the painful memory of our fall, and of the subsequent breakdown in human/animal relations, is renewed.

2. Enmity between Satan and the woman

“I will put enmity between thee and the woman” may also be interpreted as God addressing the Devil who is behind the snake and who used the snake.

Eve and the Devil had spoken together as friends and she took his “friendly” advice. He thought he could now count on Eve being an ally against God, but God stepped in to break up this “friendship” from hell. By putting enmity between the Devil and the woman, God established a relationship; a relationship which is the very essence of the benefits of the *Covenant of Grace*. The fall brought humanity into relationship with Satan, but God broke the newly formed alliance by turning humanity’s friendship with Satan into enmity, and re-establishing humanity in friendship with Himself. This reveals the essence of the *Covenant of Grace*. It is summed up in the covenant promise, implicit here and explicit in other “covenant” contexts, “I will be your God and you shall be my people” (Gen.17:7; Ex.19:5; 2 Sam.7:14; Jer.31:33; Heb.8:10; Rev.21:3). God covenants to become humanity’s ally in the struggle with Satan by the injection of this holy enmity against evil.

3. Enmity between Satan’s seed and the woman’s seed (plural)

“I will put enmity...between thy seed and her seed” may be interpreted as referring to two groups (Gal.4:28-29). The first group, the “seed (or “offspring”) of the serpent” is the Devil, his demons and servant; those whose “father” is the Devil (Jn.8:44).

The second group, the “seed (or offspring) of the woman” is not all people, or the whole human race. Just as it is the spiritual seed of the Devil that is spoken of in the previous phrase, so it is the spiritual seed, not the physical seed, of the woman that is spoken of. As Eve is now regenerate, her seed are those who share her Spirit; the Holy Spirit. Arthur Pink clarifies this:

The carnal seed of the man and the woman are not meant, but the spiritual seed, even Christ Jesus and those who are in him. Wherever you meet these, they hate the serpent with a perfect hatred. We would if we could destroy from our souls every work of Satan, and out of this poor afflicted world of ours we would root up every evil which he has planted.

4. Enmity between Satan's seed and the woman's seed (singular)

"I will put enmity...between thy seed and her seed" may also be interpreted as referring to two individuals (Gal.3:16). In the very highest sense, the seed of the woman spoken of here is Jesus Christ. He is the culmination of the seed of the woman. This enmity between the Devil and Jesus Christ did not begin at the incarnation and it did not end with the ascension. God announced its existence in Eden, and it will continue forever. However, it did climax at the time of Christ's incarnation.

It was through the woman that the Devil brought sin into the world. It is also through the woman in a special way, through the supernatural virgin birth, that the grace of God will bring the conqueror of sin (Jn.12:31; Lk.10:17-19). It is **her** seed and not the man's. "God sent forth His Son, made of a woman" (Gal.4:4).

So, in summary, the detestation and hatred between snakes and humanity symbolises the spiritual hatred which God will graciously put in the hearts of His people against the Devil.

IV. THE DEVIL DEFEATED

Though the snake can inflict the odd bite and even fatality upon humanity, in general humanity has the upper hand. This fact also signifies the defeat of the Devil by God's grace and power.

1. Thou shalt bruise his heel

"Thou shalt bruise his heel" informs the Devil that God has foreordained and planned that he inflict pain on the "Seed" (singular) of the woman. The phrase is really a succinct summary of our Lord's earthly life, especially emphasizing His sufferings and death. "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities" (Isa.53:5).

The sense of "bruise" is the same in both uses of it in Genesis 3:15, and means "to crush" or "to batter". The same word is used in connection with both head and heel, to show that on both sides the intention is the same; to destroy the opponent.

If the "bruising" implies painful attack, the "heel" indicates the limited nature of the pain. Christ's heels were literally bruised when He was nailed to the cross. However, here, the heel stands for the lower part, for Christ's human nature. Just like the snake attacks humanity, the Devil attacked Christ subversively and painfully; but with limited success as the wound was "curable".

2. It shall bruise thy head

"It shall bruise thy head" informs the Devil that despite inflicting pain and "damage" on Christ's heel, God will ensure that Christ will do far worse to the Devil. The target is not the heel but the head, which suggests an open attack, a mortal wound, a fatal and incurable crushing. The Devil may cripple for a time, but Christ will crush for all time. The verse is largely, though not completely, fulfilled at Calvary (Col.2:15). It continues to be fulfilled in the preaching of the Gospel translating lost sinners from the power of Satan to the power

of God. It will be completely fulfilled at the end of all time (Rom.16:20; Rev.20:10). This will be the climactic fulfilment. Let Charles Spurgeon have the last word:

He pronounced a sentence upon the serpent, which, while it was terrible to him, is most encouraging to us; and so far as our first parents understood it, it must have been a sun of light to their dark, depressed souls. For many a year this was the lone star of believing hearts: this gospel of the serpent's doom. Satan was their enemy; he had done them wrong. He was also God's enemy, and God would fight against him, and call them into his battle. He would raise up One who would suffer, but would win the victory – One whom he calls "the seed of the woman." By him Satan's head would be bruised; and in that very fact, the race of man would be unspeakably blest.

SUMMARY

The *Covenant of Grace* was first revealed to sinners through the post-fall *Covenant with Adam*, and especially through the covenant sign of the disgraced, detested and defeated snake. This natural covenant sign which benefited all humanity, preached the spiritual reality of a disgraced and defeated Devil resulting from the *Covenant of Grace*. However, only those with faith could benefit from the spiritual reality signified in the natural sign.

Imagine a large cathedral with no windows and no doors. Inside this black and bleak building is sinful humanity. This was the state of humanity as a result of the Fall; darkness reigned. In mercy, God decided to cut a window in one of the walls in order to let in the light of the *Covenant of Grace* which was shining brightly outside the building. He could not let in too much light or those inside would be blinded. So, He cut a window in the shape of a defeated snake. Everyone inside benefits from the light, just as all humanity benefit from a greatly weakened snake. However, though many just admire the shape of the window and enjoy the light that comes through it, others look through the window by faith and see a more wonderful spiritual reality shining brightly through it; the defeated Devil of the *Covenant of Grace*. The generally defeated experience of the snake promised in the post-fall *Covenant with Adam* signified the ultimate and total defeat of the Devil guaranteed by the *Covenant of Grace*. The disgraced, detested and defeated snake of the *Covenant with Adam* revealed sufficient of the *Covenant of Grace* to enable Adam to put His faith in the Christ of the Covenant who would disgrace, detest and defeat the Devil perfectly.

Have you followed Adam's faith? Have you used the covenant sign of the defeated snake to lead you to the victorious Saviour?