

Lesson 9 - The Covenants

1. Enjoying and glorifying God. We cannot enjoy God apart from some condescension on His part. WCF 7.1 says, “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 hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.” Now note that this is the pre-fall situation. How much more so after the fall?
2. The heart of the covenant is that God commits Himself and makes promises to fallen human beings concerning their well-being and salvation. I think of a passage like Hebrews 6:16-19 as illustrative of the blessing of the covenant: “God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope set before us may be greatly encouraged” (Heb. 6:18). Side note: covenant is not about infant baptism, even though it is sometimes called covenant baptism. More later.
3. We do not encounter the word “covenant” until Abraham, but once it is there, then it is mentioned constantly.
4. Consider how God is praised in 1 Chronicles 16. Verses 7-11 tell us to praise God for all that he is and has done. I think a pagan could have written something similar about their god. However, he could not have written 15-18. “He remembers his covenant forever, the promise he made, for a thousand generations . . .” (v. 15). He has entered into history and made covenants with His people. God took the ancient concept of covenants or treaties and used it for His own purposes. It then defines the relationship of Yahweh to His people.
5. The Greek word for covenant is *diatheke*, which means also testament (hence 7.4). We can think of the covenant as an agreement, but it is also a bequeathal, a gift of the inheritance secured through the death of the testator, Jesus. “For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance . . .” (Heb. 9:15a). The idea of a testament fits the broader idea of a bequeathal. You can see it in the Old Testament in the promise never to flood the earth again. There is a direct parallel to that promise in Isaiah 54:9-10. You can also see it in Gen. 15 where God takes upon Himself the obligations of the covenant and Abraham does not (though elsewhere, people also commit themselves to the Lord, hence describing covenant as treaty or bequeathal [see Is. 44:5 as an example]). You can also see this thought behind the way of describing the covenant of grace in WLC 31 With whom was the covenant of grace made? A. The covenant of grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in him with all the elect as his seed.
6. The idea of a covenant is used in the New Testament to describe our relationship with God through Christ (see 1 Cor. 11:25, 2 Cor. 3:6, Heb. 7:22, etc.).
7. Why extend this back to Adam? You can see that God's original relationship with Adam is considered a covenant in 7.2. “The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.” It seems that Protestant theologians in the late 16th century were the first to use this terminology (“covenant of works”). They did this in part because of the contrast

between the law in Gospel in passages like Galatians 3:10-12 and between Adam and Christ in Romans 5:12-21. The elements of the covenant seem to be there, so it makes sense to refer to it this way. If you want to read an example of the things I used to write about, you can read this article here:

<https://www.weswhite.net/2020/07/the-dutch-reformed-doctrine-of-the-covenant-of-works/>

8. After the fall, the Westminster theologians characterize the covenant as a covenant of grace because it is a gift in spite of our sin. They believe that the substance of this agreement is one even though it is manifested in different ways throughout biblical history. So, the fathers of the Old Testament were not saved by works. They were saved by grace. See on this Heb. 11, Rom. 4, Heb. 9:15, and Romans 3:25-26.