

Finding Your Place in God's Story of Redemption Winter/Spring 2015

Finding your Place in God's Story: The Covenant of Grace and Everyday Life - This class will take you step by step through the covenants of the Bible and help you understand the over-arching plot of scripture through the lens of God's Covenant of Grace. We will explore the aspect of God's covenant through its various administrations throughout the Old and New testaments and answer the question:

What does each sub-plot mean for our lives today?

What role do we play in God's story of redemption?

How does a promise made so many centuries ago to Noah, Abraham and David have an impact on my life?

The objective of this class is: to equip you with the confidence to read and understand scripture and find your place in the continuing story of God's redemptive grace.

At this point in the class, I think it important that we reiterate the compound nature of the individual covenants in revealing the overarching Covenant of Grace. Each covenant (or meta-narrative) entails elemental truth that builds on the one before. When we think of God's redemptive work, we should understand this work in light of everything God promised to do in each covenant. The Covenant of Creation/Works offers the universal mandate of being fruitful, multiplying and replenishing the earth. Likewise, the Noahic Covenant provides us the occasion for seeing this aspect of God's promise to His creation reiterated as well as elaborated upon. In the Noahic Covenant, He promises to bless the earth and never destroy the earth through the waters of a flood again. This purposeful preservation is just as much a part of God's plan of redemption as other more obvious covenantal blessings. The Abrahamic Covenant offers the promise of a great nation, a covenant people – called and set apart from all the nations of the earth in order to represent God and His kingdom on earth. The promise of a chosen seed through whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed is a continuation of the promise made in Genesis 3:15 and should be seen as a narrowing of the focus of God's redemptive plan, not a new plan seeking to replace the previous covenant between God and Noah. In each of these covenantal revelations, a clearer aspect of the work of God in our world is being disclosed. This continues to be the case in the covenant detailed below: the Mosaic Covenant.

- 1) *The Prelude to the Covenant* – One element of the Covenant between God and Abraham, which carries over into the Mosaic covenant is the promise of redemption. In Genesis 15, when Abraham is sleeping and witnessing the cutting of the Covenant between him and God, God informs the patriarch of the future enslavement of His chosen people. He assures him that though they will be enslaved by the Egyptians for a period of four hundred years, He will surely redeem them and bring them into the land covenantally promised. This redemption would be based on nothing less (or more) than the covenantal relationship between God and Abraham. Thus, contrary to the belief and teachings of some, the law given by Moses rests solely on a covenantal rather than a legal relationship, and in the ancient suzerain system, covenant always supersedes law.¹
- 2) *Theological Realities of the Mosaic Covenant* – There are three distinct truths regarding the Mosaic Covenant that must first be stated if we are to understand the relation of this particular covenant to the other covenants of scripture and ultimately to the overarching Covenant of Grace.

¹ O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenant* pg. 170.

Finding Your Place in God's Story of Redemption Winter/Spring 2015

- a) *The Mosaic Covenant is a summation of the will of God for His people.* This is not to say that the will of God in select instances was un-revealed prior to the Mosaic Covenant, but the codification of His will and the relationship between His will and the manner of living among His Covenant Community is unique to this specific Covenant.
 - b) *The Mosaic Covenant is not an alternative to the promise of redemption through the "seed" of the woman (Galatians 3:17-18).* The Mosaic Covenant was not initiating a new plan of redemption that was somehow unrelated to the previous covenants. In fact, the Mosaic Covenant and the law disclosed therein had the effect of guarding us (or as the KJV interprets this passage, treating us as a school-master or tutor) until the coming of the one promised by the Mosaic Covenant itself as well as the individual covenants that preceded it.
 - c) *Faith in God remained the sole basis of imputed righteousness, even under the dispensation of the law.* Adherence to the law disclosed in the Mosaic Covenant was never intended to bring salvation. Just as Abraham believed God and it was imputed to him as righteousness, so too were all of ancient Israel as members of the covenant community, considered righteous on the basis of faith alone (Deuteronomy 10:16).
- 3) *The Proper Place of the Mosaic Covenant* – The Mosaic Covenant was distinct in that it revealed more about God's plan of redemption than any of the covenants that preceded it, but less than the covenants that follow. In other words, the Mosaic Covenant discloses to God's covenant people the manner in which they are to live as a nation representing Him in the world. However, there are elements to this relationship (namely the aspects of King and kingdom), which will have to await the Davidic Covenant to be disclosed.
- 4) *Elements of the Mosaic Covenant* – The Mosaic Covenant consists of the Decalogue (or Ten Commandments) as well as specific civil and sacrificial laws which would later find fulfillment in a manner less relevant to the covenant community than the Decalogue itself. Exodus 20:1-17 reveals to us the Covenant itself, a covenant later to be cut (or sealed) in blood. The text can be divided accordingly:
- a) The preamble – Exodus 19:3-5 and Exodus 20:2 a statement of His mighty qualifying acts.
 - b) The terms of the agreement – Exodus 20:2-17
 - c) The ramifications of obedience – Exodus 19:5-6
 - d) The ramifications of disobedience – Leviticus 26:14:39
 - e) Sealed in blood – Exodus 24:8
- 5) *What does this mean for me?* As we continue on this journey of exploring the covenants of scripture it is helpful to observe exactly what relevancy the respective covenants have for us today. Think for a moment about the following questions. What role does the Mosaic Covenant, i.e. the Law play in the life of a believer today? To what extent should a Christian seek to adhere to the law? What is legalism? What is Antinomianism?

The Westminster Confession –

Chapter XIX

Finding Your Place in God's Story of Redemption Winter/Spring 2015

Of the Law of God

I. 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, promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it, and endued him with power and ability to keep it.

II. This law, 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: the first four commandments containing our duty towards God; and the other six, our duty to man.

III. Besides this law, commonly called moral, God was pleased to give to the people of Israel, as a church under age, ceremonial laws, containing several typical ordinances, partly of worship, prefiguring Christ, His graces, actions, sufferings, and benefits; and partly, holding forth divers instructions of moral duties. All which ceremonial laws are now abrogated, under the New Testament.

IV. To them also, as a body politic, He gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the State of that people; not obliging under any now, further than the general equity thereof may require.

V. The moral law does forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof; and that, not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator, who gave it. Neither does Christ, in the Gospel, any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation.

VI. Although true believers be not under the law, as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified, or condemned; yet is it of great use to them, as well as to others; in that, as a rule of life informing them of the will of God, and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly; discovering also the sinful pollutions of their nature, hearts and lives; so as, examining themselves thereby, they may come to further conviction of, humiliation for, and hatred against sin, together with a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ, and the perfection of His obedience. It is likewise of use to the regenerate, to restrain their corruptions, in that it forbids sin: and the threatening of it serve to show what even their sins deserve; and what afflictions, in this life, they may expect for them, although freed from the curse thereof threatened in the law. The promises of it, in like manner, show them God's approbation of obedience, and what blessings they may expect upon the performance thereof: although not as due to them by the law as a covenant of works. So as, a man's doing good, and refraining from evil, because the law encourages to the one and deters from the other, is no evidence of his being under the law: and not under grace.

VII. Neither are the forementioned uses of the law contrary to the grace of the Gospel, but do sweetly comply with it; the Spirit of Christ subduing and enabling the will of man to do that freely, and cheerfully, which the will of God, revealed in the law, requires to be done.