

## **Covenant Grace Baptist Church: What's in a name?**

### **OUTLINE**

Covenant  
Grace

### **INTRODUCTION**

'What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.'  
These are the words of Juliet to Romeo in Shakespeare's famous play. The original play was about two lovers from warring families, the Montagues and the Capulets, the point of the line is to show how names are irrelevant when the substance remains the same. If that is the case why did we change the name from Marchwiell Reformed Baptist Church to Covenant Grace Baptist Church?

Let's make a few things clear. We are not renaming ourselves in an attempt to follow the marketing trick of rebranding. We are not seeking to use a new name, logo, vision statement and launch in an attempt to get exposure with the masses. We are avoiding the massive expense of a launch in an attempt to catch attention that we might increase awareness. We did not approach the new name with this marketing mindset.

A new name does not indicate a change of substance. There are many churches that have changed their names because they had changed their views. We have not removed the word Reformed from our name because we are changing what we believe, or are ashamed to own the label, the new name is an attempt to clarify what we are all about not change what we are all about. The word 'Reformed' has many misunderstandings attached to it and our new name clarifies what we mean by 'Reformed.'

The new name is not an attempt to keep up with the latest trends. If you speak to marketing gurus about branding some of the advice you will be given is to go with pictures language not conceptual language. For example, Apple is thought to be better than IBM. We have unashamedly resisted the trends to use picture language and have a name which is still deeply theological. To use an example of what we did not choose is Cornerstone Baptist Church, our building is on the corner of Glen and Tyne Street, and we have bluestone in our building and it will also feature in any extensions, the Lord willing. Plus this is a word from the Bible which is used to describe Christ. Instead we have chosen 'Covenant' and 'Grace' which are not picture words but convey large biblical concepts. We chose to monopolise on the truth of God's word not simply stay in the neutral ground of geography. We are not attempting to say less but more about ourselves with the new name. Is it a good thing that we say a lot about ourselves in our name? Yes, I can't stand churches that have names that tell you nothing about them. There is nothing worse than when you are on holiday and you go to the local community fellowship family church and it turns out to be Seventh Day Adventist or some other place you don't want to be. When choosing to worship at a church I want to know what I going to. So you will notice that we have not removed content just misunderstood terms from our name.

## **Covenant**

In Reformed theology all of God's dealings with mankind are on the basis of covenant. There are three keys covenants in the bible that cover all of God's dealings with us and all of history. Hebrews 13:20 talks about an eternal covenant, this is the agreement between the Godhead in eternity past where before the foundation of the world, God chose a people in Christ to love and save. This is also known historically as the covenant of redemption. Before time began the history of the world was written with the fall and redemption in Christ. It was then that God loved us in Christ (Eph. 1:4-5) and the commitment of His love to us is as strong as the promise He gave to the Son to give to Him a people, John 17:2.

The second covenant we need to know about is the covenant of works, or as it has also been called the covenant of creation. This is the situation that Adam was placed in in the Garden of Eden. Adam was placed in a situation that you and I will never face, he was placed as the head of the human race, a position where as one man he could act to save or damn his descendants. He was made good and sinless with all the resources necessary to obeying God. He was placed under a covenant which stipulated that if he disobeyed he would die 2:16-17, but if he had endured in righteousness he would have had access to the tree of life 3:22. The law that is written on all of our hearts was written on his heart to guide him in the way. The word covenant does not occur in Genesis but it would have been very clear to those Moses was writing for.

This is a most important covenant for us to know because each and every one of us born to Adam in sin is still under this covenant of works. We are all born dead in Adam with all the demands of God's law upon us saying 'Be perfect as I am perfect, or else.' If Adam had wanted to live in eternal fellowship with God he had to obey the law of the arrangement God had put him in. Adam had the advantage of being sinless, of having the law on his heart, of having all he needed in order to do what God said, it was not God asking for the impossible, but that which he was abundantly supplied to do. However, despite all these advantages he failed, and he pulled all of us down with him so that we are born with a criminal record, with a corrupt nature, and in a fallen world that makes any possibility of us having eternal fellowship with God by our obedience an impossibility. The world today is unaware of its sinful plight before God because it has rejected the historical Adam, but Paul helps us to see where we stand. Paul tells us that we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, he uses the law to show up our sin, and he points out that we cannot use the law to save ourselves as Adam could have because we are fallen, Rom. 3:19-20. One day when we stand before the throne of God and he judges us according to our works, He will be judging us to see whether we have succeeded where Adam failed, and if we have to stand before God trusting in our good works to get us into heaven, there is no hope for us.

The third covenant that we need to know is the covenant of grace. And as we move from Adam to Christ so we move from works to grace to indicate that God will make a way into eternal fellowship with Him that does not come through our own works but by His grace. Genesis 3:15 has the first promise of this working of God for us because we have no chance of saving ourselves.

'I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.' Adam and Eve have eaten the fruit and God has come to deal with them. These are the first recorded words of God to the devil and in them we find the first preaching of the gospel, the first promise of a gracious God delivering a sinful people from Satan. Analyse these words with me.

'I will put enmity between you and the woman.' 'I' refers to God declaring and instigating a war. If He had killed Adam and Eve for their sins there would be no war, but God in His mercy is going to delay their final death and turn sinners into worshippers who will resist the devil and his ways. Eve was to be the mother of all the living and so the war is between her and her offspring and Satan.

'Between you offspring and her offspring.' Now this is not merely a prophecy about how much trouble man is going to have with literal snakes. If this were the case we would have to say NZ is the new heavens and earth because it has no indigenous snakes. The offspring of Satan here is interpreted for us in the words of Christ when he accuses Jews of having Satan as their father, John 8:44. This is a prophecy of a generational war where men who do not believe will persecute those who do; they will be influenced by the prince of the air to make them attack God's people.

'He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.' Please notice that God moves from speaking about the general offspring to the specific 'He' and 'you'. God moves away from speaking about the devil's offspring to speaking about the devil himself, and when He speaks of a particular son of Eve, He is of course referring to Christ. Christ will be injured in the victory, but it will not be fatal, where Christ will deal a death blow to Satan by crushing his head. That this is referring to more than the mere physical reality of men killing snakes by stamping on their heads, Paul quotes it in Romans 15:20 indicating that Christ's own victory will overflow into ours, 'The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.'

Here is the first promise of a covenant whereby God will save us because we can no longer by the covenant of works save ourselves. The promise of this salvation is developed throughout the other covenants of Noah, Abraham, Moses and David and finally climaxes and culminates in the New Covenant in Christ. There will be differences between Baptists and Presbyterians on how the covenants develop but what there is no disagreement about is that Christ is the one promised and the only saviour of sinners. So if you are asked, 'What do you mean by Covenant Grace?' We point them to Genesis 3:15 and speak about God stepping in to save us by promising a deliverer—even Christ. A covenant is a contract between two parties, here we see God promise to save sinners by Christ, He commits Himself to be a Saviour. By 'Covenant Grace' we are implying the covenant of grace. However, we mean more than this we mean that God covenanted to love us in eternity past and every action of history is God working out His purposes to keep that promise and satisfy His love for us. By covenant grace we mean a grace that is as certain and sure as the God's promise, it is as sure as the word of the God who cannot lie.

This name is all about the gospel and let me press that upon us now. All of history is divided into two camps under two covenant heads. Every human being is either in Adam or in Christ. When we are born we are born in sin, we are born as slaves and are incapable of satisfying the requirements of God's law that we might have eternal fellowship with God. Every single one of you was born in Adam, born under the covenant of works and under obligation to be perfect. If you are still in Adam, if you are still under the covenant of works you must flee to Christ. Here is the good news, God in His mercy sent another Adam, another champion for His people. This one was the God-Man. He was tested like Adam was tested, and He obeyed where Adam sinned. By His obedience He won the right for all His descendants to eat from the tree of life. But He did more than this, your sins still had to be paid for, so He not only lived a perfect life of obedience to win access to the tree of life, He also died on the cursed tree in order to pay for your crimes so that all your sins could be freely forgiven and you the sinner could live. Christ the King sent by God calls you now to join His kingdom, to put away your self-rule and submit yourself to Him, if you will turn to Him He will grant you an amnesty. Come out from the covenant of works where you must be a slave who can never work hard enough to save yourself, and come to Christ who has already fulfilled the covenant of works for us and offers us a full pardon as well as eternal life. This is covenant grace, grace that saves by Christ fulfilling the covenant of works on our behalf.

## **Grace**

The word 'Grace' really is the central part of our name. Covenant is an adjective but Grace is the noun it is describing. Historically the Reformed Baptists in the UK have changed their name from the Strict and Particular Baptists which speaks about their closed communion practices and belief in Particular Redemption to Grace as a positive summary of their theology. Grace comes to us covenantally but grace is what ultimately saves us. Grace we know is God's unearned/unmerited favour, when God does not give us the punishment we deserve for our sins but gives us the salvation we have not earned. We said earlier that the word 'Reformed' is not properly understood this word grace gets at the heart of what it means to be Reformed.

Being Reformed is being many things, it means that we hold to the rediscovered teachings when the bible was rediscovered at the time of the Reformation. It means that we hold the Bible to be our sole authority, hence the phrase *Sola Scriptura*. Therefore we hold to the regulative principle for worship where we allow God to tell us how to worship. It means believing the doctrine of justification by faith alone, hence the phrase *Sola Fide*. It means seeing Christ as the only mediator between God and sinners, so we say *Solus Christus*. And because it is God who saves us for we cannot save ourselves we believe God must get all the glory and we say, *Soli Deo Gloria!* And because we believe that we cannot earn salvation that salvation is by grace alone, *Sola Gratia!*

This last point has given rise to what has been called the five points of Calvinism. These are unfortunately named, for Calvin never gave out these five points, nor are these 5 the only things those who hold that Calvin saw some things in the bible clearly, believe. They have

been better names the doctrines of grace and I would like to outline these doctrines of grace for us very quickly.

The bible teaches us that man is dead in trespasses and sin, Eph. 2:1-3. The picture is striking, it means we are like zombies. The deadness shows itself in our enslavement to sin and being manipulated by satan. It displays itself in our dullness to spiritual things so that the gospel is foolishness to the natural man. Even though the knowledge of God is present everywhere in God's creation, no one seeks God no not one. Jesus says that we can only come to God if we are drawn by God. It is because of this deadness and our running from God not to Him that God must be gracious and make the first move. He seeks us when we were not seeking, His Spirit uses the word of the gospel and causes us to be born again and our renewed hearts are now freed to cling to Christ in faith and cast off sin in repentance. Because of our deadness we need God's regenerating grace to give us the new hearts promised in the new covenant from which we can love the God we hate and hate the sin we love. Grace comes to us when we are dead and resurrects us, grace awakens us to believe and repent, we were not seeking it, we were not even preparing the ground, we were dead and He saved us.

God did not save us for anything in ourselves. He did not look down the corridors of time and see how worthy we would be or at a hypothetical scenario of us believing. God is the architect of time, He is proactive and not reactive, He determines things He does not merely manage them. He perfect will is coming to pass He is not merely making the best of a bad situation. God is often portrayed as the one who runs around after us cleaning up and reacting to all the messes we make. Rather the bible paints a picture of a God who is sovereign over all things and that He has a plan from eternity which includes saving us. His plan is unconditional, it is based on His will not our works. If God had to consider any future actions of ours to save us we would most certainly be damned, election must be of grace or it cannot be at all.

This grace that elects to save unconditionally also secures the necessary pardon for those He chooses to save. The sufficiency of grace is so great that God sends a saviour to secure the redemption of His people. It is a definitive atonement that will save His people not merely a potential atonement that might save His people. It is a full salvation that dies for all the sins of all of the elect not merely part of them but all. God's grace does not secure part of our salvation and leave the rest to us but does all for all His people. Grace secures an actual and definite atonement.

But not only does God do all that is necessary by providing a sufficient saviour who secures a definite atonement, He also sends His powerful Spirit to ensure that all that has been done for the people He has loved from all eternity will be applied to them. When the day God appointed for them to believe comes, the Spirit is the one who gives them a new heart and they are inevitably drawn to the Christ they up until that day resisted. He portrays Christ before them as their saviour blessing the word preached to them to their understanding. He grants them the new birth and teaches them faith and repentance. By which they are converted. God graciously applies the secured salvation to us.

But it is not enough to deliver a baby but one must also raise it. God not only converts us but also grants all that we need for our journey to the heaven that is being kept for us. His Spirit works in many ways within us ensuring that the work God began will indeed be brought to completion, for He is the author and finisher of our faith. God's grace sustains us and grants us perseverance preserving us until the day we die or Jesus comes again.

By grace God enlivens dead sinners to believe and repent, by grace God chooses to save us not according to anything in ourselves but by His own will, by grace God provides a sufficient saviour who secures a definite atonement for His people not a possible salvation, by grace He works by His Spirit to ensure that every sheep comes, and by grace God ensures that no sheep is finally snatched from His hand and that each one is raised on the last day. Grace is the heart of the gospel, it is the tone of all of God's dealings with us and there is no better name for a people saved by that grace. This name points us to the God who saves and we shout out Soli Deo Gloria! Flesh cannot boast in His presence, for from Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to God be the glory forever. Amen!

In conclusion, all of God's dealings with us are covenantal, His grace is manifested to us in that Christ fulfilled the covenant of works for us according to the promise of the covenant of grace. Covenant grace is the heart of the gospel and God gets all the glory. What's in a name? if it is the gospel, then everything!