

What Is Man?

Lesson Guide

LESSON
FOUR

THE COVENANT OF GRACE



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HOW TO USE THIS LESSON GUIDE

This lesson guide is designed for use in conjunction with the associated video. If you do not have access to the video, the lesson guide will also work with the audio and/or text versions of the lesson. Additionally, the video and lesson guide are intended to be used in a learning community, but they also can be used for individual study if necessary.

- **Before you watch the lesson**
 - **Prepare** — Complete any recommended readings.
 - **Schedule viewing** — The Notes section of the lesson guide has been divided into segments that correspond to the video. Using the time codes found in parentheses beside each major division, determine where to begin and end your viewing session. IIM lessons are densely packed with information, so you may also want to schedule breaks. Breaks should be scheduled at major divisions.
- **While you are watching the lesson**
 - **Take notes** — The Notes section of the lesson guide contains a basic outline of the lesson, including the time codes for the beginning of each segment and key notes to guide you through the information. Many of the main ideas are already summarized, but make sure to supplement these with your own notes. You should also add supporting details that will help you to remember, describe, and defend the main ideas.
 - **Record comments and questions** — As you watch the video, you may have comments and/or questions on what you are learning. Use the margins to record your comments and questions so that you can share these with the group following the viewing session.
 - **Pause/replay portions of the lesson** — You may find it helpful to pause or replay the video at certain points in order to write additional notes, review difficult concepts, or discuss points of interest.
- **After you watch the lesson**
 - **Complete Review Questions** — Review Questions are based on the basic content of the lesson. You should answer Review Questions in the space provided. These questions should be completed individually rather than in a group.
 - **Answer/discuss Application Questions** — Application Questions are questions relating the content of the lesson to Christian living, theology, and ministry. Application questions are appropriate for written assignments or as topics for group discussions. For written assignments, it is recommended that answers not exceed one page in length.

Notes

I. Introduction (0:20)

Covenant of grace – The covenant relationship God established with humanity after our fall into sin that provides forgiveness and redemption on the basis of God’s mercy in Christ.

II. Eternal Counsel (3:15)

Eternal counsel (or “eternal decree”) – God’s eternal plan for history

Before he created the world, God:

- knew humanity would fall into sin
- created a plan to save us involving all three persons of the Trinity
- planned to redeem sinners through Christ’s death on our behalf

A. Timing (5:17)

God’s plan to redeem humans from the corruption and consequences of sin was made before he created the universe (Ephesians 1:3-4, 3:11; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 1:9-10)

God’s eternal decree of salvation was “foreordained” (Greek, *proorizo*), or decided before the world began (Romans 8:29-30; Ephesians 1:5, 11).

B. Trinity (8:08)

God's eternal plan of redemption involves the work of all three persons of the Trinity:

- The Father – originated the agreement because of his desire to redeem fallen human beings from the curse of sin (Ephesians 3:10-11).
- The Son – agreed to add a perfect human nature to his perfect divine nature to die on behalf of sinners (2 Timothy 1:9).
- The Holy Spirit – agreed to enable and empower the Son's work and to apply salvation to those whom the Son redeemed (2 Thessalonians 2:13).

C. Fulfillment (11:40)

The covenant of grace fulfills part of God's eternal plan for history:

- The Father fulfilled his eternal decree in the covenant of grace by:
 - sending the Son and the Spirit to do their work
 - appointing the Son to the office of Messiah or Christ (Acts 2:36; John 5:36, 6:38)
 - giving the Son his powerful Spirit without limit (John 3:34)
 - preparing the Son's perfect human nature (Hebrews 10:5)

- The Son fulfilled his eternal agreement to redeem humanity by:
 - veiling his divine glory
 - adding a full human nature to his full divine nature
 - living a perfect life
 - dying an atoning death (Philippians 2:5-8; Hebrews 2:13-17)

- Holy Spirit fulfilled his part in God's eternal counsel by:
 - enabling and empowering the Son's incarnation and subsequent work (Matthew 1:20; Luke 1:34-35)
 - empowering Christ's death on the cross (Hebrews 9:14) and his resurrection (Romans 8:11)
 - regenerating our spirits (John 3:5-8; Titus 3:5-7)
 - empowering us to resist sin (Romans 7:6)
 - giving us spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:11)
 - securing our salvation (Ephesians 1:13-14)

III. Providence (17:31)

“Providence” – God’s preservation and governance of creation in history

A. Sin (18:11)

The covenant of grace was necessary to restore humanity’s ability to fulfill the cultural mandate.

- Our corruption prevented us from being able to please God, and even from wanting to please him.
- Our alienation kept us away from his presence, and prevented us from cooperating to build human culture throughout the world.
- Death kept us from enjoying the blessings of his kingdom.

God did not withhold his covenant judgment, but he did restrain it and offered redemption to humanity.

Protoevangelium/proto-euangelion – “first gospel”; God’s promise that a human being would eventually conquer Satan’s sinful kingdom (Genesis 3:15)

God’s first covenant with humanity has been called the "covenant of works" because it was completely contingent on our works.

The covenant of grace depends on Jesus' works to fulfill the terms of the covenant for us.

The covenant of grace is an expansion and continuation of the covenant of works.

B. Mediator (25:18)

God the Son joined the covenant of grace as its mediator:

- He intercedes for God's covenant people.
- He reconciles us to God by taking the blame and punishment for our sins.
- He preserves the integrity of the covenant and the lives of his people by suffering the covenant curses and earning the covenant blessings.

The Son's mediation provided forgiveness and salvation for the Old Testament saints on the basis of his promised future work.

Paul contrasted Adam's role in the covenant of works with the Son's role in the covenant of grace:

- Adam and Jesus held similar covenant roles (Romans 5:14).
- Adam and Jesus had parallel but opposite histories as our covenant representatives (Romans 5:15-19).
 - In Adam, humanity received only condemnation.
 - Jesus' righteous works and mediation in the covenant of grace provided for mercy and forgiveness.

Redemption is possible under the covenant of grace because Jesus isn't just our representative; he's also our mediator (Hebrews 9:15; 1 Timothy 2:5-6).

IV. Elements (36:13)

Three elements common to ancient Near Eastern suzerain-vassal treaties:

- Benevolence
- Loyalty
- Consequences

The covenant of works was based on:

- Divine benevolence – God created our first parents, assigned them authority over creation, and gave them food and shelter.
- Human loyalty – Adam and Eve were to serve God in the Garden of Eden and to expand the borders of his kingdom to fill the earth.
- Consequences – the blessing of greater life if Adam and Eve obeyed the covenant and the curse of death and condemnation if they disobeyed.

The covenant of grace maintains these elements but expands them to account for humanity's sinful nature and Christ's mediation.

A. Divine Benevolence (38:00)

God's benevolence in the covenant of grace:

- let humanity live
- allowed humanity to multiply and fill the earth
- permitted humanity to continue to produce food
- promised to send a redeemer to reverse the curse of sin
 - The promised redeemer was God the Son.
 - Jesus was mediator or "surety" for the covenant of grace.
 - The Holy Spirit brings us to faith so that we receive redemption (1 Corinthians 2:12-14).

Theological traditions differ on how the Spirit works to bring us to faith:

- View one: Human beings have the natural ability to choose either the path to salvation or the path to destruction — the Holy Spirit brings people into an encounter with the gospel.
- View two: Human beings lack the natural ability to respond positively to the gospel — the Holy Spirit provides prevenient grace that *enables us* to choose the path of salvation.
- View three: Human beings lack the natural ability to choose life — the Holy Spirit provides *irresistible* grace to those he chooses to save that *ensures* we will choose the path of salvation.

B. Human Loyalty (43:31)

The covenant of grace requires heartfelt human loyalty.

Under the covenant of works, the requirement of human loyalty had to be fulfilled twice:

- by Adam as our covenant representative
- by our personal loyalty

In the covenant of grace:

- As covenant head, Jesus has already fulfilled the requirement of corporate human loyalty.
- As mediator, Jesus has fulfilled the requirements of personal loyalty.

Evangelicals agree that the only thing we absolutely have to do to be saved is possess saving faith in God (Acts 16:30-31).

True believers are still required to demonstrate loving, sincere loyalty to God (John 14:15; James 2:22-25; Revelation 14:12).

Our actions still have covenant consequences for this world and the next (Hebrews 12:5-11; Matthew 6:20; Mark 10:21; Luke 12:33-34).

C. Consequences (53:03)

The covenant of grace includes and expands on all the consequences of the covenant of works:

- death is still a corporate result of Adam's sin (Romans 5:12-14)
- we still have to suffer for our personal sins
- the covenant curses have been increased now that Christ has come (Hebrews 10:28-29)

The blessings of the covenant of works have also been included and expanded in the covenant of grace:

- eternal physical and spiritual life
- the possibility of sin and its consequences removed
- union with Christ
- freedom from covenant curses through Jesus' work

Redemption in the covenant of grace is so much better than humanity's original condition that we're actually better off for Adam having sinned.

V. Administration (59:10)

The covenant of grace was administered by various covenant representatives:

- Adam
- Noah
- Abraham
- Moses
- David
- Jesus

A. Adam (1:02:22)

The covenant of grace was instituted with Adam immediately after he fell into sin (Genesis 3:15).

The Adamic administration provided humanity the immediate opportunity to reconcile our relationships with God (Genesis 4:25-26).

B. Noah (1:04:23)

The covenant confirmed with Noah after the flood explicitly incorporated all the terms of Adam's administration (Genesis 6:18, 8:21–9:17).

The Noahic administration expanded the covenant blessings by adding God's promise never again to destroy the earth with flood waters.

God reaffirmed his kingdom purposes for humanity giving Noah the same command he had given to Adam and Eve (Genesis 9:1).

C. Abraham (1:05:46)

Under Abraham, the covenant included the previous terms and added God's promise to turn Abraham's descendants into a mighty nation and to bless all nations through them (Genesis 15:1-21, 17:1-21).

In the Abrahamic administration, the nation of Israel was charged with expanding God's kingdom throughout the earth (Romans 4:13).

D. Moses (1:08:03)

With the Mosaic administration (Exodus 19–24), God:

- confirmed his promises to Abraham (Deuteronomy 4:31, 7:8-13)
- provided structure for the nation of Israel
- gave Israel the first codified version of the law
- redirected Israel to build his kingdom throughout the world (Deuteronomy 28:1)

Israel was to bring redemption to all nations through its message of God's truth.

E. David (1:09:28)

In the Davidic administration (2 Samuel 7; Psalms 89, 132), God:

- confirmed the Mosaic administration
- revealed that the greatest covenant blessings would be fulfilled under the kingship of David and his dynastic heirs (Psalm 89:3-4)

F. Jesus (1:10:13)

Jesus' administration is typically referred to as the "new covenant" (Jeremiah 31:31; Hebrews 8:8).

In the new covenant, God established a permanent, unbreakable covenant in which his people would receive all his covenant blessings.

The word "new" in "new covenant" can be translated "renewed" — God is renewing or reaffirming his covenant with his people through a fresh covenant administration.

The renewed nature of this covenant administration is evident throughout the book of Hebrews:

- contrasts the old Mosaic administration of the covenant of grace with the new and final administration under Christ (Hebrews 5–7)
- shows that the new covenant will be better than the old as it renews and restores the blessings of the Mosaic covenant (Hebrews 8; Jeremiah 31)
- The new administration pays the old debt of sin and fulfills the old promises of inheritance through its mediator (Hebrews 9:15).

In the new covenant, the mediator (Jesus) finally fulfills the terms of the covenant on behalf of his people:

- underwent Abrahamic circumcision (Luke 2:21)
- affirmed and kept the Mosaic Law (Matthew 5:17-19; Luke 24:44; Romans 8:4)
- inherited the Davidic office of Messiah (Matthew 1:1-25)

By keeping all these covenant terms, Jesus inherited all their associated blessings (Romans 4:3-25; Galatians 3:14-16).

Christ has given us the Holy Spirit as a deposit guaranteeing our full future inheritance, and when Jesus returns, he'll share all his blessings with us in God's earthly kingdom. (Ephesians 1:13-14).

VI. Conclusion (1:17:33)

3. What is the covenant of grace? How does the covenant of grace fulfill part of God's plan for what will happen in history?

4. How did human sin make the covenant of grace necessary? In what ways is the covenant of grace different from the covenant of works?

5. How does Christ act as our mediator in the covenant of grace? When did he begin to mediate the covenant of grace? Why is his mediation necessary for our redemption?
6. Describe, in as much detail as possible, God's benevolence to human beings in the covenant of grace.

7. Although Jesus has fulfilled the requirements of loyalty in the covenant of grace, and the only thing we absolutely have to do to be saved is possess saving faith in God, explain how our actions still have covenant consequences for this world and the next. Use specific Scripture references to support your answer.

8. Describe how the covenant of grace includes and expands on all the covenant consequences, both curses and blessings, of the covenant of works.

Application Questions

1. God knew before he created the world that humanity would fall into sin, and he created a plan for our redemption. Why do you think this plan gives God greater glory than if he had simply created humans without the ability to disobey him?
2. Scripture tells us that God chose us for salvation from the beginning. Should this convict believers to live in a certain way? How has this understanding affected the way you live your own life?
3. Without God's grace we will never be able to fulfill the cultural mandate of Genesis 1:28. How is God's grace evident as you strive to fulfill this mandate? How might this encourage others around you who are working toward the same goal?
4. What are three major views regarding how the Spirit works to bring us to faith? Which view do you tend to agree with most and why?
5. Though we live under the covenant of grace, God still demands our obedience. How would you respond to a Christian who believes that as long as we profess faith in Jesus, we don't have to worry about obeying God?
6. Eventually, believers will be in a state of *non posse peccare* — unable to sin. What do you most look forward to when considering this future reality?
7. Older theologians sometimes referred to Adam's sin as a “fortunate” or “happy” event. How would you explain this to someone who has never heard of the covenant of grace?
8. How does the historical development of the covenant of grace's administrations help you better understand how God fulfilled his purposes for humanity in Christ?
9. What is the most significant thing you learned in this lesson?

Glossary

Abraham – Old Testament patriarch, son of Terah, father of the nation of Israel with whom God made a covenant in Genesis 15 and 17 promising innumerable descendants and a special land

Adam – The first man; husband of Eve; man with whom God made the covenant of foundations in which humanity was to fill and subdue the earth

Aquinas, Thomas – (ca. 1225-1274) Italian theologian and Dominican friar who wrote *Summa Theologica*

Augustine – (A.D. 354-430) Bishop of Hippo who believed in the Scriptures as our final authority in doctrine and considered the creeds of the church to be helpful summaries of scriptural teaching; wrote *Confessions* and *The City of God*

Berkhof, Louis – (1873-1957) Influential Reformed theologian who wrote *Systematic Theology* in 1932

covenant – A binding legal agreement made between two people or groups of people, or between God and a person or group of people.

covenant of grace – The covenant relationship God established with humanity after our fall into sin that provides forgiveness and redemption on the basis of God's mercy in Christ

covenant of works – God's covenant made with Adam that emphasized the goals of God's kingdom and the role of human beings in his kingdom

cultural mandate – The command in Genesis 1:28 instructing humanity to develop and rule the creation to display God's glory

David – Second Old Testament king of Israel who received the promise that his descendant would sit on the throne and reign forever

eternal counsel – God's eternal plan for the universe, established before his work of creation

irresistible grace – Grace from the Holy Spirit that ensures those he chooses to save will choose the path of salvation

Marshall, Walter – (1628-1680) English Puritan pastor who wrote *The Gospel-Mystery of Sanctification*, first published in 1692

Moses – Old Testament prophet and deliverer who led the Israelites out of Egypt; man with whom God made a national "covenant of law" and who administered the Ten Commandments and the Book of the Covenant to the Israelites; also appeared with Elijah at Jesus' transfiguration

Noah – Man who, under God's direction, built an Ark and survived the Flood; individual with whom God made a universal covenant that promised the enduring stability of nature

non posse peccare – Latin phrase meaning "the inability to sin"; used by Augustine to describe redeemed humanity's condition in our final state

posse non peccare – Latin phrase meaning "the ability not to sin"; used by Augustine to describe humanity's condition before the Fall and after the Holy Spirit has regenerated our souls

posse peccare – Latin phrase meaning "the ability to sin"; used by Augustine to describe humanity's condition both before and after the Fall, prior to our final state

prevenient grace – Grace from the Holy Spirit that comes before saving faith and enables us to choose the path of salvation

proto-euangelion/protoevangelion – Theological term for "the first gospel" or the first promise of redemption found in Genesis 3:15

providence – God's active involvement in history as he works out his eternal plan for his creation and the welfare of his people

surety – One who ensures that the debt of another will be paid by becoming legally responsible for the other's debt

Suzerain-vassal treaty – A covenant arrangement made between a conquering emperor and a lesser ruler

Wesley, John – (1703-1791) Anglican minister and theologian; one of the founders of the Methodist Church

Westminster Confession of Faith – An ecumenical doctrinal summary composed by the Westminster Assembly of Divines and published in 1647