

The Gospel in Galatians Lesson 10 4Q 2011

The Two Covenants

SABBATH

What do you understand the two covenants to be?

- Old and New? Which are what?
- Dispensation of law and grace?

What is a covenant? A contract? An agreement?

What did God covenant to do after man sinned?

- Save the species
- Provide a remedy to sin freely available to anyone
- Reveal the truth
- Save all who will let Him
- Bring an end to sin
- To make the earth new again

How much of this required the cooperation of mankind? A willing woman to be the vessel for Christ, and then individual cooperation for individual salvation – but what about the rest?

If no human being ultimately accepts God's offer of salvation, didn't God still save the human race/species? Yes, via Jesus who is fully human. And didn't He provide a free remedy to sin? And didn't He reveal the truth? And won't He bring an end to sin? And won't He remake the earth?

The lesson rightly states, "The two covenants are not matters of time; instead they are reflective of human attitudes."

What are those attitudes?

- I can cure myself
- I trust myself into God's hands and accept His remedy

SUNDAY

Read second paragraph, “The Hebrew word...”

What do you hear being described?

A covenant is an agreement, contract, or treaty – now with this in mind read the last paragraph, “While marriage...”

Thoughts?

Several good things in this paragraph, like Adam and Eve’s natural desires were to live in harmony with God and do right, and sin was unnatural and God had to restore the relationship that was lost.

What is the major error in this paragraph, which infects Christian thought and contributes to misunderstand of God and the plan of salvation?

What is a covenant? A contract, agreement or treaty, which necessarily require what? The mutual consent of both parties. Are such agreements based on natural law or based on the desires, goals, wishes, wants of the two parties involved?

Regarding, God’s warning in Eden, “in the day you eat of the tree you will surely die.” Was this a contract, agreement, treaty i.e. “covenant of creation,” or was it a warning of how the universe is built and if you exercise your freedom to step out of harmony with this design life cannot continue?

If God had taken them to the top of the Empire State building and said, “In the day you jump you will surely die.” Is this a contract, treaty or agreement? Or is it merely the statement of reality – no agreement or contract necessary.

What happens if we believe what happened in Eden was a covenant, a contract, or treaty?

- Then we immediately put God back into the role of enforcer of breeches of the contract, or treaty.
- He now must sue, or prosecute or punish, or destroy because the contract was broken.
- Why would those who broke contracts in the ancient Near East be killed like the animal? Because it would automatically happen, or because it would be imposed upon them?
- What concept of God does the idea of “the covenant of creation” create?
- It creates the distorted idea that there is no natural consequence of sin, just as there is no natural consequence to breaking a contract, the problem with breaking a contract is the enforced penalties that come from such a breach. So, God must enforce punishment upon sinners.

But when we understand God’s law is the law of life that He constructed the universe to operate upon then we realize God’s warning in Eden was not a covenant, but a mere education on the reality of how the universe was built and what was necessary to live in harmony with life.

So specifically, the covenant of creation –

- Marriage, as God designed it in Eden, not how it functions in sinful beings – a natural law, part of God’s design, or contract law? Can love exist without someone to love? Marriage, as God designed, is not contract law, it is part of humanity’s design, just as reproduction, is built into our biology and design, and we don’t have to get a contract, or treaty to have children, neither was marriage, originally, a contract issue. This is why Adam said, “bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh.” He understood Eve was built, constructed, to be his life partner in love. The two of them were built to love each other and did so automatically, freely, without the need of a prenuptial agreement or a marriage license.

- Physical labor – a contract issue, God contracted with Adam to keep and tend the garden? Or God built His universe to exist on the principle of giving, and work, physical labor, is the giving of one's energy to tend, manage, help, etc. and in so doing the one who works gets stronger. This again is part of God's natural design for life.
- Sabbath – contract law, rule put in force to obey, or expression of natural law? The Sabbath is a gift of love from God to mankind and the onlooking universe who learn of God from what happens on planet earth (1Cor 4:9). As a gift of love it is not a contract, rule, or treaty, but an expression of love, which reveals the character of the One who gave it.

It is Satan who wants to turn every aspect of God's character of love, into some legal, contractual, rules oriented idea so that we will conceive of God as an severe imposer of law and punishing judge.

MONDAY

What did God covenant with Abraham to do? To make a great nation from Abraham's descendants and through one of his descendants bless the entire world.

Was this a new covenant with mankind, or merely a further revelation of the covenant with humanity in Eden, but now God identifies the specific gene pool through which the covenant would be fulfilled? Didn't God already make this covenant in Genesis 3 when He promised a Savior to crush the serpent's head?

So now we have God specifically announcing through which family the Savior would come, but the covenant, agreement, is not new.

And what is the agreement, treaty, or promise? It is all a promise of what God will do to save and heal mankind and destroy sin and sinners.

What did God do in order to provide Abram with confidence that God would follow through? He went through a human ritual of cutting animals in half and walking between them, symbolically saying if I break my promise let this happen to me.

What does it say about God that He would be willing to do this?

Do you like a God who is willing to stoop to meet us where we are in order to heal and save? Can you trust a God like this?

Why did Abram need this extra assurance? Abram was 75 years old and apparently doubted his and his wife's fertility, and this subsequently meant He doubted God could do what He said.

Read bottom pink section, "What are..." thoughts? Why does it seem impossible, whatever the issue is? Might it be because we are thinking through the lens of human ability, strength, perspective and limiting God with our understanding? If we understood more of God, His universe, His methods, principles, His abilities, character, nature etc. would we doubt as much? And would the things He does or ask seem as impossible?

So would our growth in understanding and knowing God undermine or strengthen our faith in God?

So the problem of doubt arises in our ignorance, or misunderstanding about God! And the solution is to know God, just as Jesus taught!

TUESDAY

Read first two paragraphs, “Hagar’s...” thoughts?

The lesson asserts that Abram failed to believe God’s promise – what promise would that be?

In Genesis 12 God promises to make a great nation from Abram’s descendants, did this promise indicate those descendants would be through Sarai?

10 years later, when Abram is 85, he has the following conversation with God. This was after rescuing Lot.

But Abram said, “O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?” ³ And Abram said, “You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.”

⁴ Then the word of the LORD came to him: “This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir.” ⁵ He took him outside and said, “Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”
Gen 15:2-5

God promises descendants from Abraham’s body, does this promise indicate it will be with Sarai?

When do we find the first word from God that the promised child would be from Sarai? After Ishmael was born. If it was accepted custom, as the lesson states, that a slave woman could legally bear a child for her mistress, how did Abram’s action fail to believe God’s promise that his descendants would be more numerous than the stars?

The lesson states Abram had a lapse in faith, given the nature of the promises, and the understanding of marriage and concubines at the time, what do you think?

Did Abram fail to believe God? If Abram didn't believe he would have descendants, didn't believe God had promised to make a great nation and bless all nations through his descendants, would he have likely taken Hagar? Wasn't it precisely because he and Sarai did believe God's promise that from Abram's body a great nation would arise, but they doubted Sarai's ability to be the mother of his child, that they acted the way they did?

So it appears Abram did believe God's promise of a great nation etc, but didn't trust God to bring it about without Abram instituting his own plan to help God achieve it.

This is another place where belief in God gets derailed in practice by human tradition! Notice, Abram believed God, but when it came time to put that belief into practice, his actions were derailed by human tradition, with devastating consequences!

This is what happened to the Jews in Christ's day. They still believed in God, but their actions had been derailed by human tradition. And what happened, devastating consequences of crucifying Christ.

And today, Christianity, believes in God but in practice has been infected with human tradition, and with what consequences? Paul says:

But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. ² People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, ⁴ treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— ⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.
2Tim 3:1-5.

And Jesus said,

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’ Mt 7:21-23

What is the problem? Accepting traditional views of God’s character, God’s law, and God’s methods, accepting traditional views of atonement.

When we substitute God’s design, for human tradition in attempting to fulfill God’s purposes tragic results always happen – Abram did it, the Jews did it, and now Christianity is suffering with the same problem.

So, why did Paul take such a disparaging view of Hagar and her son? He is criticizing the idea that we can do anything to free ourselves from sin, it is only through the grace, miracle, intervention of God through the promised Son that we can be free of sin. It is only in harmony with God’s design, His methods, that we can be healed. Paul is making the case that one who is a slave cannot inherit the estate? And no amount of work can change that.

Thus as Isaac was the promised son of the freewoman, and therefore, able to inherit the estate, Jesus is the promised Son of God, and through His accomplishments inherits all that humanity was to receive from God when God created humanity. And it is through Christ, the promised seed of Abraham, that all nations are blessed and we, through this promised Son become partakers of the divine nature and share in that inheritance.

WEDNESDAY

Read top dark section, “What type...” thoughts?

First sentence of first paragraph states, “God desired to share the same covenant relationship with the children of Israel at Sinai that He shared with Abraham.”

If that is so, why did God say to Israel at Sinai,

“Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” Exodus 19:5,6.

With Abraham God promised to do everything, to make a great nation, to bless all the peoples of the earth through Him, but here God tells Moses to tell the people, “If you obey me fully and keep my covenant, *then...*” Is this same covenant He made with Abraham?

Why did God say this to them? How did they respond to this proposition by God?

The people all responded together, “We will do everything the LORD has said.” Exodus 19:8

What does this answer reveal? The lack of insight, awareness, understanding the people had about their own condition of sinfulness. They actually thought they could do it. It would be like someone coming to you and saying, if you jump out a window and fly around the building flapping your arms, then I will make a great nation out of you. And you respond by saying, “I will do that” and then jump out the window.

Why did God do this? Did God know their hearts? Did He know how they would respond? Then why did He do this? Because they needed to be brought to understand their own inability to heal themselves, change themselves, fix themselves

and thus rely wholeheartedly on God. This was designed to very quickly bring them to realize they were helpless over sin in their lives and their lives were out of control.

Read first two paragraphs from Friday's lesson and I will include the missing paragraph from between the two quoted there:

But if the Abrahamic covenant contained the promise of redemption, why was another covenant formed at Sinai? In their bondage the people had to a great extent lost the knowledge of God and of the principles of the Abrahamic covenant. In delivering them from Egypt, God sought to reveal to them His power and His mercy, that they might be led to love and trust Him. He brought them down to the Red Sea--where, pursued by the Egyptians, escape seemed impossible--that they might realize their utter helplessness, their need of divine aid; and then He wrought deliverance for them. Thus they were filled with love and gratitude to God and with confidence in His power to help them. He had bound them to Himself as their deliverer from temporal bondage. {PP 371.2}

But there was a still greater truth to be impressed upon their minds. Living in the midst of idolatry and corruption, they had no true conception of the holiness of God, of the exceeding sinfulness of their own hearts, their utter inability, in themselves, to render obedience to God's law, and their need of a Saviour. All this they must be taught. {PP 371.3}

God brought them to Sinai; He manifested His glory; He gave them His law, with the promise of great blessings on condition of obedience: "If ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then . . . ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation." Exodus 19:5, 6. The people did not realize the sinfulness of their own hearts, and that without Christ it was impossible for them to keep God's law; and they readily entered into covenant with God. Feeling that they were able to establish their own righteousness, they declared, "All that

the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient." Exodus 24:7... Yet only a few weeks passed before they broke their covenant with God, and bowed down to worship a graven image. They could not hope for the favor of God through a covenant which they had broken; and now, seeing their sinfulness and their need of pardon, they were brought to feel their need of the Saviour revealed in the Abrahamic covenant and shadowed forth in the sacrificial offerings. Now by faith and love they were bound to God as their deliverer from the bondage of sin. Now they were prepared to appreciate the blessings of the new covenant. {PP 371.4}

Do you see how God stoops to meet us where we are, to lead us through experiences designed to open our minds to our own condition, so that we will cooperate with Him for healing and transformation?

How long was the Old Covenant at Sinai in force? Just a few weeks and it was broken and void and from that point onward all the Old Testament was to be an experience of the New Covenant!

What happened? Why didn't they experience the New Covenant?

What about today? How many look back on Sinai and fail to see its purpose and instead see a harsh, severe, punishing God who puts rules on His people and punishes disobedience?

The last paragraph in Wednesday states, "The covenant at Sinai was intended to point out the sinfulness of humanity and the remedy of God's abundant grace, which were typified in the sanctuary service."

Love the use of "remedy" by the lesson, absolutely right! But, did the people understand the meaning of the sanctuary service as a remedy for sin, or did they see it instead as a system of legal payment and appeasement?

Do we struggle with the same problem?

THURSDAY

Read first paragraph, “Paul’s brief sketch...” thoughts? Do Christians today struggle with similar misunderstanding about what makes one a true son of Abraham?

To whom do you think the great nation, multitude of descendants God promised Abram is referring? Is it the genetic descendants or those with character like Abraham?

Is it taught in some circles, that genetic biological descent from Abraham gives one some special right with God? What does the Bible say about this?

John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? ⁸ Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. ⁹ The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.” Lk 3:7-9.

Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. ³⁵ Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. ³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. ³⁷ I know you are Abraham’s descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word. ³⁸ I am telling you what I have seen in the Father’s presence, and you do what you have heard from your father.”

³⁹ “Abraham is our father,” they answered.

“If you were Abraham’s children,” said Jesus, “then you would do the things Abraham did.” ⁴⁰ As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. ⁴¹

You are doing the things your own father does.”

“We are not illegitimate children,” they protested. “The only Father we have is God himself.”

Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me. ⁴³ Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. ⁴⁴ You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. ⁴⁵ Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! ⁴⁶ Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don’t you believe me? ⁴⁷ He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.” Jn 8:34-48

It is not as though God’s word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. ⁷ Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham’s children. On the contrary, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.” ⁸ In other words, it is not the natural children who are God’s children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring. Rom 9:6-8

If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise. GAL 3:29

This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. Eph 3:6

We again have two messages, two views, two possibilities,

- the biological, genetic descendants of Abraham are somehow special and have a different and unique path to God from the rest of us, or
- they were blessed by God to be the family through which the Messiah would arrive on earth, yet God is the Father of all humanity, not just the Jews and all humanity is blessed through Christ and it is only through Christ that any are saved, Jew or Gentile

What do each of these views say about God? If the first is true what kind of God would God be?

FRIDAY

Read and discuss questions 1-3