

THE 1689 BAPTIST CONFESSION OF FAITH

God's Covenant (2)

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. Chapter 7 of the Confession is about how humans relate to God.

The opening paragraph tells us that for this to happen a covenant is needed.

Because God is the great Creator, it is our duty as creatures to obey Him without any expectation of reward for doing so.

How then can humans be blessed/rewarded with life [glorified state with God], when obedience is doing our duty?

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

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

God graciously did this when He offered Adam life if he trusted Him by obeying His command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

But Adam disobeyed, and all humans are not just creatures but sinners as well.

Is a relationship with God still possible now? We're given the answer in the second paragraph of this chapter of the Confession.

"Moreover, man having brought himself under the curse of the law by his fall, it pleased the Lord to make a covenant of grace, wherein He freely offers unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved; and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life, His Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe."

3. The law [that first covenant God made with creatures] is unable to give life because Adam, and those he represented, broke it.

"All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." (Galatians 3:10)

Yet it is possible for people to have a relationship with God because He has made a covenant of grace.

"...it pleased the Lord to make a covenant of grace..."

"Therefore no-one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify." (Romans 3:20-21)
The covenant of grace is God's plan to save sinners from their sin and the wrath of God against them and to give to them eternal life.

As Question 23 of The Baptism Catechism states:

Q: Did God leave all mankind to perish in the estate of sin and misery?

A: "God having out of His mere good pleasure, from all eternity; elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace, to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer."

This covenant of grace is a different kind of covenant [to the law] because it is not just made with creatures but sinners.

The first covenant displays God's willingness to have fellowship with those He had made.

This second covenant is astonishing because it displays His willingness to forgive those who have rejected Him – it magnifies God's grace because it is undeserved.

What does the covenant of grace do?

B. The covenant of grace offers salvation to all people

1. God offers in the gospel salvation to all people.

"...wherein He freely offers unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved..."

"He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:15-16)

It is a free offer.

It is an indiscriminate offer.

It is an offer only made possible by the work of Jesus Christ.

"For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering." (Romans 8:3)

2. God gives in the gospel salvation to all who believe.

Salvation is offered to all people, but is only given to those who repent of their sins and trust in God's Son.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

However, as sinners are unable and unwilling to do this, how can they?

C. The covenant of grace guarantees salvation to God's people

1. God will ensure that the elect will be saved.

"...and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life, His Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe."

"For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight." (Ephesians 1:4)

"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away."
(John 6:37)

2. The Holy Spirit makes people willing and able to believe in Jesus Christ and be saved (regeneration).

"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws." (Ezekiel 36:26-27)

"No-one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me." (John 6:44-45)

This faith is a gift to sinners that has been given to them by God.

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no-one can boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9)

D. How then shall we lead?

1. We must tell everyone that Jesus is the only Saviour of the world and command them to turn and trust in Him.

"In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead." (Acts 17:30-31)

It should be our ambition as a local church that everyone who lives in this community has the opportunity to hear the gospel and respond by placing their faith in Christ.

2. We must trust that Jesus is the sufficient Saviour of the world who will save from their sins everyone He has ordained to eternal life.

"When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honoured the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed." (Acts 13:48)

This should encourage us to be faithful to how God says we should tell people the gospel.