

"The Administration of the Covenant of Grace"  
(2 Corinthians 3:6-8)

Introduction: All men by nature are under the wrath and displeasure of God and are liable to His eternal judgment because of the sin of our father Adam. You will recall that Adam sinned as our representative and plunged the whole human race as it were into a morass of sin, into a bottomless pit from which none may escape by their own merit or on their own power. But we have also seen what God has done to repair that situation for His people by providing a way of escape, an elevator as it were out of that pit, so that they might receive life and a title to heaven. This He did by providing another representative, One who was perfect and who came, unstained by the sin of Adam, to fulfill the righteous Law of God perfectly, and who took upon Himself the guilt of His people to die in their place that He might become an iron-clad guarantee of their salvation from destruction. This plan we have been calling the Covenant of Grace, which is commonly called, God's plan of redemption. We have already seen who the covenant was made between the Father and Christ, and the elect in Christ, and the blessings that are given in it, namely, every gracious gift which is bestowed upon any. Tonight we want to look at how that covenant was administered in the different dispensations, that is, how God dispensed that grace which Christ merited to His people throughout all the history of His church.

In 2 Corinthians 3:6-8, we see Paul contrasting two covenants, one the Old Covenant of Law, written in letters on tablets of stone, which letters brought about death; and the other, the New Covenant, written by the Spirit on the fleshly tablets of the human heart, which brings life. Paul here is referring to the Mosaic Covenant, which was primarily a legal covenant, full of types and prophecies concerning Christ, and the New Covenant in which the reality which the Old was pointing to was displayed, in the shedding of Christ's blood. But because of the particular aspect of the Old Covenant that Paul has in view, it appears as though it was nothing more than a legal covenant, a covenant of works, a "do this and you will live" arrangement. But that is not so, for if that were the case, then nobody would have been saved under the Old Covenant, because nobody can keep the Law of God perfectly. "THE LETTER KILLS." But what I want you to see this evening is that,

***The Covenant of Grace was administered by God throughout all the successive generations of man, from Adam until the end of the age, in different ways.***

***What I want you to see this evening is first, the Covenant of Grace is the fountain from which all the grace of God is given and went into effect as soon as sin came into the picture, and secondly, that even though the Mosaic covenant was primarily a covenant of law, it was still an administration, or an application, of the Covenant of Grace.***

- I. ***The Covenant of Grace Is the Basis for all of God's Gracious Dealings with His Creatures.***
  - A. ***The Covenant of Grace Is the Source of All of God's Gracious Covenants.***

1. The Covenant of Works, which God made with Adam, was broken and therefore rendered everyone incapable of obtaining life through it.
  - a. Adam was created with an original righteousness, without the stain of sin, and so was capable of keeping the covenant and receiving the reward, which would have been for all of his children.
  - b. But after his breaking the commandment of God, he became wholly depraved, and in him all of his children, and completely unable to earn life by that covenant of works.
  
2. And so God, knowing this from all eternity and planning it so in advance, ordained a second covenant whereby He might redeem fallen man.
  - a. He provided the Lord Jesus Christ to be the covenant head of a new race, a chosen generation.
  - b. The Lord Jesus Christ met all the requirements of that first covenant of works and died to discharge the debt that His people had committed under that covenant, that He might bring in life.
  - c. This is the meritorious basis, the just reason why God can give grace to anyone, because of the Covenant of Grace made between Himself and Christ, and the elect in Christ.
  - d. And because Christ was so certain to come and to perform the work of the Mediator, God granted forgiveness of sin and salvation to all who would believe in His coming Redeemer, even from the very beginning.
  
- B. This Covenant of Grace, the Grace Which Christ Earned by His Work, Was Administered as Early as the Fall of Man.
  1. When Adam and Even sinned, they lost all claim on life from God, because they were no longer able to meet the requirements of His covenant.
    - a. God told them, "FROM ANY TREE OF THE GARDEN YOU MAY EAT FREELY; BUT FROM THE TREE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL YOU SHALL NOT EAT, FOR IN THE DAY THAT YOU EAT FROM IT YOU SHALL SURELY DIE" (Gen. 2:16-17).
    - b. Adam and Eve clearly disobeyed God and ate of the tree, and yet they did not immediately die.
    - c. Yes, they began to die physically, yes they became guilty sinners and under God's wrath, and yes they became completely disinclined to the things of God.
    - d. But human history did not end there. God may have justly ended it at that point, but He did not.
  
  2. God intervened with His grace and redeemed Adam and Eve to Himself.
    - a. Instead of requiring the death penalty which would have ended their lives in everlasting misery, God first separated them again to Himself.
      - (i) **Adam and Eve by their decision had allied themselves with the devil.**
      - (ii) **But God intervened and brought them back to Himself, "AND I WILL PUT ENMITY BETWEEN YOU**

- AND THE WOMAN" (Gen. **3:15**).
- (iii) You can only be in one of two kingdoms, either you are on the devil's side, or the Lord's side. Jesus said, "HE WHO IS NOT WITH ME IS AGAINST ME; AND HE WHO DOES NOT GATHER WITH ME SCATTERS" (Matt. **12:30**).
  - (iv) God took our first parents back to Himself.
- b. *He then made a gracious promise to them that He would raise up a seed from the woman who would slay the serpent.*
- (i) "AND I WILL PUT ENMITY BETWEEN YOU AND WOMAN, AND BETWEEN YOUR SEED AND HER SEED. HE SHALL BRUISE YOU ON THE HEAD, AND YOU SHALL BRUISE HIM ON THE HEEL" (Gen. **3:15**).
  - (ii) God promised to raise up a champion from the offspring of the woman, who would deal a crushing blow to the head of the serpent and deliver His people from his power.
- c. *And thirdly, He instituted a gracious sacrificial system.*
- (i) We are told in Genesis, "AND THE LORD GOD MADE GARMENTS OF SKIN FOR ADAM AND HIS WIFE, AND CLOTHED THEM" (Gen. **3:21**).
  - (ii) Adam and Eve had not needed to wear clothes because of the sanctity of their relationship and their lack of shame.
  - (iii) But now finding themselves ashamed by reason of their sin, the Lord God slays some animals to cover their nakedness.
  - (iv) Adam and Eve had not experienced the death of any animal life, this was new to them. But now God kills this animal in order to cover their sins.
  - (v) This is why Cain was held guilty for bringing an unacceptable sacrifice from the ground, while Abel knew that God required a blood sacrifice.
  - (vi) Here is the beginning of gracious substitution which ultimately pointed to that One great substitute who would take their place on the cross, many years in the future.
  - (vii) Here is the beginning of God's administration of the grace of the Covenant of Grace.

*II. In the Old Covenant, or Mosaic Dispensation, the Covenant of Grace Was Administered as Well.*

- A. *To Explain this, I First Want You to Realize that In Every Administration of the Covenants of God, You Have Both the Covenant of Grace and the Covenant of Works in Action.*
1. *All men living are either under the covenant of works or the covenant of grace.*
    - a. *All of mankind may be separated into these two covenants.*
    - b. *They are either trying to earn their own salvation under a covenant of works, or they are resting in Christ who has brought to them perfect righteousness in the covenant of Grace.*
  2. *Even within the church of God throughout the ages, the*

*same situation is true.*

**a. Within the church there will always be wheat and tares.**

**b. The wheat are those who are actually in the covenant of grace, by virtue of their union with Christ.**

- (i) They have believed on Christ unto salvation and are resting in Him.
- (ii) They have received the promises which were given to them in the covenant, through Christ and have entered the reality.

**c. But the tares are still only externally connected to the covenant.**

- (i) They received the sign of the covenant, which was either circumcision in the Old, or baptism in the New, when they made a profession, but they have not rested in Christ.
- (ii) They are still trying to earn their salvation by their works.
- (iii) Either they have made faith a work, by making salvation depend upon their exercising of it.
- (iv) Or they believe that now that they have come to Christ, they must keep up a certain level of works in order to stay in Him.
- (v) But they are relying upon their works, and not upon Christ to save them. This is the dividing point between those in the covenant of Works or Grace.

**d. Christ bids you to examine your hearts tonight to see what you are trusting in.**

- (i) Are you trusting on-your coming to Christ to save yourself?
- (ii) Are you trusting in your ability to persevere in obedience to ultimately be saved?
- (iii) Are you relying on your personal piety and good works to be what tips the scales in your favor on the day of judgment?
- (iv) The Bible says to you as it did to Belshazzar in the days of Daniel, "YOU HAVE BEEN WEIGHED ON THE SCALES AND FOUND DEFICIENT" (Dan. 5:27).
- (v) Your righteousness cannot stand the scrutiny of God's holy judgment; He requires infinite perfection, and you are infinitely imperfect in comparison.
- (vi) You need the righteousness of His Son, the Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ to save you.
- (vii) Make sure that you are trusting in Him alone, and not in any supposed works of righteousness which you have wrought by your own strength.

**e. And so the two principles are always at work, that of law-keeping and that of grace alone in order to be saved.**

- (i) Man can be saved only by grace alone through faith alone.
- (ii) Faith is not a work, but it is a looking away

from yourself to Christ alone who is able to save you.

*B. But Even Though the Mosaic Economy Was Outwardly More Law than Gospel, It Was in Fact a Gracious Covenant.*

*1. The Old Covenant was primarily characterized by law.*

*a. And because law is the substance of what was required in the Covenant of Works, it is often mistaken for it. But that is not the only use of the Law.*

*b. It was not given that men might gain salvation by law-keeping, but only to show them that salvation in that way was impossible.*

*(i) As a covenant of works, the Law kills, "FOR THE LETTER KILLS, BUT THE SPIRIT GIVES LIFE" (v. 6). Viewed as a covenant of works, the Old Covenant was called, "THE MINISTRY OF DEATH."*

*(ii) But the Law was not given that men might gain life by it, rather it was added to the promises of the Abrahamic covenant in order to show all men that they cannot be saved by works.*

*(iii) Paul says, "WHY THE LAW THEN? IT WAS ADDED BECAUSE OF TRANSGRESSIONS, HAVING BEEN ORDAINED THROUGH ANGELS BY THE AGENCY OF A MEDIATOR, UNTIL THE SEED SHOULD COME TO WHOM THE PROMISE HAD BEEN MADE" (Gal. 3:19).*

*(iv) "THEREFORE THE LAW HAS BECOME OUR TUTOR TO LEAD US TO CHRIST, THAT WE MAY BE JUSTIFIED BY FAITH" (3:24).*

*(v) The Law points us away from ourselves to the One who has kept the Law of God perfectly for us, that we might be saved by faith.*

*c. But just because we cannot be saved by a covenant of works, does not mean that the Law has no value for the Christian.*

*(i) It is true that we cannot be saved by it, but we must remember that it is the sum of perfect righteousness; it is that which Christ had to keep in order to bring in perfect righteousness for His own.*

*(ii) The Law as a Covenant of Works does kill, but the Law kept out of thankfulness is evangelical obedience. It is what the Lord requires of you.*

*(iii) Do you think therefore that God no longer is concerned about whether you keep the Law or become law-breakers? God forbid.*

*(iv) Our God is a holy God and He delights in righteousness and holiness.*

*(v) We are not saved by the Law, but we are to live by it in thankfulness for what God has done.*

*(vi) That is why the Psalmist, who was redeemed by the Messiah yet to come said, "OHOW I LOVE THY LAW! IT IS MY MEDITATION ALL THE DAY"*

(Ps. 119:97).

- (vii) **If it were a covenant of works that the psalmist had to keep, which was always condemning him to death, he could not say that he loved it.**

2. *The Old Covenant was characterized by the prominence of the Law, but it was not only law, it was also full of gracious provision.*
- a. *If it had merely been a covenant of works, then there could not have been any grace given, because grace by definition is unmerited, you cannot earn it. But there were many gracious provisions made in the Mosaic covenant for the forgiveness of sins.*
  - b. *There were gracious promises of the coming of the Messiah, who would deliver His people from their sins. Paul writes, "FOR I SAY THAT CHRIST HAS BECOME A SERVANT TO THE CIRCUMCISION ON BEHALF OF THE TRUTH OF GOD TO CONFIRM THE PROMISES GIVEN TO THE FATHERS" (Rom. 15:8).*
  - c. *There were many prophecies made concerning this Messiah who was to come. "MOSES SAID, 'THE LORD GOD SHALL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN; TO HIM YOU SHALL GIVE HEED IN EVERYTHING HE SAYS TO YOU. AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERY SOUL THAT DOES NOT HEED THAT PROPHET SHALL BE UTTERLY DESTROYED FROM AMONG THE PEOPLE.' AND LIKEWISE, ALL THE PROPHETS WHO HAVE SPOKEN, FROM SAMUEL AND HIS SUCCESSORS ONWARD, ALSO ANNOUNCED THESE DAYS" (Acts 3:22-24).*
  - d. *The sacrifices, which atoned for their sins, were types of the One whose coming was foretold from the very beginning. Because of their union with the Christ who was coming, they were effective in the forgiving of their sins, "SO THE PRIEST SHALL MAKE ATONEMENT FOR THEM, AND THEY SHALL BE FORGIVEN" (Lev. 4:20).*
  - e. *Circumcision was given as a sign of the covenant, showing them that they needed to have their hearts circumcised by this One who was to come. "MOREOVER THE LORD YOUR GOD WILL CIRCUMCISE YOUR HEART AND THE HEART OF YOUR DESCENDANTS, TO LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, IN ORDER THAT YOU MAY LIVE" (Deu. 30:6).*
  - f. *And the Passover lamb was also a type of the coming One who would be the Passover Lamb to deliver God's people from eternal wrath. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5:7, "CLEAN OUT THE OLD LEAVEN, THAT YOU MAY BE A NEW LUMP, JUST AS YOU ARE IN FACT UNLEAVENED. FOR CHRIST OUR PASSOVER ALSO HAS BEEN SACRIFICED."*
  - g. *These were enough to build up the people of God in faith in the promised Messiah, and in Him they had the forgiveness of their sins and eternal life.*
    - (i) **They were not saved by the coming of the Messiah, but by the Messiah who was to come.**
    - (ii) **They were saved in no other way than the way**

that all the saints in all ages have been saved. By faith in none other than the Lord Jesus Christ, and by faith in Him alone.

- (iii) Are you trusting in Christ this evening to save you?
- (iv) Are you His by faith, or are you trying to save yourself through your works?
- (v) Trust in the One who alone can save you by a perfect righteousness which He gives as a free gift. Take hold of Christ as He is offered to you in the Gospel.
- (vi) And then show forth the fruits of a redeemed life by keeping His commandments out of gratitude for His mercies received.
- (vii) Don't compromise with the world's standards, or a standard of your own making. Do the will of the Lord from the heart, and show yourself to be a true follower of the Lamb of God. Let us pray.