

“God’s Covenant with Believers and Their Children”- Scripture: Genesis 12:1-4a; 15:1-6; 17:1-14
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Introduction: Sadly, most evangelical Christians today have not heard much teaching on the Covenant(约, 盟约). Or, if they have, it’s in connection with the so-called “prosperity gospel.” (成功神学, 丰盛福音) That by means of the covenant, God made Abraham a rich man—with lots of land and herds and cattle. But, no. But that’s surely not the main teaching about God’s covenant.
-This aft, in 5 basic points, I hope to explain the main elements of the biblical covenant of grace (有圣经依据的恩典之约).

1. THE PERSONS who are in the covenant.

A covenant in the Bible is a kind of contract (合同, 合约). It’s not exactly the same...but it is similar.

A contract establishes a certain kind of relationship between two people, or two groups of people. So it is with the covenant God made with Abraham. God on the one side; Abraham on the other side. God establishes a relationship with Abraham by means of the covenant.

So it is with a modern contract...think of selling or buying a house. A legal contract is written between two people: the buyer of the house on the one side; and the seller of the house, on the other side. They become bound together, by means of that legal contract.

The covenant God established with Abraham, however, was **not primarily** a legal relationship.

Rather, we refer to this covenant as the covenant of “grace.” The word “grace” means “favour” or mercy, and carries with it the idea of love. So, God made “a covenant of love and grace” between himself and the man Abram.

Now, the actual word “covenant” is found for the first time in the Bible in Genesis chapter 9:9. God made a covenant with the man Noah. In love, in grace, God promised Noah that he would never again destroy the whole world with a flood.

In Genesis 12 the word “covenant” is not found, but the main idea is there. The LORD, Yahweh, **takes the initiative** (采取主动, 发起), **in love, in grace**. And He forms a relationship, even a friendship, with the man Abraham. In Gen 12:1 God is basically saying: “Abram, I will bless you. Abram, I will give you many blessings...Eventually, all the peoples of the earth will be blessed through you, Abram.”

So in the covenant of grace, God initiates His covenant. In fact, He comes to Abram with saving Grace (救贖之恩). Abram was still an unbeliever, living in the pagan city of Ur (外邦人的城市吾珥). In grace, God reveals Himself to Abram, while Abram was still an unbeliever.

-That’s one reason why we call it a covenant **of grace**. Grace means something given freely, a gift.

Abram, later named Abraham, did nothing to earn that covenant relationship; nothing to deserve it. God simply came to him with that gift....establishing that relationship of love, and friendship.

-So, God, through Jesus, still comes to us today. In the upper room, the night before he was crucified, Jesus refers to his blood, as “the blood **of the covenant**.” Jesus says that he will give his blood, on the cross, for the forgiveness of all our sins. // Paul says in Romans 5: “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” (惟有基督在我们还作罪人的时候为我们死)

Think of it...While **you** were still a sinner, dead in your sins, JC (耶稣基督) **died for you**. So the covenant God made with Abraham finds its fulfillment in Jesus, ultimately. In Jesus, this remains a covenant of free grace, a gift of God’s love. Because Jesus took our place, took the punishment of our sins.

And Jesus earned the righteousness that we could not earn.

-God’s covenant, notice, not only included Abraham as an adult.

But God also included Ab’s children, and all his later descendants. [Read vs. 7.

-In the NT, the apostle Paul teaches that God considers the children of believing parents to be “holy children.” [Read 1 Cor 7:14. In context, the apostle Paul says here that if just 1 of the 2 parents in that family are Christian, then, their children are “holy.” Else, we read, the children would be “unclean.” To be “holy” first of all means, “to be set apart” (被分别出来) from what is common or unclean.

-So today, the covenant from God, in Jesus, is still made with Christians and their children. And in this covenant of grace, our children are declared by God to be set apart from the ordinary children of this world. Not because in their little hearts they are better than the other children...Oh no, by nature, they are sinners.

But, God, from His side, has simply declared them to be set apart unto him.

And that they will be raised in a “set apart” family, a “set apart” Christian family.

These children, among other things, will be brought to church, and hear the gospel preached. And as they hear the preaching, over time, God will be changing their hearts and bringing them to faith in JC.

-So, the **persons** of the covenant, are God Himself, on the one side;

and Christian believers with their little children, on the other side.

2. Today, when a contract is established, something visible will mark that contract. So, for example, today the contract will be written on paper. In visible print, that we can see with our eyes. And, often, a

lawyer, or a notary (公证人), will put his signature or official stamp on that contract.

-So with God's covenant of grace, God gave a visible sign, a mark that could be seen. Making it official. In Genesis 17 that we read the **visible sign, or mark, was that of circumcision (割礼)**. Genesis 17:11 God says that circumcision, that mark placed on the body of the boy or man, "will be **the sign** of the covenant between me and you." So in vs. 12, God commands Abraham to circumcise every male who is eight days old. That is, newborn babies.

Now, in the OT (旧约), visible signs of God's covenant, often **were made in blood**, or with blood. For example, the later covenant through Moses, required the sacrifices of animals. Animals had to be killed, their blood seen. Also, here with circumcision, the cutting of the flesh, it was a bloody sign. Especially in that day, done without modern scalpels (手术刀). They used crude knives made of flinty stone. It was a very bloody business.

But, remember, all that blood was pointing forward to Jesus—so the people would understand that Jesus had to shed his blood. "The blood of the covenant." And with Jesus' shed blood, all other kinds of blood-letting, blood-shedding, is finished.

What now takes the place of circumcision? Listen to Colossians 2:11: "In Christ you were also circumcised,...not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him **In baptism (洗礼)**."

In the NT (新约), the **visible sign of water baptism** replaces the visible sign of circumcision in the OT. So Jesus died; he rose again, ascending back to heaven. He poured out the fullness of his HS (圣灵) and He sent out the apostles with the gospel...the good news of salvation in Him. As the first missionaries went out, we find references to "family baptisms." We don't have time to look in detail. But in Acts chapter 16, we find Paul preaching about Jesus. The woman Lydia believed. She put her faith in Jesus. And then we read that she "and her household" (family) were baptized. Likewise the believing jailer (狱卒) in Philippi. We also read that he and his entire family were baptized.

In the OT, with Abraham, God showed a very wide, broad grace, which extended even to little babies in the family. We would expect God's grace in the NT, in Jesus, to be just as broad and wide. Not narrower. That God would still include in his covenant of grace, adult believers and their children. Though there is no specific verse which commands babies to be baptized...the whole biblical pattern in God showing grace to households, to covenant families. Therefore, we today, continue to give the sign of baptism, to children of believers.

3. In most biblical covenants certain obligations are set down. Obligations, or demands, in the covenant relationship.

-So look at Genesis 15:6.....in the context of God promising Abraham many descendants...then [Read vs. 6. In the book of Romans, chapter 4, Paul takes that verse, Gen 15:6, and says at that point God justified Abraham. That is, God credited Abraham with God's own righteousness.....the righteousness which Jesus later would fulfill.

So the first cov obligation upon us and our children is to personally believe, to put faith in God, in J.

So, God expected Abraham to respond in faith, which he did. And also, God expected Abraham's children to believe. First, Abraham's son by Hagar, the boy Ishmael. And later, Abraham's son by Sarah—named Isaac. Isaac as an 8 day old infant, received the sign of the covenant, circumcision. But as grew up, Isaac was expected by God **to put faith in God**.

And for each generation. Later, Isaac's twin sons—Jacob and Esau—as babies they each received in their bodies the mark, the sign of the covenant. Circumcision. But as they grew up, the obligation upon them, is that they would trust in the God of their father and g-father.

-So we today rightly speak of the **demands or the obligations** of God's covenant of grace with us.

That God expects our children, as they grow up, first, to believe in His promises: that is, to trust in Jesus. To personally accept that gospel message that Jesus' shed blood atones for the forgiveness of human sin. God demands that of us and our children—to truly trust in Jesus.

-So it would be completely wrong for someone to say this: "When I was a baby, I was baptized. God made an absolute guarantee to my parents, and to me, that I would be saved, no matter what."

Yes, God does make a gracious promise to parents and to their children. But at the same time God expects our children's response, as they get older.

Now, of course, like all people, our babies are born in sin. By nature, they are "children of wrath." So our children need to be regenerated, born again, by God's sovereign grace.

They don't come to faith "on their own" or "from their own efforts."

But the point is this: No one can claim any of the blessings of God's covenant of grace, **without having personal faith in Jesus**.

4. A 4th thing. And it's about **the penalties** of potentially "breaking" the covenant. [Read 17:14.

Remember, blood circumcision in the OT, has been replaced in the NT with water baptism.

Today, in Jesus, children of believers are regarded by God as His own “set apart” children. But the obligation is upon our children as they grow older. Each of them must come to see their own sin, repent of their own sin, and put their faith in Jesus as their Saviour. **If they don’t**...sadly, then, they are **breaking** God’s covenant. And then the penalties of covenant breaking will fall upon them. So it was with Abraham’s grandson Esau. Esau was a covenant child, circumcised on the 8th day after his birth. But as he grew up, we read that Esau despised his birthright. Esau despised putting true faith in God and living for God. He despised being part of God’s covenant people. Esau thus became a “covenant breaker.” So the penalties of the covenant fell upon him. The Bible refers to these as the “curses” of the covenant. “Curses” which fall upon someone breaking God’s covenant. –Sometime, read Deuteronomy 27 and 28, for example. Curses, penalties, will fall on a people or a person who despise God’s covenant. Today, those who reject the gospel, the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ./ So Paul as a Jew, a Christian Jew, also speaks of the penalties that were and are still falling upon the Jewish people. As a people they have rejected the Messiah, Jesus... And may I remind us, that rejection of Jesus continues to this very day.

Application: We know of some... Could be temporarily...

But for others, it seems, it has become a lifestyle of rejecting Jesus. Refusing to be part of Jesus church, worshipping Jesus, living for Jesus. The curse...

5. But let us conclude with **the wonderful blessings** that come to us and our children, and grandchildren, as each generation puts their faith in Jesus Christ.

Blessings of the covenant of grace.

So many and various blessings, are given to us, by God, in the context of the covenant. Think of it, even when you were a little child. Boys and girls: when you were little, did you walk to church when you were 2 or 3 years old? No. Your Christian parents took you. So that for many/most of you, from earliest days, you were brought to church by your Christian parents. Their responsibility in God’s covenant...to raise you in Jesus way. So, in church you learned the Scriptures, the Bible. And from the Bible you learned the basic message about Jesus.

What a blessing of the covenant, just to be in a place hear the gospel. Week after week.

And to be around not only Christian parents, but in a Christian church...to sing the gospel, together...to pray together...to pray for each other. The apostle Paul says in Ephesians chapter 4, that as Christians, young and old alike, we become built up together like stones set in a wall, forming a strong wall together. All on the foundation of Jesus.A church, a group of Christians, who together become a Temple.A Temple in which God lives by His Holy Spirit.

All these, and many, many more things...are blessings of God’s covenant to us and our children.

Sometimes we hear of unbelievers being dramatically converted in later years of life...maybe years with drugs, with crime. Or maybe just years without much meaning in life...living without God’s love...or without love, true love, in marriage or in family. I’ve talked to some adult converts over the years, and they said this:

“Yes, it’s wonderful to be converted later in life. But how blessed you were, to be born into a Christian family.With Christian parents. To be brought to a Christian church. So that you had a foundation of God’s love, around you from the start. I would give anything (they say) to have had that kind of upbringing. Not years and years wasted. Not to now trying to overcome bad habits.”

Of course, we who have been raised with Christian parents, in Christian churches...things aren’t perfect for us, either. Right? Every Christian marriage, Christian family, Christian church, has their own sin, their faults and failures. But, everything considered, we have been given many covenant blessings. By God’s grace.

But also remember, we are blessed, covenantally, to also be a blessing to others. Genesis 12:3b:

God says to Abraham “all people on earth will be blessed through you.” That refers, first, to Abraham’s biological descendant, Jesus. Biologically, Jesus descended from Abraham. So the gospel has gone out, and is going out, to all the nations today.

But, the covenant blessing of Jesus, the gospel, is meant to be shared. We are blessed, by God, to now be a blessing to others.

Maybe to that one neighbor, that co-worker, that relative.That person who tells you about his/her problem; or is searching for deeper meaning in life. How can you be covenant blessing to that person? Obviously, we must say something about Jesus...and surely we should invite them to church.

Remember, God’s covenant relationship with us, is truly a covenant of grace. A free gift of God’s favour, his mercy, his love to us, in Jesus. If you don’t know about grace, God’s grace, then you really don’t know that much about the covenant. The covenant is fulfilled in Jesus, by his shed blood, by which all our sins are forgiven, and we are accounted righteous by God. LET US PRAY.