

TEACHING GOAL

Show that faith in Christ is necessary to receive the covenantal blessings.

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 41-42

SCRIPTURAL BASIS

Study Passage: Romans 4

Support Passages: Genesis 12:1-4; John 3:36, 8:56; Acts 7:1ff; Romans 3:21-31; Galatians 3:1-14; Hebrews 11:1-12; James 2:21-24

BIBLE STORY

Genesis 22:1-14; Abraham prepares to sacrifice his own son.

MEMORY ASSIGNMENT

"For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."" (Romans 4:3, ESV)

APPLICATION

The covenant blessing being in essence a promise of salvation through a redeemer, it is required of people that they believe in (obey) the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, to have eternal life.

SUMMARY

The covenant of grace, that is specifically the promise of God to be God to us, is a doctrine that is central to Reformed theology. The covenant applies to God's elect whether parent or child and in essence is a promise of salvation through a redeemer which is Christ. Whereas mankind are not able to keep the terms of any covenant of God, for God demands absolute holiness (e.g. Genesis 17:1), and whereas only the perfect Christ could and does keep the will of God the Father, it seems logical to expect Jesus our representative before God, as priest, to be the covenanting party rather than men. Where Adam failed to keep God's will Christ does not.

Another reason for believing that Christ is the covenanting party on our behalf in the Covenant of Grace, is the central place the Lord Jesus occupies in redeeming His people. He is our substitute not only on the cross as our sacrifice, but also as the one who represents us before God, and the Bible is consistent in requiring of men, faith in Christ to be saved. God, in being God to His people, saves them by providing the Redeemer and acting in their behalf by enabling them to believe in the Redeemer.

Abraham is perhaps the clearest example in Scripture of this truth. The gospel was preached to him and he believed. He saw the Day of Christ and was glad, he believed God and righteousness was imputed to him. He is thus an example of faith and his faith centers on Christ. Apparently the promise made to Abraham of salvation by a redeemer, had Jesus written all over it, for that was in essence how God intended to be God to them.

Calvin had this to say on the matter:

4. " ... it follows that the Old Testament was established upon the free mercy of God, and was confirmed by Christ's intercession. For the gospel preaching, too, declares nothing else than that sinners are justified apart from their own merit by Christ's fatherly kindness; and the whole of it is summed up in Christ. Who, then, dares to separate the Jews from Christ, since with them, we hear, was made the covenant of the gospel, the sole foundation of which is Christ? Who dares to estrange from the gift of free salvation those to whom we hear the doctrine of the righteousness of faith was imparted? Not to dispute too long about something obvious - we have a notable saying of the Lord: "Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56). And what Christ there testified concerning Abraham, the apostle shows to have been universal among the believing folk when he says: "Christ remains, yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). Paul is not speaking there simply of Christ's everlasting divinity but of his power, a power perpetually available to believers. Therefore, both the blessed Virgin and Zacharias in their songs called the salvation revealed in Christ the manifestation of the promises that the Lord had formerly made to Abraham and the patriarchs (Luke 1:54-55, 72-73). If the Lord, in manifesting his Christ, discharged his ancient oath, one cannot but say that the Old Testament always had its end in Christ and in eternal life.

11. We ought to esteem Abraham as one equal to a hundred thousand if we consider his faith, which is set before us as the best model of believing; to be the children of God, we must be reckoned as members of his tribe (Genesis 12:3). Now what could be more absurd than for Abraham to be the father of all believers (cf. Genesis 17:5) and yet not to possess even the remotest corner among them? But he cannot be removed from their number - not even from the very highest rank of honor - without wiping out the whole church. ... When Isaac alone is left, in whom the weary old age of the good man may repose, he is shortly after ordered to sacrifice him (Genesis 22:1ff.). What more frightful thing can the human mind imagine that for a father to become the executioner of his own son? If Isaac had died of sickness, who would not have thought Abraham the most miserable of old men - given a son in jest - on whose account his grief of childlessness should be doubled? If he had been killed by some stranger, the calamity would have been much increased by the indignity. But for a son to be slaughtered by his own father's hand surpasses every sort of calamity. In short, throughout life he was so and troubled that if anyone wished to paint a picture of a calamitous life, he could find no model more appropriate than Abraham's. Let no man object that he was not completely unhappy, because he finally came safely through so many great tempests. We will not say that he leads a happy life who struggles long and hard through infinite difficulties, but he who calmly enjoys present benefits without feeling misfortune." ¹

¹ John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book II, Chapter X, Paragraph 4 and 11.