

Covenant of Life
Gen. 2:5-10, 15-17
August 8, 2011

EXHORDIUM

The Covenant made with Adam is sometimes called the Covenant of Works. That is somewhat of a misnomer, as Adam did not have to do works to enter into God's favor. He was in God's favor from the beginning. It is true that he had to remain faithful in order to stay in God's favor and to pass on the heritage of life to his progeny. He failed to do this and brought death to mankind.

It is better to think of the initial Covenant with man, with Adam, as the Covenant of Life. God gave life to Adam, put him in the garden and gave him every blessing. This Covenant of Life was a promise to him and to his offspring after him.

This Covenant with Adam was a Covenant of Grace, that is, it was a gift to him. In the [New Testament](#), the word translated as grace is the Greek word *Charis* ([Greek χάρις](#)), pronounced khar'-ece, for which Strong's Concordance gives this definition; "Grace, the state of kindness and favor towards someone, often with a focus on a benefit given to the object."^{[4][5]} A Greek word that is related to *Charis* is *Charisma* (gracious gift). Both these words originated from another Greek word *Chairo* (to rejoice, be glad, delighted).^[6] In the [Old Testament](#), the [Hebrew](#) term used is *Chen*^{[7][8]} (), which is defined in Strong's as "favor, grace or charm; grace is the moral quality of kindness, displaying a favorable disposition".^[9]

Grace, then is unmerited favor, kindness with benefits towards the object. Adam existed in this condition, even before the Fall. The reason this is significant is that the initial covenant, sometimes called the Covenant of Works is contrasted with the Covenant of Grace, which is God's covenant with mankind after the Fall, starting immediately with God's promise to Eve in Genesis 3:15.

But if we contrast the Covenants this way, we may make the mistake of thinking that Adam and Eve were not in a condition of Grace, unmerited favor, before the Fall. But they were. God made them, out of the dust. He

breathed life into Adam and formed Eve from his rib. He gave them the entire Earth as their kingdom and gave them the promise of life eternal from the tree of life. None of this was earned or deserved by Adam. It was all gift.

So, we would do better to think of the initial Covenant with man as a Covenant of Life and the Covenant after the Fall as a Covenant of Redemption, or even a Covenant of Reconciliation, or even a Covenant of Renewal, albeit a long time in coming.

EXEGESIS

Gen 2:5-10 5 And every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew: for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground. 6 But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground.

God created man good and without sin. In this condition, man, was still intended to work. He was to till the ground and keep the trees. There were animals also. It seems initially that the animals were meant as companions as well as for provision from their coats or skins. It was also likely that man was to use the milk of the beasts.

The garden did not need to be watered. Man did not have to irrigate. The Lord provided the needed water from the mist of the ground.

7 And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. 8 And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed.

Man came from the ground. This might be one reason why the covenant is so closely tied to the Earth. Man is not simply an Earth dweller. He has been literally birthed by the Earth and given life by God.

God breathed life into man. We see here the principle that in God, Himself, is life. He had life and He gave that life to Adam, such that Adam became a living soul.

God planted the garden initially and set Adam in the garden to work.

God gave Adam life. In the beginning, this life was eternal life. Until Adam sinned, he had the gift of life. He did not have to earn that life. There was a sanction for disobedience but there was no additional promise given for obedience. If he obeyed, he simply lived in the life and fellowship of the Lord.

This is important for a couple of reasons.

First, this covenant is sometimes called the Covenant of Works. This can be misunderstood. If we think that Adam had to work to earn life, then we misunderstand what God was doing. He had life given to him by God. That is grace. He could lose that gift but he could not earn it. So, we should not think in terms of earning what God has freely given. But we can think in terms of forfeiting the blessings that God has freely given through disobedience.

Second, we need to apply this Covenant to the Second Adam, Jesus Christ. Jesus also had life. In Him was life. Jesus did not have to earn favor with God. God was well-pleased with His Son. Adam lost the life of mankind through disobedience and Jesus came to set right all that Adam had set wrong. He did not have to earn life for mankind through obedience. He was life and it was His desire to bestow that life on mankind through grace.

It is true that because of disobedience, there were sanctions on mankind. Adam died and through him all men have tasted death. But Jesus came that they might have life and thus bestowed his life on mankind.

But there is a sense in which the White Witch was right. There is a deep magic that requires a sacrifice. Mankind sinned and therefore, man must pay for that sin. But the problem was that now that man had fallen into sin, all men descending through Adam by ordinary generation, were also fallen and unable to be a perfect sacrifice. Remember, in the Old Covenant, in order for man to draw near to God, they must bring a perfect sacrifice, without blemish. This all points to Jesus Christ. Not until Jesus was there a man that could be offered to pay for the failure of Adam. All the blood of bulls and goats could never take away sins. But the blood of Jesus can take away sin. This is the substitutionary atonement.

But Jesus was not earning life through His works. He had the life by grace from God. We are not saved by the merit of Jesus. We are saved by the atonement applied to us. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that Jesus

received and infinite amount of merits for His suffering on the cross. They say that we receive forgiveness for sin, justification, but that we must continue to do works of satisfaction to pay down our remaining debt for actual sins. We get the ability to do this from the infinite supply attained by Jesus on the cross and apparently doled out to us as we earn them.

I know this sounds absurd to us who understand that Jesus did not earn life but rather fully paid for the debt of mankind on the cross. This free grace of forgiveness is given fully to each believer as he apprehends God by faith. Thus we are saved by grace through faith, not of any sort of works.

We are called to be obedient and we can certainly lose the blessings of this grace through disobedience. If a baptized and communing believer ceases to follow Christ, turns away and rejects the things of the Lord, he will most certainly lose the promise of eternal life. We can argue about whether he actually had it. Of course, from God's perspective such a man never really possessed life and this became apparent when he chose death. But the central point here is that one cannot earn the favor of God or reduction of suffering in purgatory through works of satisfaction. That is a doctrine that is not found in the Scriptures. And the theological mistake made with Adam and then applied to Jesus is the beginning of that error.

9 And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. 10 And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads.

God is a God of order and beauty. The trees were not simply good for food but were pleasant to the sight and good for food. God is not merely utilitarian. He enjoys beauty and desires to share that enjoyment with His creatures. It is wrong for us to not enjoy the beauty that God has created.

The trees did not merely produce food. They produced good food. The food was meant to give Adam energy to do His work, to sustain Him for the tasks that God called Him to do.

The rivers watered the garden. We are told initially that God had not made it to rain on the Earth. The mist watered the garden. Now, we are told

that the river watered the garden. It is not clear if Adam was to irrigate or if the garden received mist from the river.

Gen 2:15-17 15 And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.

This is the dominion mandate. It is later expanded to include all the animals and dominion over the whole Earth. But even here from the beginning, man was called to work and care for God's creation.

16 And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat:

Adam was given free reign in the garden. God had given him a kingdom and had put precious few restrictions on him, really only one. It is interesting that a clear problem of fallen man is desiring that which he does not or cannot have. We see this reveal itself mostly hideously in the form of envy. Envy not only wants what it does not have but also hates to see anyone else have what one cannot have. But covetousness existed with Eve and then Adam as the initial sin. Even in their pre-fallen condition, they were prone to desire that which was disallowed to them. This was a temptation, not yet a sin.

We are later told by God to not even desire that which is forbidden, particularly your neighbors possessions. This protection from desiring that which is not yours keeps you from committing the sins of the second table of the law.

If you are not covetous, you will not kill, commit adultery, steal. We could probably even tie covetousness, or in its more extreme form, envy, to the sins of dishonoring parents and committing perjury.

So, we see that man's temptation to sin has to do with a failure to be thankful for that which we actually have. We want what we do not have. This applies in so many areas. We may want different food or clothes, a different wife or husband, different children or parents, different home or car.

It is okay to make plans. No doubt Adam would have had to make many plans, designing and building, making various improvements in the garden. He would have wanted to do things better, make changes. But he

should have learned contentment with all of his good things. It is only when we say that the good that God has given us is not good enough that we get into trouble. It didn't take long for mankind to find this kind of trouble.

17 But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

Adam did not have to earn life. He had a sanction if he failed to be obedient. That sanction was death. But he did not have to earn life through good works. The Lord had given him life out of sheer grace. Adam was created with eternal life. He lost it.

EXHORTATION

Adam and Eve were given everything. They were in a state of grace from God, their Father and they must simply walk in obedience to Him. There was merely one prohibition in the beginning. They only has one law to obey and that law created in them a desire to disobey. They failed in loving their Father to full trust. Instead, they demanded their own way which ended in death to them and all mankind descending from them by ordinary generation.

Thanks be to God that one descended from them by extraordinary generation! And He restored mankind to God, putting right all that Adam put wrong. Adam was mankind in the creation, made to take dominion over all the Earth. He failed in his calling.

After him, God raised up many men and temporary Saviors to save mankind from their sins. None of them were able to do so, until Jesus Christ. All of that history, the history of God's Covenant with the Earth, is revealed to us in the pages of the Old Testament and it all points to Jesus, the one born of a Virgin, born in an extraordinary manner to return the creation and mankind to the Garden.

Where Adam failed, Jesus Christ fulfilled His duties completely, restoring mankind to favor with God and setting the sons of Earth rejoicing, waiting for the redemption of the world. The resurrected Jesus was the first fruit of that redemption and all the sons and daughters of the Second Adam, Jesus, participate in that redemption. And we wait eagerly, with the Holy Spirit as our earnest, that God will one day raise up all His sons and

daughters to everlasting life, perfect bodies that cannot die, and He will restore the Earth to the pre-fallen state in such a way that sin and death will be utterly and completely removed.

That is the life that God gave Adam, though he lost it, and that is the life that we all possess who believe in Jesus Christ and have been born of His Spirit.

So, look to Jesus in Faith and Hope and know that our God will freely and graciously give us this life in Jesus's name. Amen.