

The Everlasting Covenant

by A.W. Pink

The everlasting covenant is a mutual agreement between God the Father and God the Son, where Christ is appointed as the mediator and representative of God's people, undertaking to fulfill the terms of the covenant and provide salvation for His people.

Scripture: Genesis 3:15, 2 Samuel 23:5, Isaiah 42:6, Malachi 3:1, John 8:56, Ephesians 2:12, Philippians 4:19, Hebrews 8:10, Hebrews 9:15, Revelation 13:8

Topics: "Grace and Salvation", "Covenant Theology"

Description

A.W. Pink expounds on 'The Everlasting Covenant,' illustrating how God's plan for salvation was established before the foundation of the world, with Christ as the mediator. He emphasizes that the covenants made with figures like Noah, Abraham, and David were manifestations of this eternal covenant, revealing God's grace and mercy. Pink highlights that these covenants were unconditional promises from God, fulfilled through Christ's sacrificial work, ensuring the salvation of the elect. The sermon underscores the significance of understanding the covenant relationship between the Father and the Son, which is foundational to grasping the fullness of God's redemptive plan. Ultimately, Pink calls believers to appreciate their inclusion in this everlasting covenant of grace.

Transcript

The Word of God opens with a brief account of creation, the making of man, and his fall. From later Scripture we have no difficulty in ascertaining that the issue of the trial to which man was subjected in Eden had been divinely foreseen. "The Lamb slain (in the purpose of God) from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8) makes it clear that, in view of the Fall, provision had been made by God for the recovery of His people who had apostatized in Adam, and that the means whereby their recovery would be effected were consistent with the claims of the divine holiness and justice. All the details and results of the plan of mercy had been arranged and settled from the beginning by divine wisdom.

That provision of grace which God made for His people before the foundation of the world embraced the appointment of His own Son to become the mediator, and of the work which, in that capacity, He should perform. This involved His assumption of human nature, the offering of Himself as a sacrifice for sin, His exaltation in the nature He had assumed to the right hand of God in the heavenlies, His supremacy over His church and over all things for His church, the blessings which He should be empowered to dispense, and the extent to which His work should be made effectual unto the salvation of souls. These were all matters of definite and certain arrangement, agreed upon between God and His Son in the terms of the

everlasting covenant.

The first germinal publication of the everlasting covenant is found in Genesis 3:15 "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." Thus, immediately after the Fall, God announced to the serpent his ultimate doom through the work of the Mediator, and revealed unto sinners the channel through whom alone salvation could flow to them. The continual additions which God subsequently made to the revelation He gave in Genesis 3:15 were, for a considerable time, largely through covenants He made with the fathers, covenants which were both the fruit of His eternal plan of mercy and the gradual revealing of the same unto the faithful. Only as those two facts are and held fast by us are we in any position to appreciate and perceive the force of those subordinate covenants.

God made covenants with Noah, Abraham, David; but were they, as fallen creatures, able to enter into covenant with their august and holy Maker? Were they able to stand for themselves, or be sureties for others? The very question answers itself. What, for instance, could Noah possibly do which would insure that the earth should never again be destroyed by a flood? Those subordinate covenants were less than the Lord's making manifest, in an especial and public manner, the grand covenant: making known something of its glorious contents, confirming their own personal interest in it, and assuring them that Christ, the great covenant head, should be of themselves and spring from their seed.

This is what accounts for that singular expression which occurs so frequently in Scripture: "Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your seed after you" (Gen. 9:9). Yet there follows no mention of any conditions, or work to be done by them: only a promise of unconditional blessings. And why? because the "conditions" were to be fulfilled and the "work" was to be done by Christ, and nothing remained but to bestow the blessings on His people. So when David says, "He hath made with me an everlasting covenant" (2 Sam. 23:5) he simply means, God had admitted him into an interest in the everlasting covenant and made him partaker of its privileges. Hence it is that when the apostle Paul refers to the various covenants which God had made with men in Old Testament times, he styles them not "covenants of stipulations" but covenants of promise" (Eph 2:12).

Above we have pointed out that the continual additions which God made to His original revelation of mercy in Genesis 3:15 were, for a while, given mainly through the covenants He made with the fathers. It was a process of gradual development, issuing finally in the fullness of gospel grace; the substance of those covenants indicated the outstanding stages in this process. They are the great landmarks of God's dealings with men, points from which the disclosures of the divine mind expanded into increased and established truths. As revelations they exhibited in ever augmented degrees of fullness and clearness the plan of salvation through mediation and sacrifice of the Son of God; for each of those covenants consisted of gracious promises ratified by sacrifice (Gen. 8:20; 9:9; 15:9-11, 18). Thus, those covenants were so many intimations of that method of mercy which took its rise in the eternal counsels of the divine mind.

Those divine revelations and manifestations of the grace decreed in the everlasting covenant were given out at important epochs in the early history of the world. Just as Genesis 3:15 was given immediately after the Fall, so we find that immediately following the flood God solemnly renewed the covenant of grace with Noah. In like manner, at the beginning of the third period of human history, following the call of Abraham, God renewed it again, only then making a much fuller revelation of the same. It was now made known that the coming deliverer of God's people was to be of the Abrahamic stock and that all the families of the earth should be blessed in Him--a plain intimation of the calling of the Gentiles and the bringing of the elect from

all nations into the family of God. In Genesis 15:5,6, the great requirement of the covenant--namely, faith--was then more fully made known.

Unto Abraham God gave a remarkable pledge of the fulfillment of His covenant promises in the striking victory which He granted him over the federated forces of Chedorlaomer. This was more than a hint of the victory of Christ and His seed over the world: carefully compare Isaiah 41:2,3,10,15. Genesis 14:19, 20 supplies proof of what we have just said, for upon returning from his memorable victory, Abraham was met by Melchizedek (type of Christ) and was blessed by him. A further revelation of the contents of the covenant of grace was granted unto Abraham in Genesis 15, where in the vision of the smoking furnace which passed through the midst of the sacrifice, an adumbration was made of the sufferings of Christ. In the miraculous birth of Isaac, intimation was given of the supernatural birth of Christ, the promised Seed. In the deliverance of Isaac from the altar, representation was made of the resurrection of Christ (Heb 11:19).

Thus we may see how fully the covenant of grace was revealed and confirmed unto Abraham the father of all them that believe, by which he and his descendants obtained a clearer sight and understanding of the great Redeemer and the things which were to be accomplished by Him. "And therefore did Christ take notice of this when He said, Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and was glad" (John 8:56). These last words clearly intimate that Abraham had a definite spiritual apprehension of those things. Under the Sinaitic covenant a yet fuller revelation was made by God to His people of the contents of the everlasting covenant: the tabernacle, and all its holy vessels; the high priest, his vestments, and service; and the whole system of sacrifices and ablutions, setting before them its blessed realities in typical forms, they being patterns of heavenly things.

Thus, before seeking to set forth the everlasting covenant itself in a specific way, we have first endeavored to make clear the relation borne to it of the principal covenants which God was pleased to make with different men during the Old Testament era. Our sketch of them has necessarily been brief, for we shall take them up separately and consider them in fuller detail in the succeeding chapters. Yet sufficient has been said, we trust, to demonstrate that, while the terms of the covenants which God made with Noah, with Abraham, with Israel at Sinai, and with David, are to be understood, first, in their plain and natural sense, yet it should be clear to any anointed eye that they have a second and higher meaning--a spiritual content. The things of earth have been employed to represent heavenly things. In other words, those subordinate covenants need to be contemplated in both their letter and spirit.

Coming now more directly to the present aspect of our theme, let it be pointed out that, as there is no one verse in the Bible which expressly affirms there are three divine persons in the Godhead, co-eternal, coequal, co-glorious; nevertheless, by carefully comparing Scripture with Scripture we know that such is the case. In like manner there is no one verse in the Bible which categorically states that the Father entered into a formal agreement with the Son: that on His executing a certain work, He should receive a certain reward. Nevertheless, a careful study of different passages obliges us to arrive at this conclusion. Holy Scripture does not yield up its treasures to the indolent; and as long as the individual preacher is willing to let Dr. Scofield or Mr. Pink do his studying for him, he must not expect to make much progress in divine things. Ponder Proverbs 2:1-5!

There is no one plot of ground on earth on which will 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 horticulturist 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 more defined 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-nigh disappeared from the earth.

The language of the New Testament is very explicit in teaching us the true light in which the plan of mercy is to be viewed, and in showing the saint that he is to regard all his spiritual blessings and privileges as coming to him out of the everlasting covenant. It speaks of "the eternal purpose which God purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph 3:11). Our covenant oneness with Christ is clearly revealed in Ephesians 1:3-5, that marvelous declaration reaching its climax in 1:6: "to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved." "Accepted in the beloved" goes deeper and means far more than "accepted through him." It denotes not merely a recommendatory passport from Christ, but a real union with Him, whereby we are incorporated into His mystical body, and made as truly partakers of His righteousness as the members of the physical body partake of the life which animates its head.

In like manner, there are many, many statements in the New Testament concerning Christ Himself which are only pertinent and intelligible in the light of His having acted in fulfillment of a covenant agreement with the Father. For example, in Luke 22:22 we find Him saying, "And truly the Son of man goeth as it was determined:" "determined" when and where but in the everlasting covenant! Plainer still is the language in John 6:38,39: "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 which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." Three things are there to be seen: (1) Christ had received a certain charge or commission from the Father; (2) He had solemnly engaged and undertaken to execute that charge; (3) The end contemplated in that arrangement was not merely the announcement of spiritual blessings, but the actual bestowal of them upon all who had been given to Him.

Again, from John 10:16 it is evident that a specific charge had been laid upon Christ. Referring to His elect scattered among the Gentiles He did not say "them also I will bring," but "them also I must bring." In His high priestly prayer we hear Him saying, "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me, where I am" (John 17:24). There Christ was claiming something that was due Him on account of or in return for the work He had done (v. 4). This clearly presupposes both an arrangement and a promise on the part of the Father. It was the surety putting in His claim. Now a claim necessarily implies a preceding promise annexed to a condition to be performed by the party to whom the promise is made, which gives a right to demand the reward. This is one reason why Christ, immediately afterward, addressed God as righteous Father, appealing to His faithfulness in the agreement.

II.

The everlasting covenant or covenant of grace is that mutual agreement into which the Father entered with His Son before the foundation of the world respecting the salvation of His elect, Christ being appointed the mediator, He willingly consenting to be their head and representative. That there is a divine covenant to which Christ stands related, and that the great work which He performed here on earth was the discharge of His covenant office, is very plain from many Scriptures, first of all, from the covenant titles which He bears. In Isaiah 42:6 we hear the Father saying to the Son: "I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold throe hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles." As a covenantee in it, Christ is thus "given" unto His people, as the pledge of all its

blessings (cf. Rom. 8:32). He is the representative of His people in it. He is, in His person and work, the sum and substance of it. He has fulfilled all its terms, and now dispenses its rewards.

In Malachi 3:1 Christ is designated "the messenger of the covenant," because He came here to make known its contents and proclaim its glad tidings. He came forth from the Father to reveal and publish His amazing grace for lost sinners. In Hebrews 7:22 Christ is denominated "the surety of a better covenant." A surety is one who is legally constituted the representative of others, and thereby comes under an engagement to fulfill certain obligations in their name and for their benefit. There is not a single legal obligation which the elect owed unto God but what Christ has fully and perfectly discharged; He has paid the whole debt of His insolvent people, settling all their liabilities. In Hebrews 9:16 Christ is called "the testator" of the covenant or testament, and this, because to Him belong its riches, to Him pertain its privileges; and because He has, in His unbounded goodness, bequeathed them as so many inestimable legacies unto His people.

Once more, in Hebrews 9:15 and 12:24 Christ is styled "the mediator of the new covenant," because it is by His efficacious satisfaction and prevailing intercession that all its blessings are now imparted to its beneficiaries. Christ now stands between God and His people, advocating their cause (1 John 2:1) and speaking a word in season to him that is weary (Isa. 50:4). But how could Christ sustain such offices as these unless the covenant had been made with Him (Gal. 3:17) and the execution of it had been undertaken by Him (Heb. 10:5-7)? "Now the God of peace, which brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant" (Heb. 13:20): that one phrase is quite sufficient to establish the fact that an organic connection existed between the covenant of grace and the sacrifice of Christ. In response to Christ's execution of its terms, the Father now says to Him, "By the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners those given to Him before the foundation of the world, but in Adam fallen under condemnation) out of the pit wherein is no water" (Zech. 9:11).

The covenant relationship which the Gown mediator sustains unto God Himself is that which alone accounts for and explains the fact that He so frequently addressed Him as "my God." Every time our blessed Redeemer uttered the words "my God" He gave expression to His covenant standing before the God-head. It must be so; for considering Him as the Second Person of the Trinity, He was God, equally with the Father and the Holy Spirit. We are well aware that we are now plunging into deep waters; yet if we hold fast to the very words of Scripture we shall be safely borne through them, even though our finite minds will never be able to sound their infinite depths. "Thou art my God from my mother's belly" (Ps. 22:10), declared the Savior. From the cross He said, "My God." On the resurrection morning He spoke of "my God" (John 20:17). And in the compass of a single verse (Rev. 3:12) we find the glorified Redeemer saying "my God" no less than four times.

What has been pointed out in the above paragraph receives confirmation in many other Scriptures. When renewing His covenant with Abraham, Jehovah said: "I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee" (Gen. 17:7). That is the great covenant promise: to be a God unto any one sides that He will supply all their need (Phil. 4:19)--spiritual, temporal, and eternal. It is true that God is the God of all men, inasmuch as He is their Creator, Governor and judge; but He is the God of His people in a much more blessed sense. "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord: I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people" (Heb. 8:10). Here again we are shown that it is with respect unto the

covenant that, in a special way, God is the God of His people.

Before leaving Hebrews 8:10 let us note the blessed tenor of the covenant as expressed in the words immediately following: "And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" (vv. 11, 12). What conditions are there here? What terms of fulfillment are required from impotent men? None at all: it is all promise from beginning to end. So too in Acts 3:25 we find Peter saying, "Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers." Here the covenant (not "covenants") is referred to generally; then it is specified particularly: "saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth" be laid under conditions? No; be required to perform certain works? No; but, "shall be blessed," without any regard to qualifications or deeds of their own--entitled by virtue of their interest in what was performed for them by their covenant head.

Let us consider now the various features of the everlasting covenant.

1. The Father covenanted with Christ that He should be the federal head of His people, undertaking for them, freeing them from that dreadful condemnation wherein God foresaw from eternity they would fall in Adam. This alone explains why Christ is denominated the "last Adam," the "second man" (1 Cor. 15:45, 47). Let it be very carefully noted that in Ephesians 5:23 we are expressly told "Christ is the head of the church, and He is the saviour of the body." He could not have been the Savior unless He had first been the head; that is, unless He had voluntarily entered into the work of suretyship by divine appointment, serving as the representative of His people, taking upon Him all their responsibilities and agreeing to discharge all their legal obligations; putting Himself in the stead of His insolvent people, paying all their debts, working out for them a perfect righteousness, and legally meriting for them the reward or blessing of the fulfilled law.

It is to that eternal compact the apostle makes reference when he speaks of a certain "covenant that was confirmed before of God in [or "to"] Christ" in Galatians 3:17. There we behold the covenant parties: on the one side, God, in the Trinity of His persons; and on the other side Christ, that is, the Son viewed as the God-man mediator. There we learn of an agreement between Them: a covenant or contract, and that confirmed or solemnly agreed upon and ratified. There too, in the immediate context, we are shown that Christ is here viewed not only as the executor of a testament bequeathed to the saints by God, or that salvation was promised to us through Christ, but there twice over we are specifically told (v. 16) that the promises were made to Abraham's "seed, which is Christ"! Thus we have the clearest possible Scriptural proof that the everlasting covenant contained something which is promised by God to Christ Himself.

Most blessedly were several features of the everlasting covenant typed out in Eden. Let us consider these features:

1. Christ was set up (Prov. 8:23) in the eternal counsels of the three-one Jehovah as the head over and heir of all things: the figure of His headship is seen in the Creator's words to Adam, "have dominion over the fish of the sea," and so forth (Gen. 1:28). There we behold Him as the lord of all creation and head of all mankind. But, second, Adam was alone: among all the creatures he ruled, there was not found a helpmeet for him. He was solitary in the world over which he was king; so Christ was alone when set up by God in a past eternity. Third, a helpmeet was provided for Adam, who was one in nature with himself, as pure and holy as he was, in every way suitable to him: Eve became his wife and

companion (Gen. 2:21‑24). Beautifully did that set forth the eternal marriage between Christ and His church (Eph.45:29‑32). Let it be carefully noted that Eve was married to Adam, and was pure and holy, before she fell; so it was with the church (Eph. 1:3‑6). (For much in this paragraph we are indebted to a sermon by J. K. Popham.).

2. In order for him to execute His covenant engagement it was necessary for Christ to assume human nature and be made in all things like unto His brethren, so that He might enter their place, be made under the law, and serve in their stead. He must have a soul and body in which He was capable of suffering and being paid the just wages of His people's sins. This explains to us that marvelous passage in Hebrews 10:5-9, the language of which is most obviously couched in covenant terms: the whole displaying so blessedly the voluntary engagement of the Son, His perfect readiness and willingness in acquiescing to the Father's pleasure. It was at the incarnation Christ fulfilled that precious type of Himself found in Exodus 21:5. Out of love to His Lord, the Father, and to His spouse the church, and His spiritual children, He subjected Himself to a place of perpetual servitude.

3. Having voluntarily undertaken the terms of the everlasting covenant, a special economical relationship was now established between the Father and the Son‑the Father considered as the appointer of the everlasting covenant, the Son as the God‑man mediator, the head and surety of His people. Now it was that the Father became Christ's "Lord" (Ps. 16:2, as is evident from vv. 9, 11; Mic. 5:4), and now it was that the Son became the Father's "servant" (Isa. 42:1; cf. Phil. 2:7), undertaking the work appointed. Observe that the clause "took upon him the form of a servant" precedes "and was made in the likeness of men." This explains His own utterance "as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do" (John 14:31; cf. 10:18;12:49). This accounts for His declaration, "My Father is greater than I" (John, 14:28), wherein our Savior was speaking with reference to the covenant engagement which existed between the Father and Himself.

4. Christ died in fulfillment of the covenant's requirements. It was absolutely impossible that an innocent person--absolutely considered as such--should suffer under the sentence and curse of the law, for the law denounced no punishment on any such person. Guilt and punishment are related; and where the former is not, the latter cannot be. It was because the Holy One of God was relatively guilty, by the sins of the elect being imputed to Him, that He could righteously be smitten in their stead. Yet even that had not been possible unless the spotless substitute had first assumed the office of suretyship; and that, in turn, was only legally valid because of Christ's federal headship with His people. The sacrifice of Christ owes all its validity from the covenant: the holy and blessed Trinity, by counsel and oath, having appointed it to be the true and only propitiation for sin.

So too it is utterly impossible for us to form any clear and adequate idea of what the Lord of glory died to achieve if we have no real knowledge of the agreement in fulfillment of which His death took place. What is popularly taught upon the subject today is that the atonement of Christ has merely provided an opportunity for men to be saved, that it has opened the way for God to justly pardon any and all who avail themselves of His gracious provision. But that is only a part of the truth, and by no means the most important and blessed part of it. The grand fact is that Christ's death was the completion of His agreement with the Father, which guarantees the salvation of all who were named in it--not one for whom He died can possibly miss heaven: (John 6:39). This leads us to consider--

5. That on the ground of Christ's willingness to perform the work stipulated in the covenant, certain promises were made to Him by the Father: first, promises concerning Himself; and second, promises

concerning His people. The promises which concerned the Mediator Himself may be summarized thus. First, He was assured of divine enduement for this discharge of all the specifications of the covenant (Isa. 11:1-3; 61:1; cf. John 8:29). Second, He was guaranteed the divine, protection under the execution of His work (Isa. 42:6; Zech. 3:8, 9; cf. John 10:18). Third, He was promised the divine assistance unto a successful conclusion (Isa. 42:4; 49:8-10; cf. John 17:4). Fourth, those promises were given to Christ for the stay of His heart, to be pleaded by Him (Ps. 89:26; 2:8); and this He did (Isa. 50:8-10; cf. Heb. 2:13). Fifth, Christ was assured of success in His undertaking and a reward for the same (Isa. 53:10, 11; Ps. 89:27-29; 110:1-3; cf. Phil.2:9-11). Christ also received promises concerning His people. First, that He should receive gifts for them (Ps. 68:18; cf. Eph. 4:10, 11). Second, that God would make them willing to receive Him as their Lord (Ps. 110:3; cf. John 6:44). Third, that eternal life should be theirs (Ps. 133:3; cf. Titus 1:2). Fourth, that a seed should serve Him, proclaim His righteousness, and declare what He had done for them (Ps. 22:30, 31). Fifth, that kings and princes should worship Him (Isa.49:7).

Finally, let it be pointed out that this compact made between the Father and the Son on behalf of the whole election of grace is variously designated. It is called an "everlasting covenant" (Isa. 55:3) to denote the perpetuity of it, and because the blessings in it devised in eternity past will endure forever. It is called a "covenant of peace" (Ezek. 34:2,5; 37:26) because it secures reconciliation with God, for Adam's transgression produced enmity, but by Christ the enmity has been removed (Eph. 2:16), and therefore is He denominated the "Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6). It is called the "covenant of life" (Mal. 2:15), in contrast from the covenant of works which issued in death, and because life is the principal thing pledged in it (Titus 1:2). It is called the "holy covenant" (Luke 1:72), not only because it was made by and between the persons of the Holy Trinity, but also because it secures the holiness of the divine character and provides for the holiness of God's people. It is called a "better covenant" (Heb. 7:22), in contrast from the Sinaitic arrangement, wherein the national prosperity of Israel was left contingent on their own works.

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