

# **What is Covenant Theology?**

January 9 2022

**Harvest Fellowship PCA**

# An Overview

- Each Story has a Beginning
- What we know...so far...
- What is a Covenant?
- Types of Covenants
  - Ordinary Covenants
  - Divine Covenants
- Terms to know:
  - Introduction to the Covenant of Redemption
  - Introduction to Covenant of Works
  - Introduction to Covenant of Grace
- Covenant History – A thumbnail view
- References

# An Overview

- Each Story has a Beginning.
  - Genesis 1: 1 “In the beginning, God...”
  - John 1: 1- “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God....”
  - Hebrews 1:1- “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, <sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.
- The Covenants is one means to understand God’s Redemptive Work:
  - Covenant Theology helps us to understand how God deals with man from the very beginning. It relates God’s promises and commands in term of covenants
  - Reformed Theology is associated with Covenant Theology”; Why?
  - Jesus spoke of Scriptures pointing to HIM (Luke 24:27).



# What we know...so far

- Is there a story of how God started this work? We are familiar with some aspects of the Reformed Faith:

## We know of the Five Solas of the Reformation

**1) Sola Scriptura** – ..Ascribing to SCRIPTURE alone

**2) Sola Fide** -..through FAITH alone

**3) Sola Gratia** - ..by GRACE alone

**4) Sola Christus**-..through CHRIST alone

**5) Sola Deo Gloria**-..for the GLORY of GOD alone...

# What we know...so far

- Is there a story of how God started this work? We are familiar with some aspects of the Reformed Faith:

**We know of the doctrines of the Reformed faith with the acrostic of  
T U L I P**

- 1) Total Depravity**– We are dead in trespasses and sins ( Eph 2: 1-6)
- 2) Unconditional Election**- God chose me from without for anything good in me (John 15:16)
- 3) Limited Atonement**- Christ laid down His life for HIS sheep (John 10:11), with HIS own blood (Acts 2:28).
- 4) Irresistible Grace**- God's grace to save a person from his sins cannot be resisted (John 6:37). They God makes His people "willing in the day of His power" Psalm 110:3.
- 5) Preservations of the Saints** – Jesus said: "And I give them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (John 10:28).



# What is a Covenant?

It is another aspect that speaks of a THEME/ STRUCTURE of how to know what we know (ontology); of God saving me from Eternity “past”

- ... a covenant is a relationship of “oaths and bonds” and involves mutual, though not necessarily equal commitments...
  - Michael Horton
- **A covenant is a bond in blood sovereignly administered**
  - **O. Palmer Robertson**
  - The Covenant is a means where God established His relationship with man in the form of agreements, oaths, bilateral agreements, unilateral pronouncements, and Royal grants.
  - It is **ONE STORY**, with different administrations ( methods of revelation of the same purpose – **REDEMPTION**).

# What is a Covenant?

- How does God's work of establishing a covenant differ from a contract?
  - **A CONTRACT** is a conditional relationship established for the mutual benefit of the contracting parties. A contract is **a limited commitment**, continuing only so long as the mutual benefit continues. The covenant is not a contractual type of relationship, limited by the mutual benefit of the parties involved.



# What is a Covenant?

- How does God's work of establishing a covenant differ from a contract?
  - **A COVENANT** is a formal, binding agreement, a compact. It is a seal between two or more parties, especially for the performance of some action. It had stipulations of rewards and consequences if the agreement was broken.
  - In the biblical context, it is derived from the root word meaning **"TO CUT"**. It was usually formal, serious and had life and death implications. When a covenant was established or sealed, it was done with an animal sacrifice and sealed in blood. (Merriam Webster dictionary)
  - In the Bible, a covenant can only be established and sealed by an **oath**, which usually involves an **oath-taking ceremony** like circumcision (that is, in ancient Israel, the act of circumcising a child constituted a covenant oath). The oath is so important in a covenant that the word oath is sometimes used as a **synonym for covenant** (cf. Deuteronomy. 29:12, 14)



# What is a Covenant?

- What is an **oath**?
  - An **oath** is a self-maledictory promise. When one takes an oath, he promises to preserve the covenantal relationship and seals the promise with words that call a curse upon himself if he should fail to keep his promise. The curse of the covenant is death. ( - Ralph Alan Smith)
  - Most common usage of an oath with a maledictory promise, is an oath to be married to one person “in sickness and in death”.
  - A **vow** is a solemn promise, to do a specified thing (Google).

# What is a Covenant?

What is a **bond**?

- It is “a **relationship** between people or groups based on shared feelings, interests, or experiences.” In **Biblical context, the bond is a relationship between persons and between God and man.** HE verbalizes a declaration in a covenant that has characteristic “oaths” and “signs” that define it as a bond.
- When God initiates a covenant, it extends to issues of life and death. The binding of the agreement means to “cut a covenant”. Most obvious example is Abraham slaughtering a series of animals and lays pieces one against the other. God passes between the divided pieces, resulting in the “making” and “cutting a covenant” (Genesis 15). (Robertson)
- Therefore, God establishing a **DIVINE COVENANT in its essence is a bond** (Robertson)

Reference: Bible Study Tools.

URL: <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/sign/>



# What is a Covenant?

- What is a **sign**?
  - It is “**a mark** by which persons or things are distinguished and made known.” In Scripture used generally of an address to the senses to attest the existence of super-sensible and therefore divine power. It is usually an object.
  - Example: In the Noah Covenant; **God casts a rainbow in the sky as a covenant sign** between **GOD** and **Noah, the earth, and ALL LIVING CREATURES- and their offspring**, promising not to destroy them with water again. (Genesis 9: 9 – 12).

# What is a Covenant?

## Scripture examples of the COVENANT as a pact or oath-bond:

- **Genesis 22:17** “I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore” (Gen. 22:17).
- **Exodus. 24:3** “All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do” (Ex. 24:3).
- **Royal Grant covenants: Genesis 9:11:** “I will establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” (see also Genesis 15; 2 Samuel 7:1-17).
- **Suzereign-Vassal covenants: Mosaic Covenant** – “I solemnly warned your fathers when I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, warning them persistently, even to this day, saying, Obey my voice. Yet they did not obey” (Jeremiah 11:7-8).



# What is a Covenant?

To understand the elements of the story, we will look at different types of covenants as practiced in the ancient time and Biblical type

## **TWO COVENANTS that we can separate**

- 1) ORDINARY Covenants – A bond or agreement between men**  
**Example: The Parity Treaty - bound two equal parties in a relationship that provided conditions stipulated by participants. Example: Abraham and Abimelech ( Genesis 21:25 – 32), Jacob and Laban ( Genesis 31: 44 – 50) David and Jonathan (I Samuel 18: 1 – 4 & II Samuel 9; 1 – 13)**

# What is a Covenant?

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## **TWO COVENANTS that we can separate**

### **2) DIVINE Covenants – A Bond or agreement between God and men.**

a. This can be initiated by God with men,

**Example: God initiated a covenant with Abraham (Genesis 15 & 17) Example: Abrahamic Covenant -Genesis 15: 17 – 21 ; “<sup>17</sup> When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. <sup>18</sup> On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates,<sup>19</sup> the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, <sup>20</sup> the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, <sup>21</sup> the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites.”**



# What is a Covenant?

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## **TWO COVENANTS that we can separate**

### **2) DIVINE Covenants – A Bond or agreement between God and men.**

#### **b. This can be initiated by men with God**

**Example: King Josiah (II Kings 23:3) His reforms, in the midst of repairing the Temple, Hikkah the high priest found the book of the Law in the house of the Lord.**

<sup>1</sup>Then the king sent, and all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem were gathered to him. <sup>2</sup>And the king went up to the house of the LORD, and with him all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the priests and the prophets, all the people, both small and great. And he read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant that had been found in the house of the LORD. <sup>3</sup>**And the king stood by the pillar and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people joined in the covenant.**

# What is a Covenant?

Developing the Covenantal Framework when following the Story

There are THREE Overarching COVENANT types to consider in knowing the STORY of God's Redemptive Work through COVENANTS

**I The Covenant of Redemption (Pactum Salutis)**

**II The Covenant of Creation (foederus naturae) – Covenant of Works**

**III The Covenant of Grace (foederus gratiae)**

Within the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>d</sup> categories, we find the progressive revelation of God's Divine covenants inaugurated and executed in redeeming his people at different times and at different places. These are

- 1) Adam – the covenant of commencement**
- 2) Noah – the covenant of preservation**
- 3) Abraham – the covenant of promise**
- 4) Moses – the covenant of the LAW**
- 5) David – the covenant of the KINGDOM**
- 6) Christ - The NEW COVENANT, i.e. the covenant of consummation**



# What is a Covenant?

Developing the Covenantal Framework when following the Story

## I The Covenant of Redemption (Pactum Salutis)\*

- 1) This view is **not unanimous** within the Reformed Community. Nowhere is the word “Covenant” mentioned before Genesis 6. How do we know the words the Father used in establishing this pact? It is only fair to ask,” is this category valid or speculative?”\*\*

.. “But affirming the role of redemption in the eternal counsels of God is not the same as proposing the existence of a pre-creation covenant between Father and Son. A sense of artificiality flavors the effort to structure in covenantal terms the mysteries of God’s eternal counsels. Scripture simply does not say much on the pre-creation shape of the decrees of God. To speak concretely of an intertrinitarian ‘covenant’ with terms and conditions between Father and Son mutually endorsed before the foundation of the world is to extend the bounds of scriptural evidence beyond propriety.”...

Reference: Horton Michael Introducing Covenant Theology pg 27 – 83

\*\*O Palmer Robertson: “Christ of the Covenants pg 54

URL: <http://gentlemantheologian.com/2020/10/02/definite-atonement-trinitarian-disharmony/>

# What is a Covenant?

Developing the Covenantal Framework when following the Story

## I The Covenant of Redemption (Pactum Salutis)\*

2) Most biblical covenants or pacts are between God and humans and creatures. **The covenant of redemption is an eternal pact between the Persons of the TRINITY.**

3) In this pact: **The Father elects people in the Son as their Mediator, to be brought to a saving faith through the Holy Spirit.**

- 1) Implication – **The covenant made by the Trinity in eternity takes into account the fall of the Human Race.**
- 2) **God chose according to his freedom to display both his justice and his mercy and the covenant of redemption is the opening act in this drama of redemption.**

Reference: Horton Michael Introducing Covenant Theology pg 27 – 83

**\*\*O Palmer Robertson: “Christ of the Covenants pg 54**



# What is a Covenant?

Developing the Covenantal Framework when following the Story

## I The Covenant of Redemption (Pactum Salutis)\* (continued)

4) The love demonstrated through the “Creator-creature” relationship: The love of the Father and the Spirit for the Son is demonstrated in the gift of a people who will have Him as their living head. At the same time the Son’s love for the Father and the Spirit is demonstrated in his pledge to redeem that family at great personal cost.

Philippians 2: 5 - 11 “<sup>5</sup> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [b] <sup>7</sup> **but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.** <sup>8</sup> **And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.** <sup>9</sup> **Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,** <sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Reference: Horton Michael Introducing Covenant Theology pg 27 - 83

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## I The Covenant of Redemption (Pactum Salutis)\* (continued)

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Hebrews 12: 1 – 2

<sup>1</sup>Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> **looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.**



# What is a Covenant?

Developing the Covenantal Framework when following the Story

## **I The Covenant of Redemption (Pactum Salutis)\* (continued)**

5) God's predestination is hidden from us, Christ is not. The unveiling of the mystery hidden in past age, the Person and work of Christ, becomes the only reliable testimony of our election. Those who trust in Christ, belong to Christ, are elect in Christ.

**6) Going back to Unconditional Election – We can see the divine decree in terms of the eternal covenant between the three persons of the Godhead.**

# What is a Covenant?

Developing the Covenantal Framework when following the Story

## I The Covenant of Redemption (Pactum Salutis)\* (continued)

- 7) Some proof-text to show this pact or covenant was established between the persons of the Godhead.
- a. **In the ministry of Christ, the Son is represented as having been given a people by the Father:** John 6:39; 10:29; 17:2, 4 – 10; Ephesians 1:4 – 12; Hebrews 2:13,-citing Isaiah
  - b. **The elect are called and kept by the Holy Spirit** for the consummation of the new creation: Romans 8:29 – 30; Ephesians 1: 11 – 13; Titus 3:5; I Peter 1:5
  - c. **The Son redemptive work and the Holy Spirit's regenerative work are the execution of the Father's eternal plan.** Not only were we chosen "before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4) ; Christ is spoken of as **"the LAMB slain from the foundation of the world.** (Revelations 13:8).



# What is a Covenant?

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## I The Covenant of Redemption (Pactum Salutis)\* (continued)

8) The Covenant of Redemption activity is Christ-centered.

a. It all takes place “in Christ”, that points the way to Christ – **our Mediator**.

9) While the covenant or redemption is **ETERNAL**, and has its partners the Persons of the Godhead, the covenants of creations and grace unfold in *HUMAN HISTORY* and have both **CREATOR** and the creatures as **PARTNERS**.

Reference: Horton Michael Introducing Covenant Theology pg 27 – 83

Vos Geerhardus, Redemptive History and biblical Interpretation pg 245

# What is a Covenant?

Developing the Covenantal Framework when following the Story

## I The Covenant of Redemption (Pactum Salutis)\* (continued)

10) By “just as the blessedness of God exists in the blessedness of God in the free relationship of the three Persons of the Adorable Being, so man shall find his blessedness in the covenantal relationship with God”\*

The questions may be valid, but the revelation of the activity of the Godhead through the Son points us to what has been revealed, no more, no less.

### NEXT WEEK:

- Introduction to Covenant of Works
- Introduction to Covenant of Grace
- Attestations from the Westminster Confession of Faith: VII on Covenants

Reference: Horton Michael Introducing Covenant Theology pg 27 – 83

Vos Geerhardus, Redemptive History and biblical Interpretation pg 245



# **Key Take Away that We will REVISIT MANY Times.**

From Jeremiah 31:33

<sup>33</sup> For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD:

**I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.**

.... And point to Christ in His role as High Priest ( John 17: 6 – 9, 26)

<sup>6</sup> “I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. <sup>7</sup> Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. <sup>8</sup> For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. <sup>9</sup> I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours...<sup>26</sup> I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”..

# Questions