

HEBREWS 22
(Hebrews 8:10)

THE COVENANT OF GRACE
By Ron Harvey
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TEXT: *For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people.*

INTRODUCTION

Whenever we come to this concept of covenants we all go, “Oh, no.” And we say, “Oh, no” because we think we are going to get into deep waters. But let me put your mind at ease. We are not going fishing in terribly deep waters this morning. We are going to briefly talk about a covenant that was made with Adam and then the covenant that was made with Christ.

There are several covenants in the Bible. Whenever God makes a promise to a man, that is a covenant. We call that an unconditional covenant because God requires nothing in return to complete the covenant. He simply says, “I promise to you that I will do this and that.”

Whenever God enters into a mutual agreement with a man . . . that is also a covenant. God says, “I will do this if you will do that.” That is a conditional covenant.

God can even reach an agreement with himself . . . and that also is a covenant.

Now when God first instructed Adam in the garden, God established a Covenant of Works. And God said, “Thou shalt not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And furthermore, if you obey me you will be blessed and if you disobey you will die. And Adam was the representative of all men. If Adam kept the law, he and all his posterity would be blessed

as the result of his obedience. And if he broke it, he would bring the curse upon himself and upon all of his people whom he represented.

You know the history well. Adam sinned and broke his covenant with God. He broke that old covenant of works and he fell. Adam failed to fulfill his obligations under the covenant. And sadly, he involved us in his disobedience. We were all in the loins of Adam and he represented us all before God. And he ruined us all.

Now this is a bible truth that catches many by surprise. Many of us have some understanding that we are ruined by sin. But many don't understand that we are all ruined by the sin . . . of our representative. And our ruin was complete before we were born. My, my, if we could just get our hands on Adam, why, we might like to ring his little neck. The law has been already broken. And we cannot be saved by works because we are already condemned by his sin and by his works. We are already lost.

Now if we are to be saved from the awful penalties of sin, then we must be saved by some other method than by works. We have already failed that test in Adam and his sin is imputed to our account. We have all failed in his failure and whatever works that we imagine that we could do to undo Adam's sin is of no avail. Were it possible for us to live as spotlessly as the Lord Jesus himself from this day forward until the day we die, we could not undo Adam's sin. Were it possible for us to do all manner of good works - to heal the blind, to raise the dead, to care for the poor and feed the hungry - we would still die in our sins. Even if we preached the gospel to every human being that we encountered and we gave ourself to the service of the Lord for every moment of the rest of our life, we would not be justified by our works. Though we might spend every moment of the rest of our life in prayer and fasting, we are still condemned by Adam's failure.

That old covenant of works is broken into a million pieces by one act of disobedience. The proverbial milk has been spilt. Someone has broken into our house and stolen our priceless possessions and we cannot get them back.

It seems like such a simple act, but once Adam tasted the forbidden fruit, all was lost.

Example: It is like a baseball pitcher who is pitching to a very dangerous hitter in the bottom of the ninth inning with the bases loaded. And the pitcher cannot make a mistake. And he winds up and he throws the ball and as soon as the ball leaves his hand he knows he has thrown a hanging curve ball - that is, a curve ball that doesn't really break sharply and it sort of hangs out over the plate for the hitter to hit. And as soon as the pitcher lets it go, he knows it is too late. And the hitter hits it out of the park and the game is lost.

And as soon as Adam sunk his teeth into that forbidden fruit, the game was over. The damage was done. The covenant was broken.

How hopeless is our condition under that old, broken covenant. And we have lost much more than a baseball game. We have lost life itself. We have irretrievably lost the most valuable thing ever known to man – fellowship with and acceptance of a holy God. And God owes us nothing under that old covenant but retribution. And should you die under that covenant, you will suffer the great wrath of God upon your body and soul.

But the great mercy of our God has provided another covenant.

Now that first covenant of works was a covenant made with Adam. And the effects of that covenant were upon Adam and all those whom Adam represented.

But wait, there is another covenant. And this covenant is made with Christ. And this covenant with Christ is also a covenant of works. And it goes something like this: I will send my Son into the world. And I will give him work to do. And I will give him a command and he must obey the law of God. And when he is obedient through it all then he shall be accepted. You see there may be a man yet who will please God. And God sent his Son.

And so Christ said, "Lo, I come to do thy will O God." And Christ performed all the will of God and he obeyed the law of God in every respect.

And yet there was one more requirement of Christ. God said, "Son, I give you a people, will you take their penalty upon yourself?" And Christ said, "I will." And he was obedient even unto death. And he died, not for his own sins, but for the sins of those whom God had given him. He willingly

suffered the penalty of sin which was imposed by virtue of Adam's sin. But he did it not for himself – not for his own sins – but he did it on behalf of his people. And just as all of Adam's people were condemned, all of Christ's people went free.

By Adam's sin, all who were in Adam were lost. But by Christ's perfect obedience and by his payment of the penalty, all who were in Christ were set free.

And you can see that this covenant was a covenant of works to Christ. It was his great challenge to keep the covenant and he did it! He has thus done what the first Adam could not do – he kept the law. And the covenant of works is performed in Christ. There is no more work to be done. Jesus cried, "It is finished." And I am sure in some sense he meant, "I have satisfied the requirements of the covenant."

Now although this second covenant was a covenant of works for Jesus, it is a covenant of grace to us - because God now treats all those whom Christ represented as though they had obeyed the law.

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:1

So, for as many as are in Christ, there is not only no condemnation, but there is now treasured up for them unspeakable riches. The treasure house of God's blessings is now open unto us, not by our works but by his works. It is given unto all those whom Christ represented. And it is given by the sovereign grace of God. And so it is a covenant of matchless grace unto us.

The hope of saving ourselves was lost long ago in Adam. Over 6,000 years ago that hope was dashed forever. And now there is one hope and one hope only and that hope is in the unmitigated grace of our God. If you are to be saved from the grip of perdition and hell, it will be by the sovereign grace of God. You will be saved only if Christ represented you on that day.

Now many say, "That's not fair." And they reject such an idea that salvation could be by the sheer grace of God. But I tell you, I would a

million times over rather cast myself at the mercy of a gracious God than to take my chances with Adam under that first covenant – because that covenant is locked and sealed and the results are in – we shall surely die. But there is yet a safe haven whereby men may be saved and it is by God's grace.

Example: If I told you that I had hidden one million dollars in this building and it was yours if you could find it, why you would jump up right in the middle of this sermon and you would look everywhere. And if you couldn't find it you would probably come right up here and interrupt the sermon and ask for a hint.

And if you want to find unspeakable riches I will give you a hint. It is a very great clue. It is found in God's treasure chest of grace. And that treasure chest is none other than the person of Jesus Christ.

There is yet a way of salvation and it goes like this – “Believe in the Lord Jesus.” You can be lifted out of that deep pit of sin and despair by simply believing. Believing in Him will mark you as one of those whom he represented when he paid the penalty. This covenant of grace is open unto all who believe. The blessings of God are open unto all who trust in him.

Now our text for this morning tells us four benefits of being a part of this covenant of grace. There will be an illumination of the mind. There will be an effect on the heart. He will be your God. And, you will be his people. Now let's look at each of these great benefits of the covenant.
There will be an illumination of the mind

Specifically, it says,

I will put my laws into their mind.

This is illumination – that we should know the law of God. As David said,

Teach me thy law, O God.

By nature man is dark. Romans chapter one tells us we have some knowledge of the Godhead through nature. (Romans 1:20) God has impressed his law on our consciences so that there is a dim knowledge of

his will within us. Even the Gentiles had this knowledge. (Romans 2:14, 15) But the Bible says, "Their foolish heart was darkened." (Romans 1:21) And that is our hopeless estate without Christ.

But please notice the promise of God under the covenant of grace.

I will put my laws into their mind.

This is an unconditional promise by the grace of God. He will shed light where there was darkness.

Here is a universal bible truth for you: man loves darkness rather than light because his deeds are evil. He does not love the light. Like a cockroach, he flees into the darkness.

But when the Holy Spirit comes to a man, he calls him out of darkness and into God's marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9) And the Holy Spirit shines a light in the mind and the laws of God are clearly seen.

You know, a Christian barely needs to look at the ten commandments written on stones because they are imprinted on his mind. He knows them by instinct. He knows what he ought to do because the law of God is imprinted on his mind and God's light shines in his mind so that he sees God's law clearly.

And when he sees God's law clearly, then he sees the awesome holiness of God – for God's law is a measure of God's holiness.

We have missionaries laboring in all parts of the world. We support some financially who are laboring in Thailand and India and Africa. And some of the people in these places are so blinded by heathenism and paganism and demonism and general human depravity that they barely recognize the distinctions between right and wrong.

But when there is a convert made in these barren places, the gospel floods in and light comes into the soul. And even before he is taught all the precepts of God, his conscience is enlightened and his mind is enlightened by the Holy Spirit so that it can be said,

And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me. (Hebrews 8:11)

There is a wonderful and great teacher and that teacher is the Holy Spirit who is given to every man who receives Christ. This is the first great blessing of our text.

I will put my laws into their mind.

This should teach us that there is really only one way to reform the world and that is by the preaching of the gospel. Do we want to teach men right from wrong? Then, it must be by the preaching of the gospel. There is only one power which will illumine the minds of men and make them to know the law of God and that is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But I see a second benefit of the covenant in our text:

There will be a writing of his law in the heart

It is quite one thing to know the law and to have some understanding of it. It is quite another to love the law. And the most wonderful thing about the covenant of grace is that God not only teaches us his law in our mind, but he puts his finger to our heart and causes us to love it.

God touches us in our affections and he makes us to love what he loves. He makes us to hate what he hates.

And notice what God says in our text. He says, "I will do it."

I will write my laws in their hearts.

And it is a good thing that God can do it, because this is something that a man cannot do. As the Bible says, "Can an Ethiopian change his skin or can a leopard change his spots?" And the answer to that question is no. Man does not have the ability to change his nature. And the natural man cannot love what he hates. And he cannot hate what he loves. But God says,

I will write my laws in their hearts.

Now notice very carefully here. It is said that God writes in their hearts. He doesn't drag the heart where it doesn't want to go. He doesn't merely write on the heart. But it says he writes in the heart.

That is, he changes the very nature of man. The heart is changed and it is no longer what it was before. Christianity is not living life enslaved to God's law by compulsion. But it is living life with a new heart that loves God's law and freely and voluntarily and willingly submits to it.

I hope that our church will always be a people who love God's law - not just a people who wish to avoid hell; not just a people who wish to go the heaven; but a people who have a heart that has been changed by the power of God and a heart that loves God's law.

But look in our text. God has promised much, much more. He says,

I will be to them a God.

This is what you get by his covenant of grace. You get a God. The creator of the universe says, "I will be to you a God."

It seems to me that we will never know the fullness of what this means. He will be your God.

The Scriptures themselves describe somewhat of what this means. From Genesis to Revelation we are taught of the mercies of God toward us. We are taught what it means to have a God. And he is described in various ways to us.

He is a loving and tender father to us. He is not a vengeful slave master but he is now a father. He is a shepherd and he shepherds us through this earthly wilderness. He is a friend. He is a companion. He is a guardian. He is a brother. He is a strong protector. He is a lover of our souls. All of this is comprehended when it says,

I will be to them a God.

He is a God to us in a way that he is not a God to others. Now he is the master of all and the ruler of all. But he is our God. He is not on the side of the unrighteous, but he is on our side. He will fight against the ungodly,

but he will fight for us. He takes pleasure in us in a way that he does not take pleasure in others, because he is our God.

What is it that you want or need in life? Whatever it is, then you have a God. Others don't have a God, but you have one. Simply go to Him. He sits in the heavens and the blood of Jesus is sprinkled on the throne and God is propitiated toward all who are in Christ. You can go to Him because he says,

I will be to them a God.

Look how wonderful a covenant you have. It is a covenant of grace! And he says,

I will write my laws on their minds. And I will write my laws in their hearts. And I will be to them a God.

Ah but notice what else he promises:

And they shall be to me a people.

All creatures belong to God. My puppy dog belongs to God. The birds and the beasts belong to God. All people are subject unto God for he has created them all. But, all people are not his people. And it says here,

And they shall be to me a people.

You know, a great king or a great president loves his people. And if he is a good president, he has a special love for his own people.

Example: One thing that I always admired about our last president, President Bush, was that he seemed to absolutely love his soldiers. He would visit with them often and he would hug them and salute them. When they were killed he grieved with the families. Even after he finished his term, he would often go to the airport and greet returning soldiers. Now if a Russian soldier or a French soldier or an Iranian soldier would get off the plane, there was no special response. But when an American soldier disembarked, he and his wife would hug them and welcome them home and take a picture with them. They were his soldiers.

And likewise, it says,

And they shall be to me a people.

God has a peculiar treasure and it is us. We are the trophies of his grace. And we are his people.

The Bible says that one of these days God will destroy the world. But for now he is longsuffering in order that he might bring in all the elect. The wrapping up of all creation awaits the bringing in of all God's people. And this is so because God has a covenant of grace. And it says,

And they shall be to me a people.

Now I want to finish this message by asking the question: For whom did God make this covenant?

God says,

I will write my laws upon their minds. I will write my laws in their hearts. I will be to them a God. And they shall be to me a people.

Now this covenant was actually made with Christ. But the benefits of it flow to the people who he represents. Remember Adam represented a people in the first covenant. And Christ represents a people in this covenant.

And the crucial question is, "Am I a part of the covenant.? Do I have a part in these blessings? When Christ died, did he have me in mind?"

Now some say that Christ was the representative of all the world when he performed the requirements of the covenant – that we were all in him. And if that's the case, then there was no particular advantage in being in Him because millions and millions of people reject Him to the end and they prove they have no part in Him.

And I ask you, for those who reject Christ and who go into judgment lost and condemned, "Did God write his law in their minds? Did God write his law in their hearts? Can it be said of them, "He shall be a God unto them?" Can it be said, "They shall be unto me a people."

And if it is apparent that none of that is true of a man, then it is clear that that man has no part in the covenant.

But Christ did have a people in mind when he died. Those people are called his people. They are his sheep. They are his friends. They are the called. They are those who partake of the covenant of grace.

Now God doesn't allow us to peek into the book of life. And we don't receive a letter in the mail telling us we are part of the covenant. But he makes us to partake in the benefits of the covenant and thereby we have evidence that we are his.

Let me ask you? Has God enlightened your mind? Has the light of God shined in so that you have a sense of right and wrong? Or are you still dulled to the truth of God.

Or, a better question is, "Has God changed your heart so that you have a love for God's law and a hatred for all that God hates? That is really the clearest indication of your part in the covenant. "Has he changed you?"

And if so, then set your eyes on that Promised Land because that is the end of the covenant. Right now you are in the wilderness, but the Captain of your salvation is leading you to that promised rest.

But, what about those who have not had that change of heart? What about those who as yet cannot say, "He is my God." Is there hope yet for them?

And I say there is hope yet that you might be a part of the covenant of grace. God may yet enlighten your mind. God may put his law in your heart. He may yet be your God and you may yet be his people.

There is only one way to partake of that blessed covenant of grace. And in the words of Scripture it says, "Believe and live."

Are you tired of living in darkness? Are you tired of a heart that prefers darkness to light? Are you weary of having no God to shepherd you from day to day? Would you like to be included in the people of God?

Then believe Him. He holds out the offer of grace to you. Here it is. Take it. Accept it freely.

Jesus Christ says, "Here is my righteousness. Here is my blood which was shed for many. Here are the blessings of the covenant of grace. Would you take it? It is that simple.

I want to assure you that Jesus died for a very select people. He didn't die to make people savable. He didn't die for people in general. But he died for people in particular. He died to effect a real redemption for his people. He died to take away the sins of his people. When he died he actually took upon himself the sins of his people.

And if you believe in Him, then you are assuredly one of his elect. There is such power in the gospel that it will compel Christ's people to come home. All of God's people will be swept up in the covenant of grace.

Now you might ask, "When will I get this new nature?" When will God write his law in my mind and my heart? And the answer is that when you believe, God has already done it!

When the tears of remorse for sin roll down your cheeks and when you turn to Christ in faith for redemption, then he has already made you alive in Him.

We love Him, because He first loved us.

You see, if you shall be in the covenant of grace at all, it is because you were placed there before you ever believed. It is before you ever felt sorrow for your sins. It was even before God wrote his law in your heart. It was before you were born. It was even before Jesus died for his people. It was before the foundation of the world.

According as he hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world.

Eph.1:4

All of this is beyond human comprehension. It is incomprehensible that God would undertake an eternal plan to save his people. But all you really have to know is that whoever believes in Jesus Christ shall be saved.

Do you believe in your Savior Jesus Christ? Then it is God himself who has shown it to you.