

THE 1689 BAPTIST CONFESSION OF FAITH

God's Covenant (1)

A. Introduction

1. Two things we are commanded to do as elders are to watch and to hold.

We are to watch what we believe, to make sure we are believing what God's Word says.

"Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers." (1 Timothy 4:16)

We are to hold firmly to the truths taught in God's Word.

"He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it." (Titus 1:9)

It is vital we do these two things, not just for our own sake, but also for the members of this church and in fact those who live in the community God has placed us in.

To help us to watch and to hold, we are spending our elders' meeting working through the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith a paragraph or so at a time.

2. The question of how humans relate to God is the concern of Chapter 7 of the Confession.

It's an important question, especially in the light of Chapter 6, and the tragic effects of the Fall upon all mankind.

However, the viewpoint of the opening paragraph is not how humans as sinners can relate to God but how humans as creatures, relate to their Creator.

What we see is that for there to be a relationship, a covenant is needed.

"The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience to Him as their creator, yet they could never have attained the reward of life but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which He hath been pleased to express by way of covenant."

B. A covenant is needed because of the greatness of God

1. God is so far above us.

"The distance between God and the creature is so great..."

"Who has understood the mind of the LORD, or instructed him as his counsellor? Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding? Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weights the islands as though they were fine dust. Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires, nor its animals enough for burnt offerings. Before him all the nations are as nothing; they are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing." (Isaiah 40:13-17)

"Who is like the LORD our God, the One who sits enthroned on high, who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth?" (Psalm 113:5-6)

"He is not a man like me that I might answer him, that we might confront each other in court." (Job 9:32)

There is a vast difference between Him and us – He is our Creator and we are His creatures.

2. As creatures we must obey our Creator.

"...that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience to Him as their creator..."

"The very act of creation brings the creature under obligation (owed obedience) to the Creator, but it cannot bring the Creator into obligation to the creature." (A.A. Hodge)

We are to do all that He commands us to do because it is our duty without expecting any reward.

"Suppose one of you had a servant ploughing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'" (Luke 17:7-10)

So, Adam, if he had obeyed God's command in the Garden of Eden, would not have deserved the reward of life [glorified state with God], for he would only have been doing his duty.

3. How then could man be blessed by God with the reward of life?

"...yet they could never have attained the reward of life but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which He hath been pleased to express by way of covenant."

The answer is that a covenant was needed.

What is a covenant?

"Simply put, a covenant is an arrangement or contract between two parties that include the terms of their relationship, covenant obligations (stipulations), and blessings and curses." (Michael Kruger)

"A declaration of his sovereign pleasure concerning the benefits he will bestow on them, the communion they will have with him, and the way and means by which this will be enjoyed by them." (Nehemiah Coxe)

"A sovereignly given arrangement by which man may be blessed." (Walter Chantry)

It is the means by which God can bless those He has made with the reward of life.

C. A covenant is given because of the graciousness of God

1. God has freely and willingly chosen to condescend.

To graciously offer life to His creatures.

Not because they deserve it or have earned it, but because He is pleased to give it.

2. He did this in the Garden of Eden when He promised Adam life if he obeyed.

And He continues to outside the Garden after Adam disobeyed by promising a Saviour.

Without God establishing a covenant with humans, there could be no relationship with Him other than Creator-creature.

"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God." (Revelation 21:3)

D. How then shall we lead?

1. Emphasise the greatness of God in our worship.

Let's make sure that we direct the gaze of the church when it gathers to God as Creator and us as creatures, and not just to God as holy and us as sinners. A lack of balance in this can lead to us regularly praising God for what He has done and forgetting to praise Him for who He is in Himself.

2. Emphasise the graciousness of God in our worship.

Let's make sure that we highlight to the church the wonder it is that we can relate to God not just as the great Creator, but as our God.