

The Covenant of Grace: Fulfilled in Christ

Because the old covenant could not overcome the power of sin, and because God remained steadfast to his ancient promises to Abraham and David, God promised a new and better covenant (Jer 31:31–34).

I. What is “new” about the new covenant?

- Continuity: things that are *not* new in the new covenant:
 - Both old and new covenants insist on holiness:
 - God’s *law* is vital to both (Deut 4:2; Jer 31:33).
 - “Be holy as I am holy” sums up both (Lev 19:2; 1 Pet 1:16)
 - Both are based on grace: in both cases, we receive “undeserved and forfeited blessings” (Bavinck). See Rom 4:2; handouts #5 and 6.
 - Both covenants mediate Christ to us (1 Cor 10:4; Jude 5; etc.).
 - Both have the same goal: covenant fellowship with the living God.
- Discontinuity: things that are new in the new covenant:
 - Renewed hearts that can obey vs. Israel (as a people) being still “in the flesh” (Rom 7:5–6; 8:3):
 - Jer 3:22: “Return, O faithless sons, I will heal your faithlessness.”
 - Jer 24:7: “I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD ... for they shall return to me with their whole heart.”
 - Jer 31:33: “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.”
 - Jer 32:40: “I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me.”
 - Ezek 36:26–27: “I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.”
 - Because Israel lacked the power to obey, the old covenant could only condemn, but the new covenant brings justification and life.
 - 2 Cor 3:6: God “has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” The old covenant was “a ministry of death” (2 Cor 3:7). Cf. Rom 8:2–3.
 - Universal blessings:
 - Within the new covenant, all will know God (Jer 31:34); all will have the Spirit (Joel 2:28–29).
 - The Gentiles used to be outsiders to the covenant of grace (Rom 9:4; Eph 2:12), but now we are fellow heirs (Eph 3:6).
 - Shadowy foretastes vs. the substance (Col 2:17; see below).
 - Everlasting, ultimate: the old covenant was breakable and temporary, but the new covenant will never be surpassed, nor will it pass away. The new covenant is the final deliverance; it is unbreakable (Isa 33:20; 45:17; 60:20).
- Conclusion: the new covenant is the same covenant as the old, but better.
 - Heb 8:6: the new covenant “is enacted on better promises.”
 - WCF 7.6: “There are not therefore two covenants of grace differing in substance, but one and the same under various dispensations.”

II. Jesus inaugurated the new covenant

- Jesus inaugurates the new covenant and keeps it going.
 - Christ’s merit earns these blessings for us (Rom 5:12–21; Phil 2:5–11). The covenant of grace is based on works—*Christ’s* works!
 - Jesus’ blood atoned for all the sins committed by true believers in the old covenant (Rom 3:25; Heb 9:16), as well as the sins of new covenant believers. His sacrificial blood also consecrates us and the new creation (Heb 9:23; 1 Pet 1:2).
 - Jesus is mediator. Jesus “is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance” (Heb 9:15; cf. 12:24)
- On the cross, the old covenant passed away; in the resurrection, the new has begun.
 - Rom 7:4: “Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law [i.e., the old covenant] through the body of Christ...”
 - Eph 2:14–15: Christ “has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances...”
 - 2 Cor 3:11: the old covenant has been brought to an end; Heb 8:13: it has been obsolete by a new and better covenant.
- We are now in a different place from Adam and Eve in the garden: in Christ, *we have passed the test* and are now enjoying what they would have enjoyed.
 - “[Jesus] acquired and bestows [what] Adam would have received had he not fallen. He positions us not at the beginning but at the end of the journey that Adam had to complete” (Bavinck).
- Now all the promises of the covenant of grace have reached their pinnacle. Every saving benefit we enjoy is a *new covenant* gift we have through Christ.

OT Promise	NT Fulfillment
Land	The new creation (Heb 11:10, 16)
Seed	All who believe are Abraham’s offspring (Rom 4:11; Gal 3:29)
Son of David ruling	Jesus, as well as us! (Luke 1:32; Rev 3:21; 21:7)
Temple	The church is a living temple (Eph 2:21; 1 Pet 2:5)

- Even all of God’s creation purposes have reached fulfillment: all that Adam and his offspring were supposed to be (rulers and subduers of the earth for the glory of God), Christ and his offspring have become. Grace restores nature.

III. Becoming part of the new covenant

- Sinners cannot *earn* salvation. We receive it freely as a gift.
 - Phil 3:9: we do not have “a righteousness of [our] own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.” (see Rom 3:28; 11:6)
 - Tit 3:5: “he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy...”
- But sinners must *receive* salvation: we must receive it by faith.
 - Rom 3:22: “the righteousness of God [is] through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.”