

TEACHING GOAL

Explain the Covenant of Grace and its relationship to salvation.

DOCTRINAL STANDARDS

- Q. Did God leave all men 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.

S.C. 20; L.C. 30-35; W.C. of F. VII; Savoy 7; Young 34-37

SCRIPTURAL BASIS

Study Passage: Genesis 17:1-14; 18:19

Support Passages: Genesis 3:15, 9:8-17, 12:1-3, 15:1-21; Romans 8:28-30

BIBLE STORY

Genesis 19:1-26; The salvation of Lot.

MEMORY ASSIGNMENT

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." (1 Peter 2:9-10, ESV)

APPLICATION

We should praise God for setting His love, without condition, on His chosen people. Without such election no one can be saved.

SUMMARY

Having studied the horrors of hell, the miseries of this life and the desperate wickedness of all mankind, whose heart "is more deceitful than all else, and is desperately sick..." (Jeremiah 17:9), we are confronted with our complete inability to save ourselves or to do anything in our own strength that is pleasing to God. Does not Paul say that the Law is our tutor to bring us to Christ (Galatians 3:24)? Surely it is knowledge of God's Law that brings us before the cross to acknowledge our sinfulness and our need for the Savior.

It should be obvious that there are many who, even when they are confronted with the Law of God and have some knowledge of their sinfulness, do not receive Christ as their sin-bearer and Lord. It is also clear that many others do come to Christ for salvation and confess Him as Lord. So then it is in keeping with our own observations and, much more importantly, the data of Scripture, that the Catechism notes that God did not leave all men to perish - but chose some to receive His saving love, brought to some eternal life, and brought some under the terms of His covenant of grace. Without this gracious act no one could possibly be saved. Even if the Redeemer is presented to mankind they must be made willing by God to receive Him, which happily for some is the outcome of the Covenant of Grace.

The Westminster Confession of Faith states this doctrine very clearly in chapter VII:

I. 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 has been pleased to express by way of covenant.

II. The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.

III. Man by his fall having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the Covenant of Grace: whereby 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 life His Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe.

We have seen in Scripture that were it not for God's gracious promise to Adam (Genesis 3:15) there would be no hope for him and he would have perished. Had not God acted in Noah's behalf (Genesis 9:8-17) he and all his household would have perished, and rightfully so for the people of Noah's time were so wicked (Genesis 6:5). Had not God acted in Abram's behalf in bringing him out of Ur to Canaan, and had He not covenanted with Abram to be a God to him and to his descendants (Genesis 12, 15 & 17), none of them would have been saved either. Don't forget that we also are Abraham's descendants if we are

by grace, "in Christ" (Galatians 3). Mankind simply cannot save himself. Furthermore, the salvation of God is not merely an offer but an act of God in the sinner's behalf, that act being that God makes Himself to be a God to the sinner. He is not a God to be chosen from the "God shelf" of the idolater, but God makes Himself to be a God to the person of His choosing by His gracious and powerful act. We do not deny that people can make choices, even choices that are reasonable and proper, but in the matter of one's salvation his reaction to God's offer will be rejection unless God acts in his behalf.

Lot is an excellent example of this truth. We read that Lot and his family had to be forcibly removed from Sodom and even so his wife looked back with desire and perished. Unless God had acted in Lot's behalf he would have perished in Sodom. The parallel with us today is striking. When we get too close to iniquity it seems to rub off and has a way of captivating us. When we camp near our own Sodom it's not long before we are inside and liking it. We then must be forcibly removed (John 6:44-45).

What is God's covenant of grace? It is God's gracious promise of salvation to His people, which does not depend on human obedience, as His first covenant depended on Adam's obedience, but it depends on Christ as the Mediator of the Covenant. It is only Christ who is able to and does now keep the Covenant of Grace as our perfect and powerful representative.