

## Sunday School: March 18, 2018 **Reformed Worship is Covenantal**

What is a covenant?

A relationship established by God and confirmed by His Word.

We are not talking about a “contract” made between equals, as the word “covenant” is often used today.

Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 7, paragraph 1:

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

The Westminster Divines did not define covenant – because at the time everyone knew (unlike today)

The first covenant was between God and Adam in the Garden – the covenant of works

The second covenant was the Covenant of Grace, whereby Jesus fulfills the covenant of works.

Ancient near-eastern covenants:

Always between a superior and an inferior (between a sovereign and a vassal)

A covenant was instituted by the sovereign, and had certain stipulations/obligations

Order of ancient covenants: parties / stipulations / blessings and curses (curses upon the vassal if the stipulations or obligations were not met)

(Note: The Book of Deuteronomy is structured as an ancient near-Eastern covenant)

Biblically – covenants are always initiated by God, by which we enter into a binding relationship, and the covenant is always ratified by blood.

Genesis 17:

God appeared to Abraham and introduces the sign of the covenant (circumcision) between God and Abram. The covenant had been made in Genesis 15

Genesis 15:

God doesn't owe anything to Abraham, but he makes promises to Abraham as a sovereign.

Typical of the day: when a covenant was made, an animal was sacrificed and cut in two pieces, and then the vassal would walk between the split pieces of the animal (part of the ritual), and the blessings and curses would be read; the meaning was that if the vassal didn't keep the obligations, the vassal would be cursed and split like the animal.

Now we see a major deviation from the covenantal script: Abraham fell into a deep sleep and a vision appears: the sovereign of the universe, the Holy Creator, appears, and makes promises to Abraham, and then God Himself passes between the sacrificed/split pieces of the animals.

God appears as a smoking fire pot and flaming torch.

Abraham doesn't pass between – but God does. What does this imply? God will pay the price for Abraham's failure in this covenant.

The Bible is structured with various covenants: each one is a renewal of the previous covenant, with further revelation and promises, but they are NOT new covenants, they are a renewal of the existing covenant.

Next week: we will look at the implications of the idea of covenant in worship.

We will see worship as Covenant dialogue and as a Covenant Renewal service.