



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Eschatology

“The Covenants of Scripture: Everlasting and Historical”

TRANSCRIPT

We are turning again to our series of studies in prophecy or the doctrine of eschatology and our subject is “The Covenants of Scripture: Everlasting and Historical.” I want to read two passages of Scripture, Titus chapter 1 verse 1 through verse 4, and then Romans chapter 9 verses 1 through 5. Titus chapter 1 verses 1 through 4. The Apostle Paul writes to Titus, one of his apostolic legates,

“Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; In hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before the world began;”

The important part of this text that we want to notice is the statement, in hope of eternal life promised before the world began.

Then in Romans 9 verses 1 through 5 the apostle is bemoaning the fact that Israel, possessed of great privileges, has nevertheless in view of their rejection of Jesus Christ failed to enter into the possession of them and in the first verse he writes expressing his anxiety and care for Israel,

“I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: Who are Israelites; (these are their privileges) to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.”

The important word I want you to notice is that word, covenants. So in these two texts we have the statement made that life was promised before time began, and we also have reference to the covenants that belong to Israel.

The subject of the covenants of God is one fraught with great difficulty due to two things primarily. In the first place, the very breadth of the study of the covenants makes this a study of difficulty, because in the attempt to gather the biblical information concerning the covenants, one must deal with almost the entire Bible. Involved in it is the gathering, the interpretation, the systemization of a vast amount of Scripture, and as I say, almost the entire Bible deals with the topic.

For example, in the Book of Genesis itself there are twenty-five references to covenant and then it seems as you go through the Bible and come into the old in the New Testament, this same frequency of occurrence is found. It is also important because in our Lord’s work of the cross he relates it to the blood of the new covenant. So you can see the Bible is full of teaching concerning the covenant and covenants, and in addition, some of the most significant parts of the Bible have to do with the covenants.

The second reason that this is a task fraught with great difficulty is because there has arisen sharp contention over the question of the biblical covenants and dispensational teachings. The dispensationalists and those who are known as covenant theologians have had and are having a great deal of contention over the significance of the biblical teaching on covenants and dispensations. Dr. Charles Ryrie has written a book called *Dispensationalism Today*, and in that book, in case some of you have read it, you will find a fairly a very good treatment of the issues and a fairly complete treatment of the issues that today stand between the covenant theologians and the dispensational theologians.

The purpose of our study is to set forth in modest form the covenantal system of the Bible, and so I want to deal with the nature of the covenantal scheme. I want to deal then with the so-called theological covenants and finally with the everlasting covenant of redemption. So we turn first of all to the nature of the covenantal system, and I think this is of the greatest importance because it pertains to intelligent reading of the Bible. I really do not see how anyone can read the Bible with intelligence who does not understand the covenantal scheme of the biblical teaching. The structure of the Bible itself is of the greatest importance for understanding the message, and so if we are to understand the Bible, we must understand the covenants of Scripture, because the teaching of Scripture is gathered around these covenants that are set forth in the word of God.

Capital A, The Relation of Covenants to Dispensations.

Now if you have a Scofield Bible, I’d like for you to turn with me to the opening section of that Bible, page three. On page three of the Scofield Bible the editors have given us a definition of a dispensation.

Now there are certain aspects about this dispensation that may not be precisely accurate, but it will do for our purposes tonight. Notice what is said concerning the term, dispensation, in the middle of page three. A dispensation is a period of time during which man is tested in respect to his obedience to some specific revelation of God.

Now notice carefully the elements of it. A dispensation is a period of time. There are some aspects in which this is not true but generally it is true. A dispensation is a period of time during which man is tested in respect to his obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God.

Now of course the dispensationalists have never intended that those who study their understanding of Scripture should understand them to be saying that we are saved in different ways in different dispensations. You’ll notice the definition says that man is tested with respect to some specific revelation of the will of God. Nothing is said about the way of salvation, because the way of salvation is the same throughout all of the dispensations, and all intelligent dispensationalists believe that fact. But the thing that is characteristic of the dispensation is that it is a period of time during which man is tested in respect to his obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God.

Now that is the character of the dispensations. What is the character of the covenants of the Bible in relationship to them? The covenants treat the divine side of things. The dispensations stress the human side of things, for they stress the fact that man is tested with respect to some specific revelation of God. In the covenants we have the divine side of things, and the covenants are designed to represent the successive stages in the unfolding of the Messianic grace which will reach its climax in the millennial kingdom upon the earth which ultimately shall merge into the new heavens and the new earth. So as over against the dispensations, the covenants are designed by God to represent the successive stages in the unfolding of the gracious program which he has for man and the nations’ salvation and blessing in the kingdom of God and the eternal state.

That is what we see for example in Romans chapter 9, 10 and 11. We read Romans chapter 9 in verse 4 where Israel is said to have been the possessor of the covenants, but after unfolding the ways in which God has dealt with the nations, the Gentiles and the Israelite nation at the conclusion of this great dispensational section of Romans Paul says in chapter 11 verse 33, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom

and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counselor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.” And Paul winds up his great treatment of God’s dealings with the nations and traces it all ultimately to the desire of God to manifest his glory. The covenants then represent the successive stages in the unfolding of the messianic grace.

#### Capital B, The Necessity of a Covenantal Plan.

When we read in the Bible that God is an intelligence, we should not be surprised to discover in the Bible that he has a plan. If he is an intelligence, I think it’s fair to say, we not only expect that he has a plan, but he must have a plan. In Ephesians chapter 3 and verse 11 the Apostle Paul writes, “According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The text there says literally, according to the purpose of the ages. And so the apostle states that God has a purpose of the ages and his purpose of the ages is found in Jesus Christ our Lord.

In the second chapter of the Book of Acts in the sermon that Peter preached in reference to Jesus Christ he says in verse 23, “Him being delivered by the determinant counsel and foreknowledge of God,” and there he states quite plainly that the specific issue of the program and plan of God, one of those specific issues and in the light of the Scripture, the preeminent, specific issue is the deliverance of our Lord Jesus to death at the hands of the Romans and the Jews. He says that this is happening by the determinant counsel and foreknowledge of God. So you can see that God works all of his works according to an intelligent program and a plan.

One of the best analogies it seems to me to the plan and program of God is the analogy of the solar system of which our earth is a part. From the little that we know of astronomy, we know that what we, the solar system in which we live is just one of many of the great systems which God has created.

Now we also know that within our systems there are various other kinds of little systems, little subordinate systems here and there. It seems to me that the program of God is very much like this. He has a vast, scientific, orderly plan of the ages which he is working out, but there are all kinds of subordinate systems within that one great system.

Now the one great system represents the overall total plan of God the everlasting covenant of redemption. The subordinate systems are the systems represented by the smaller biblical covenants that have a more limited purpose, such as, for example, the Edenic Covenant, the Abrahamic Covenant, the Davidic Covenant, the New Covenant. All of these are historical biblical covenants that are subordinate systems related to the overall total plan of God represented ultimately by his eternal decree.

#### Capital C, The Definition of a Biblical Covenant.

Now we must have these things in mind when we think about covenant. Human covenants are pacts between persons concerning the ordering of things in their power. There are three aspects to a covenant. There must be persons involved in the covenant. They must have a certain power over matters which they may dispense or order in their covenants. And the agreement must be made. So then we can say that covenants involve the parties, the terms of the covenant, and the actual agreement, with sanctions if necessary for breaking of covenant.

The two types of covenant. The two types of covenant. There are only two kinds of covenants just as there are only two ways for men to be saved theoretically. The two kinds of covenants are, first, we may have one founded upon what man shall do for his salvation. That would be a covenant of works. We might conceive of God entering into relationship with man in his innocency. We might conceive of him entering into a covenant whereby each agrees to do a certain thing and upon the basis of obedience to the covenant, certain blessings are bestowed. That would be a covenant of works.

And second, we may conceive of a covenant in which that covenant is founded upon what God will do. That is a gracious covenant. That’s a covenant that does not rest

upon what we will do, but it is a covenant that rests upon what God determines that he shall do for men. That’s a grace covenant.

Now it’s very interesting in the Bible to look at the terms that are used for covenant. In ancient times among the Greeks, the common word for a covenant was the term, *suntheke*. *Sun* is Greek preposition that means “with” and *theke* comes from the Greek word *tithome* which means “to put or place”—it’s a very common word, it means many types of things actually—so that a *suntheke* was an agreement in which men entered and by which each had certain responsibilities. That was the common term for covenant among the Greeks. Striking thing about the biblical language is that when the Old Testament translation of the Hebrew was made into Greek by the translators of the version that we call the Septuagint version, they almost uniformly preferred another Greek word the word, *diatheke*.

Now *dia* is a preposition that means “through,” but the combination *diatheke* instead of suggesting as agreement is which both of the parties have responsibilities. *Diatheke* was the common Greek term for a will or a testament. If for example you were Greek and lived in those days and you were to say, I have made my will today, you would say, I have made my *diatheke* today. Not *suntheke*, *diathek*, because in a will or testament the disposition of the contents rests upon one man’s determination. I determine to whom I shall convey my property. The blessings that flow out of my *diatheke*. Understand this is only an illustration: the blessings that flow out of my testament or my will are my disposal and my determination.

Now the Old Testament translators selected that word to translate the Hebrew word *b’riyth* which means “covenant.” In other words, they understood and understood rightly, for the Hebrew word did mean precisely that: that the characteristic fact of the Old Testament covenants is that they were grace covenants.

Now we shall see later on that not every one was a grace covenant but generally speaking, they were gracious covenants that depended upon the divine determination.

They were unconditional in the sense that man did not supply anything toward the fulfillment.

Well now, you say of course, man supplied his faith. Well yes, man did supply his faith. Man did believe, but we are also taught in Scripture that that belief is induced by God, so that it is truly an unconditional covenant. He guarantees on the basis of his provision to convey certain blessings to men. That is characteristic of the important covenants of the Old Testament.

It is particularly characteristic of the Abrahamic Covenant. It is characteristic of the Davidic Covenant. It is characteristic of the New Covenant which our Lord consummates in his blood. So the Bible-type of covenant is one that is founded upon what God will do. This is so beautifully expressed in the conversion of the Nation Israel in the last days that I cannot help but refer to this. In Zechariah chapter 12.

Now we all know the text which says that they shall look unto me whom they have pierced and they shall mourn for him as one mourneth for his only son and shall be in bitterness for him as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. This is the text of Scripture that prophesied that the Nation Israel shall in the last days turn to God and as a result of their turning to God, they shall be brought to repentance and to forgiveness of sins and to the blessings of the Abrahamic and New Covenants. But did you notice how that text begins? God is not going to bestow his blessings upon unbelieving, impenitent people is he? No. He is not going to bestow his blessings upon unbelieving, impenitent people.

But the characteristic of the grace covenants is that it is God who determines to bring those impenitent, rebellious people to faith and trust in him. Look how the text begins, “And I will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and supplications, and they shall look unto me whom they have pierced.” So the looking unto him whom they have pierced is the result of the previous work of the Holy Spirit in grace in the spirit of grace and supplication. So in effect God



determines what he is going to do and in the face of rebellion and impenitence he determines that he will change that into faith and trust.

Now the biblical covenants are covenants of grace. So how should we define a covenant then? Well, it is a gracious undertaking of God or an administration by which he determines to confer upon certain peoples his blessing. One of the striking things about this of course is that it is related to the decree of God, and in perhaps the most famous dictionary of the New Testament Greek language, the *Teologisches Vertebuch zum Neue Testament*, the theological dictionary of the New Testament, the author of this particular series of books – a vast work if any of you have seen it (most of the authors are not very evangelical; they would not really be at home in Believers Chapel) – but in the definition of covenant, in that particular set, it is called “a decree of God that introduces a certain order of affairs.”

So then that’s a covenant. A gracious undertaking of God or administration by which he determines to confer upon certain peoples his blessing and these covenants are the successive stages in the unfolding of the Messianic grace. They are the divine side of the dispensational program of God and for that reason in my opinion are more important than the dispensations.

Let’s turn now to the theological covenants. The theological covenants.

Now by the term theological, I refer to the fact that these covenants that I’m going to speak about here are largely deductions, not inductions, but deductions from the Bible. We, generally speaking, do not find precise expressions of the theological covenants in the Bible. Let me say just a word about their history. I won’t burden you with the long history of covenantal theology. It is important, it is interesting, it is enlightening I think in the study of the Scripture, but in the final analysis, it’s not a necessary thing for us to understand eschatology, to know the history of the covenantal system.

The theological covenantal system is a rather recent thing. In fact you will not find the theological covenants referred to in any document of confession until the time of

the Westminster Confession of Faith in 1647. It was a man by the name of Coxseus who was a German but who taught in Holland who really systematized the idea of the covenants of God and rather strikingly – this is often overlooked by students of theology – rather strikingly it is also Coxseus who gave us something like a dispensational system too. Now he was not too popular because of his emphasis upon the developing *hausgeschiste* or history of divine salvation, the dispensational aspect of things, but his treatment of the covenants became the standard treatment of the covenants of Reformed or Presbyterian-type theologians.

Covenant theology came to the United States with the Puritans, and so in the United States we have a tradition of covenantal theology. When you talk for example about the fathers of this country being Christians, or at least a strong Christian movement in the United States, you are talking about people who had Puritan roots and who also were covenantal in their theology, so in that sense we are as a nation related to the covenantal system of theology. And it came to this country through the writings of men like Francis Turretin, a Swiss theologian, and Herman Vitsias, who was a Dutchman, too.

The Hodges of Princeton Theologian Seminary were those who really evangelized covenantal theology. And in the United States the Princeton theology, the theology of men like Hodge and Alexander and Warfield, the theology of these men was covenantal. Someone has said the covenants were made in Holland and not in heaven. And there is a great deal of truth in that, but we must not be put off by that. There are certain aspects of the covenantal system that may be true in spite of the fact that they were made in Holland and not in heaven.

Well let’s look at the nature of the covenantal system and see what it has to say about the Scripture as a whole. In its most fully developed form the covenant theologian sees three covenants as basic to divine revelation, the first, being the covenant of redemption.

Now the covenant of redemption is the agreement between the Father and the Son. The Father gives the Son to be the head and redeemer of the elect, and the Son voluntarily takes the place of those whom the Father has given him. It is the Holy Spirit who also covenants to apply the redemption that the Son works out. So we have the three persons of the Trinity entering into a covenantal relationship each affirming that they will carry out certain features of the eternal covenant of redemption.

Now there are texts in the Bible that suggest this, but there are not texts that specifically speak of the eternal covenant of redemption. Now I know that some of you may say, well I do remember the statement everlasting covenant. Yes you do find that statement more than once. You find it in the Old Testament, the everlasting covenant or an eternal covenant, but in the context of all of those passages in the contexts of every one of those passages, it is more likely that those terms refer either to the Abrahamic Covenant or the New Covenant most often to the latter. And even in the Epistle to the Hebrews when he says in the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter and the 20<sup>th</sup> verse that God – well I think I’ll read the whole of the text Hebrews chapter 13 and verse 20, “Now the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus the great shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the everlasting covenant make you perfect in every good work to do His will working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ to whom be glory for ever and ever.”

It seems likely in the light of the Epistle to the Hebrews that the reference here to the blood of the everlasting covenant is a reference to the blood of the New Covenant which our Lord Jesus consummated in the shedding of his blood on Calvary’s cross in the fulfillment of the great passage in Jeremiah chapter 31 by which that covenant was promised.

Dr. Chafer who was the founder of Dallas Seminary has said concerning the eternal covenant of redemption, “This covenant rests upon but slight revelation. It is rather sustained largely by the fact that it seems both reasonable and inevitable.” In other

words, what Dr. Chafer is saying is that we do not have in the Bible any specific place where we find the phrase, the eternal covenant of redemption, referring to the eternal covenant of redemption, but nevertheless in spite of that, it is a covenant that he believes is a valid covenant, and that the Bible teaches it because it is both reasonable and inevitable. And what he means by it being reasonable and inevitable is simply this, that when we read in the Bible that God has an eternal plan, that there is a purpose of the ages, and that that purpose of the ages encompasses the work of the Lord Jesus Christ in dying for our sins, that it was determined that he should come before the ages began and give his life for the remission of sins, that these facts when put together confirm the fact that there was an agreement between the persons of the Godhead concerning the program of the ages and that is nothing more than an eternal covenant. So Dr. Chafer I think his point is sustained.

In a moment we will talk about it in more detail, and I will point you to certain parts of the Scripture that seem to definitely refer to this even though the precise wording is not specifically found. Those passages for example in John chapter 17 when we read that the Father has given certain people to the Son, now that giving of certain people to the Son is something that has taken place in the past, and for which our Lord Jesus carries out his ministry that is part of the arrangement between the Son and the Father. We are saying then nothing more than that there is a kind of an arrangement within them, between them.

The second of the theological covenants is the covenant of works. This is the agreement between the Father who promises life upon the condition of obedience to his will with Adam as the representative of man. The covenant of works is then between God and Adam and God promises life upon the condition of obedience. The penalty of disobedience is death and that of course is what happened historically. Adam disobeyed and he died. He was told that he was able to eat of the fruit of all the trees of the garden, but the fruit of the tree which was in the midst of the garden he was not to eat of that,

and he was told specifically in the day you eat of that you shall surely die. God gave him just every freedom he could possibly give him but just one little restriction, and Adam true to our nature, it seems, decided that that was the one thing that he really wanted.

Now I don’t think there is a complete analogy to this, but have you ever seen five kids in a room, each one with five toys, twenty-five toys each. One has at least five and every one of those kids sooner or later will take it upon themselves somehow or other to get the conviction that the one toy that belongs to somebody else is the one toy that they must have.

Now how Adam managed to do that before he fell, how that managed to come into his mind I don’t understand. That’s one great theological problem I have not solved yet. There is one other one too. [Laughter] But anyway that is one that I have not solved. The covenant of works. The word covenant is never used of this agreement covenant of works in Genesis 2 but the elements of a covenant it seems are clearly there. Next week we will talk about the elements of this particular covenant so I pass by by just pass it by by simply saying that while the term covenant is not used of the arrangement in Eden Eden nevertheless the features of a covenant are there and I think it is fair to speak of it as the Edenic Covenant or as the theologians of the covenantal system have called it the Covenant of Works.

Third, the covenant of grace. The covenant of grace according to the covenant theologians is the gracious agreement between the offended God and the offending but elect sinner in which God promises salvation through faith in Christ, and the sinner accepts this, believingly, promising a life of faith and obedience by the enablement of the Holy Spirit.

Let me review these theological covenants. The covenant of redemption is the agreement between the persons of the Godhead that has to do with the carrying out of the work of redemption and the application of it on into the eternal state, all of the aspects of it to the ultimate glory of God. The covenant of works is the agreement

between Adam and God by which God promises life upon the basis of obedience with the sanction being death. And third, the covenant of grace, the covenant made between God and the elect by which he promises salvation through faith in Jesus Christ to them. These are the three covenants of the covenantal system.

Covenantal theologians as you might suspect from this tend to equate the church with Israel and to deny the visible kingdom on earth. That does not however seem to be a necessary feature of this system, but it generally goes with it as we’ve been saying. Generally speaking, amillennialists are covenantal in their theology while premillennialists may be both covenantal and dispensational in their theology.

We come now, third, to the eternal covenant of redemption. You’ll remember as students of theology – which you are even if you haven’t learned much; that’s what you are a student of theology (and those of you who are here tonight for the first time you’re a beginning student of theology) – you will remember that there is no verse in the Bible that uses the term, the Trinity. There is no question but that the Christian church has accepted the doctrine of the Trinity. They not only accept the doctrine of the Trinity, they affirm that this is fundamental to the Christian faith that we cannot have the Christian faith if we do not have a doctrine of the Trinity.

Therefore we affirm that Jehovah’s Witnesses, though they carry Bibles around with them are not Christian at all; that Mormons who have the Bible and other books are not Christians at all. These syncretistic religions which have the Bible, plus, since these that I’ve mentioned do not believe in the doctrine of the Trinity, they are not Christian. That is fundamental to the Christian faith the doctrine of the Trinity.

And yet the term Trinity is not found in the Bible at all. It is gathered by Christians to be a doctrine of Scripture because the elements of that teaching are found in the word of God. And when the truths that pertain to the doctrines are gathered together, systematized, and set forth we see that the Bible teaches the doctrine of the Trinity when its parts are put together into a completed whole. The Bible does not have the

expression, the old nature, but most of us who are Christians realize that there is still something of the old man within us, and we accept the teaching that there is such a thing as an old nature.

Now some of my friends don’t like the term old nature and new nature, and they like to speak of the higher nature and the lower nature, but the lower nature is not found in the Bible, either so it doesn’t make any difference what you may call it. If you call it flesh, then you have to define that, because flesh is used in a number of different ways. So we have other doctrines in the Bible which are plainly taught by the Bible, but we don’t have the precise wording. We don’t have, for example, anything in the Bible that says specifically that the doctrine of the coming of our Lord is the premillennial faith. We don’t find that we gather that from the study of Scripture.

Now I’m setting you up of course for what I’m going to say. There is no statement in the Bible which says the eternal covenant of redemption, and in that expression, the eternal covenant of redemption categorically refers to this eternal compact between the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is a deduction from various lines of evidence.

One of the students of prophecy has likened this to horticulturalists and natural historians who study flowers, trees or butterflies. He has said, there is no one plot of ground on earth that would be found growing all varieties of flowers or trees, nor is there any part of the world in which may be secured representatives of every variety of butterflies, yet by expense, industry and perseverance, the horticulturalist and the natural historian may gradually assemble specimens of every variety until they possess a complete collection in like manner.

There is no one chapter in the Bible in which all the truth is found on any subject. It is the part of the theologian to diligently attend unto the various hints and the more definite contributions scattered throughout Scripture on any given theme and carefully classify and coordinate them. Alas, those genuine and independent theologians, those unfettered by any human system have, well now, disappeared from the earth.

What he said in effect is simply this, that just as we study anything, we gather all of our material together and having gathered it together, we set forth what we have learned. Well we must do that in theology. That is exactly what we do in theological study. We collect systematize and set forth in systematized fashion the results of the investigation of Scripture. And having done that, we come to the conviction – I come to the conviction – that there is such a thing as an eternal covenant of redemption.

I want to look at the biblical references to it. The truth flows out of God’s plan, but it is suggested by certain passages of Scripture, and I first want you to turn with me to Luke chapter 22 and verse 22. Luke chapter 22 and verse 22. Now verse 21 says, “And behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table. And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed!” By the way, for those of you who are interested in the doctrines of predestination on the one hand and human responsibility on the other, you see in this text that both of them stand in this one passage: the Son of man goes as it was determined, the predestinating design of God, and yet woe unto that man by whom (Judas) he is betrayed—he is responsible for his betrayal even though our Lord’s crucifixion was determined by God. So predestination and human responsibility are cousins. They’re not enemies; they are brothers and sisters within the same family.

Now notice the word, determined. Goes as it was determined. Determined by whom? Determined by the Son? Why of course. He is part of the councils of eternity being the second person of the Trinity. Determined by the Father? Of course. He is the fountain source of all of the blessings of God the Father. Determined by the Spirit? Yes, it was the Spirit who led our Lord to the cross in agreement with the determination of the eternal Trinity. So when we read here that the Lord’s death was determined. We cannot escape the fact that it was determined by God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, and if it was determined by God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit – they had an agreement concerning it – and that’s all we are saying when we talk about an



eternal covenant of redemption. It has to do with redemption and it is an eternal agreement.

Let’s turn second to John 6:38 and 39. John 6:38 and 39. Let me read these verses John 6:38 and 39, “For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father’s will who hath sent me, that of all that he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.” Isn’t that striking? The Father has given the Son certain individuals, and he will not lose a single one of them. Isn’t that striking?

Now notice these things about these two verses. First, Jesus Christ had a commission from the Father. I have come to do the will of the Father. Second, he has undertaken to execute that commission. He has a commission, and he is determined to execute it, and the end of it is the actual bestowal of blessing upon on all given to the Son.

Well what are we saying other than that there is an agreement between the persons of the Trinity, the Father who gives a commission, the Son who carries out the commission in order that certain blessing may be conferred upon others? This is nothing more than saying that there is an arrangement between them, a covenant.

Ephesians chapter 3 verse 11. We’ve already referred to that. There is no occasion to, no need to refer to it again; it too speaks of a plan or purpose of the ages and that of course stresses the fact that this is an eternal purpose. Ephesians chapter 3 and verse 11 reads, after having spoken of the purpose of God in redemption and in the gathering together in the church of Jew and Gentile upon an equal plane, we read that this “was all done that the angels, principalities and powers in heavenly places might know the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.” So what our Lord has done in connection with the church is in accordance with the eternal plan and purpose of God.

By the way in John 10 16 – I should have put that as number three, reversing these two texts since we just looked at the passage in John – but in John chapter 10 and verse 16 we read, “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold:”— he’s talking about the fact that he has some Gentiles who don’t belong to his flock yet, but who shall –“other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring,” notice he does not say, I will bring them, but I *must* bring them—there is an agreement; this is part of the plan. I must bring them, not I shall, it’s not simply that I’m prophesying that I will bring them, but it is a necessity laid upon him I must do it. It’s part of the plan part of the program.

And now finally Titus chapter 1 and verse 2. Titus chapter 1 and verse 2. In this passage we read, “In hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before the world began.” Notice that the promise of eternal life is before the world began. Now that is simply a way of saying that this promise of life is an eternal promise of life. In other words, there is an eternal plan that concerns life. It is made up of activities within the persons of the Trinity each having his own part in it, and it is to be carried out by God. Over in 2 Timothy chapter 1 verse 9 we have a parallel text in which Paul writes, “Who hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.” Now there it is again, reference to the fact that there is a plan, there is purpose and grace within that plan. There are individuals involved. There are people who are given to the Son, and God and the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit work to the successful conclusion of their total plan.

I do not think I have ever found a better statement in an expository way of the eternal covenant of redemption than that which is found in Mr. Spurgeon’s exposition of the everlasting covenant. And I’m going to take the remaining moments and read this statement of Mr. Spurgeon. He says, “Now in the covenant of grace”—he calls this the covenant of grace, the covenant of redemption— “We must first of all observe the high

contracting parties between whom it was made. The covenant of grace was made before the foundation of the world between God the Father and God the Son, or to put it in a yet more Scriptural light, it was made mutually between the three divine persons of the adorable Trinity. The covenant was not made directly between God and man. Man did not at that time exist. But Christ stood in the covenant as man’s representative. In that sense we will allow that it was a covenant between God and man, but not a covenant between God and any man personally and individually; it was a covenant between God with Christ and through Christ indirectly with all the blood-bought seed who were loved of Christ from the foundation of the world.

“It is a noble and glorious thought the very poetry of that old Calvinistic doctrine which we teach that long ere the daystar knew its place before God had spoken existence out of nothing, before angels’ wing had stirred the unnavigated ether, before a solitary song had disturbed the solemnity of the silence in which God reigned supreme, he had entered into solemn counsel with himself, with his Son and with his Spirit, and had in that counsel decreed, determined, purposed and predestinated the salvation of his people. My soul flies back now, winged by imagination and by faith and looks into the mysterious council chamber, and by faith I behold the Father pledging himself to the Son and the Son pledging himself to the Father while the Spirit gives his pledge to both.”

Let me just read a couple of the statements concerning each of the covenanting parties as Mr. Spurgeon imagines that it must have happened. “On the Father’s part, thus runs the covenant.” He later says that he acknowledges that he was not there and does not know exactly what was said [laughter]—now he didn’t say that he does say something like that, and I’m just putting words in his mouth there.

“I cannot tell you in the glorious celestial tongue in which it was written. I am fain to bring it down to the speech which suiteth to the ear of flesh and to the heart of a mortal. Thus I say, run the covenant, in lines like these”—that’s what he says. He says, “run the covenant,” I would say runs. “I the most high Jehovah do hereby give unto my

only begotten and well-beloved Son a people, countless beyond the number of the stars who shall be by him washed from sin, by him preserved and kept and led and by him at last presented before my throne without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. I covenant by oath and swear by myself because I can swear by no greater, that these whom I now give to Christ shall be forever the objects of my eternal love. Them will I forgive through the merit of the blood. To these will I give a perfect righteousness. These will I adopt and make my sons and daughters, and these shall reign with me through Christ eternally.

“Thus run that glorious out of the covenant”—that’s what he says, run—“the Holy Spirit also, as one of the high contracting parties on this side of the covenant, gave his declaration. I hereby covenant saith he that all whom the Father giveth to the Son I will in due time quicken. I will show them their need of redemption. I will cut off from them all groundless hope and destroy all their refuges of lies. I will bring them to the blood of sprinkling. I will give them faith, whereby this blood shall be applied to them. I will work in them every grace. I will keep their faith alive. I will cleanse them and drive out all depravity from them, and they shall be presented at last spotless and faultless.”

Then the Son speaks. “My Father on my part I covenant that in the fullness of time I will be come man. I will take upon myself the form and nature of the fallen race. I will live in their wretched world and for my people will I give the keep the law perfectly. I will work out of spotless righteousness which shall be acceptable to the demands of Thy just and holy law. In due time, I will bear the sins of all my people. Thou shalt exact their debts on me. The chastisement of their peace I will endure and by my stripes they shall be healed. My Father I covenant and promise that I will be obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. I will magnify the law and will make it honorable. I will suffer all they ought to have suffered. I will endure the curse of the law and all the vials of Thy wrath shall be emptied and spent upon my head. I will then rise again. I will ascend into heaven. I will intercede for them at Thy right hand, and I will make myself responsible for every one of them, that not one of those whom Thou hast

given me shall ever be lost, but I will bring all my sheep of whom by Thy blood Thou hast constituted me, the shepherd. I will bring every one safe to Thee at last. Thus ran the covenant.”

One final word. Our time is up. The relation to the biblical covenants of the eternal covenant I conceive to be simply this: these covenants of promise that the Bible speaks of as covenants, the Abrahamic Covenant, the Davidic Covenant, the New Covenant – they are aside from certain lesser ones such as the Jonathan-David Covenant – they are the successive stages in the unfolding of this great covenant of redemption.

I conceive of this great covenant of redemption as to be the foundational covenant, and out of that covenant flow all of those little subordinate covenants by which God accomplishes his one great, grand design through Jesus Christ. I hope that every one of you in this auditorium know that you stand by the grace of God within that covenant. There is no hope for any who do not stand there. The invitation is given to all to believe in our Lord Jesus Christ. We do not know the enrollment, but we know the conditions set forth in Scripture: faith in the Son who died and who rose again. May God give you grace to come to him whom to know is to possess everlasting life. Let’s bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the privilege of the study of the Scriptures. We pray that Thou wilt guide and direct us in such a way that Thy name shall be honored through our studies. For Jesus’ sake. Amen.