

Heirs *of the* Covenant

LEADER'S GUIDE

*Leaving a Legacy of Faith
for the Next Generation*

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Published by

„ 1998 Christian Education & Publications
1700 North Brown Road, Suite 102
Lawrenceville, Georgia 30043

*Dedicated to
the Members of Decatur Presbyterian Church
Decatur, Alabama.
They are what this book is about.*

When I submitted the manuscript for *Heirs of the Covenant*, I gave the publishers a working title. Three months later, our seventh grandchild was born. Annie Grace was the fifth child of our daughter Kathryn and her husband Dean. My middle name is Ann, and they decided that Grace is also a family name. Their rationale: we are saved by grace, we live by grace, we are in God's family because of His grace. Our family prayer was that Annie Grace's life would be a celebration of God's glorious grace and that she would always rest in the sufficiency of His grace.

A few days after Annie's birth we learned that she had a hole in her heart.

When Annie was about nine weeks old, the publishers called and asked me to consider the title *Heirs of the Covenant*. It immediately seemed right. My husband, Gene, and I discussed it and he confirmed that it was the right title.

When Annie was eleven weeks old, she had surgery to repair her heart. Her little heart was weaker than was thought, and she died a few hours after the surgery. Suddenly the title of this book became more than a title—it was God's sweet mercy to us. This title reminded us that Annie is in heaven, not because of her innocence, nor because she deserved it; Annie is in heaven because she was an heir of the covenant.

The content of the book also took on deeper meaning for me. The theme of the book is that the *content* of the covenant should be taught in the *context* of the covenant community living covenantally. As we experienced the body of Christ at work following Annie's death, I realized to a greater degree that this book is a feeble attempt to describe this phenomenon. I also realized that human language can never adequately describe the wonder and beauty of God's people living out the reality of their relationship with Him. Once again I am restricted by words, but I will attempt to describe what we experienced.

Kathryn and Dean are members of Decatur Presbyterian Church. Several people from the church were with us at the hospital during the surgery, but when we received word that Annie was not doing well, the waiting room soon filled with people. When the nurse took Kathryn and Dean to Intensive Care to stay with Annie, the church in the waiting room began to pray that God would give them grace to parent Annie to the gates of heaven. When the nurse let Gene and me into Intensive Care, we saw the incredible answer to those prayers. Dean was sitting in a rocking chair, Kathryn was in his lap, and they were holding Annie. I have never seen such extraordinary peace. They rocked Annie, talked to her about heaven, and told her how much they loved her. They told her that she would soon be worshipping Jesus face to face. After a while, we reminded them that the church was in the waiting room and asked if they would like to give others the opportunity to tell Annie good-bye. Kathryn and Dean could have clutched those last moments with Annie, but they acted covenantally. The covenant family began coming in two or three at a time. They kissed Annie. They wept. When Annie began worshipping God face to face, the church in the waiting room worshipped Him with her.

Over the next days and weeks, this covenant community continued to surround the family with tender love. They did not just weep *for* Kathryn and Dean; they wept *with* them. They believed that Annie had been entrusted to their church family, and they loved her. They did not stand at a distance and watch. They entered into her living and her dying, and they continue to care for her parents and siblings in remarkable ways. This congregation is faithfully taught about God's grace, and they faithfully cultivate an environment of grace. Carol Godwin, the wife of an elder in this church, wrote these words as a gift to Kathryn and Dean and their children. They are framed and now hang in their home.

*God sent us a little girl
Who changed us forever.
He showed us how to love, to suffer, and
To cling to Him through a tiny child that
Never said a word, but whose life spoke
More loudly than a thousand voices.
May His words sink into the depths of our
Souls and cause us to be more like Him.
We praise you, Lord, for teaching us
Through Your Grace.*

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Heirs OF THE Covenant

Psaalm 78:5-7 “He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands.”

CONTENT — *Covenant of Grace*

Psalm 119:130 “The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.”



CONTEXT — *Covenant Community*

John 17:20-24 “My prayer is... that all of them may be one...”



Colossians 3:12-14 “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”

CULMINATION — *Covenant Compassion*

Micah 6:8 “He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”



Colossians 2:2, 3 “My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

Dear Fellow Teacher,

Thank you for teaching this study. My prayer is that God will be pleased to use it to draw you closer to Himself and to your students. The need for prayer cannot be overstated. Please pray fervently for your students. I pray for you on Wednesdays. Will you join me and pray for others who are teaching and studying this book?

Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt His name together (Psalm 34:3).

Susan

PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY:

- To teach the content of the covenant of grace and to show how it applies to all of life.
- To cultivate a context of a covenant community that radiates God's glory to one another.
- To culminate in authentic Christianity that acts justly, loves mercy, and walks humbly with our God (Micah 6:8).

The opposite page visualizes this purpose.

Content

People hide in caves of isolation and ignorance. The process of encouraging them to come out is both *educational* and *relational*. We are to shine the light of God's truth (education) *and* love (relational) so that it becomes safer to be outside the cave than it is inside the cave.

Context

A part of the teaching process in Christian education is to help our students develop covenant relationships with one another and with others in the church family. Covenant life is intergenerational.

Culmination

The learning process is not complete until our students become covenant keepers who "put their trust in God . . . [and] keep his commands" (Psalm 78:7), who "act justly. . . love mercy, and . . . walk humbly with our God" (Micah 6:8).

Suggestion: Make copies of the visualized purpose and use it frequently during the study to keep your students focused on the purpose for this study. Put the responsive reading on page viii on the back. This can be used as a reminder of our three-pronged purpose.

Recommended: *The Micah Mandate*, by George Grant, would be an excellent follow-up to this study. It gives a thorough and balanced approach to acting justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with our God.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN TEACHING . . .

- Read the entire text and the Leader's Guide.
- Be sure to look over the *Resources* beginning on page 87.
- Look at pages 131-133 in the text again. Keep these questions and suggestions before you throughout this study. Particularly notice #1 under *Some Ways to Build Community in a Class*. If you do not have a leadership team, consider appointing one.
- Evaluate the atmosphere of your class. You may want to talk with others and get their perspective. Be intentional in cultivating a warm atmosphere.

WAYS TO USE THIS STUDY

Plan #1: Teach it in one quarter and follow the lesson plans as they are given in this guide.

Plan#2: Teach it in two quarters by teaching the bulk of the lesson one week and leaving a section such as *Living Covenantally* for the following week. The second week, use the same *Responsive Reading*, do a brief review, spend more time cultivating community in your class, and incorporate some of the ideas below:

Some weeks you may want to have a testimony, or a panel. (See suggestions below.)

- Schedule 1 or 2 fellowship days with coffee and donuts.
- Invite another age group to meet with you and “interview” them to get to know them better. If it is a younger group, ask some members of your class to share some life-lessons they wish they had known when they were the age of your guests. If it is an older group, ask them questions such as: What do you wish you had known when you were our age? What are some of the lessons you have learned about God? What are some cautions you think we need to hear?
- Have a planning day to implement some of the ideas in the book.
- Keep a list of questions and ask the pastor to take one lesson to answer the questions, or to go deeper into the content of the covenant.
- The lesson plans do not include the *Christian Education Ideas* at the end of each chapter. With this plan you can consider these during the second week of a lesson.
- Invite a panel of church leaders and ask questions such as: What is the greatest joy of serving as a _____? What is the greatest challenge? What is your prayer for our church? How can we pray for you?
- Create a comfort panel and ask people who have been through various trials to answer questions such as: What did people do that helped you through this time? Do you have other suggestions of things we should and should not do to comfort and help a person going through a similar situation? What did you learn about God through this experience?
- Create a life-stage panel and ask people who are in various life situations and stages to answer questions such as: What are some of the benefits of your life-stage? What are some of the spiritual lessons you are learning at this time in your life? How can we pray for you?
- Always give the questions in advance and tell the participants exactly how long they have for each question. Ask them to write out their answers and then to read them so that they stay focused. Plan your time carefully. If you allow 15 minutes for a panel, you have 3 people on the panel, and you have 3 questions, allow 1 minute per response. This will give time to introduce the panel and to ask the questions.

(This plan allows more flexibility in going through the material and more time to cultivate covenant relationships.)

Plan #3: For Teacher Training or Leadership Training with a Christian Education Committee:

- For a one-time training event, have all participants read the entire text in advance and then select portions to discuss.
- For on-going training, schedule 15 to 30 minutes at each teacher's meeting or CE Committee Meeting to discuss a chapter. You may want to ask each person to share one thought about what the chapter meant to him or her.
- For a CE Committee planning meeting, ask everyone to read the *CE Ideas* at the end of each chapter and to come prepared to consider which ideas would be helpful for your program.
- Be sure to read the *Resource* section beginning on page 87 and share these ideas with your CE Committee.

USING THE LESSON PLAN

You have permission to copy the *Supplementary Material* and the handout for each lesson.

The times given for each segment are suggestions based on a 45-minute lesson. Adapt this to your students and situation, but try to include all segments of the lesson.

Some of the suggested times may seem impossible to you. Try it, and you will be surprised how much discussion can be done in two or three minutes. The point of these times is not to have a thorough discussion, but to engage the class in discussing the material and to help them get to know one another. There will be some lesson plans with longer blocks of discussion time as the study progresses.

When you divide into small groups, simply have the students turn their chairs into small circles. Most people will discuss more freely in groups of four to eight.

Small group prayer times: Ask the groups to pray simultaneously. Explain that all groups should remain in prayer until you conclude the prayer time. Explain that they should not feel awkward if no one in their group is praying—they should simply pray silently.

You may want to have a worship leader to lead the *Responsive Readings*.

The discussion and prayer times are essential parts of this study. This will help move this study from an academic exercise to understanding the content of the covenant as you cultivate a context of covenant relationships. If you and your class are accustomed to a lecture format, small group discussions may seem daunting. Just try it. When your students learn to participate together in the learning process, their understanding of the material and their relationships with one another will be much richer.

You will frequently read sections of the text. Even though the students have read it individually, hearing it read again will reinforce and expand their understanding.

More instructions are given in the first few lessons. If an idea works well with your group, continue using it even though it is not repeated in other lesson plans.

Don't forget the *Resource* section beginning on page 87 of this Leader's Guide.

RECOMMENDED READING

The Micah Mandate, George Grant, published by Moody Press

Foundations of Christian Education, Addresses to Christian Teachers, Louis Berkhof & Cornelius Van Til, published by P & R Publishing Company

Shepherding A Child's Heart, Ted Tripp, published by Calvary Press

The Peacemaker, Ken Sande, published by Baker Book House

Responsive Reading

Leader: I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you (Genesis 17:7).

People: For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples (Deuteronomy 7:6, 7).

Leader: I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the LORD. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart (Jeremiah 24:7).

People: “As for me, this is my covenant with them,” says the LORD. “My Spirit, who is on you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth, or from the mouths of your children, or from the mouths of their descendants from this time on and forever,” says the LORD (Isaiah 59:21).

Leader: What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people” (2 Corinthians 6:16).

People: My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:2-3).

Leader: May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God (Romans 15:5-7).

People: Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity (Colossians 3:12-14).

Leader: He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8).

People: . . . Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow (Isaiah 1:17).

Leader: This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of each other” (Zechariah 7:9-10).

People: Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

Leader: Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world (James 1:27).

Heirs OF THE Covenant

LESSON 1 *Introduction*

Getting Ready

Lesson Objectives

1. To introduce the study.
2. To show the need for a vigorous effort to teach God's people a biblical world and life view by contrasting biblical and non-biblical approaches to education.
3. To stimulate enthusiasm about studying a covenantal approach to educating God's people.
4. To introduce the content/context principle.
5. To begin using small group discussion times to establish a pattern of teaching the *content* of the covenant while cultivating the *context* of a covenant community.
6. To introduce the idea of leaving a legacy of faith for the next generation by having members of the small groups discuss the legacy of faith that was left to them.

Scripture Meditation: Psalm 8 and Psalm 100

In Psalm 8, notice the theme of the majesty and excellence of God in creation. Also note that the name of God used is LORD, or Yahweh. This is His personal, or covenantal, name. This name reveals God to us as a personal God who has entered into a covenantal relationship with His people.

In Psalm 100, notice again the theme of creation and covenant: It is He who has made us; we are His people.

Lesson Preparation

1. Read and reflect on the *Scripture Meditation* above. You may want to incorporate these Scriptures into your lesson plan.
2. Pray. Pray. Pray. Pray for your students and for yourself. Pray for wisdom to understand the material and wisdom to apply it to your students. Pray for an atmosphere of grace in your class. Pray that the Lord will fill you with His grace and that you may touch your students with grace.

3. Read the material on page vii of this Leader's Guide that explains the various sections of the lesson plan.
4. Read the *Foreword* and *Introduction* in the text, pages 11 to 16, several times.
5. Quickly read through the entire lesson plan on page 3, then read it slowly several times until you are familiar with it. Make whatever adjustments or adaptations you need to make.
6. Read the additional supplementary material on page 2. You may want to make copies of this to give out as extra reading for those who are interested.
7. Read the quotes on the handouts, and the sections of the text that are to be read aloud, several times. Students will understand it better by following along as you read it aloud *if* you read it smoothly and with proper emphasis. You may want to stop and make comments about your own thoughts.
8. Consider your students. Sometimes the topic of education is a volatile issue because people have made various choices about how they will educate their children. If there is this potential in your class, diffuse it by repeatedly emphasizing that this discussion is about the broad view of teaching God's people how to think and live. Obviously there are implications for how we make day school choices, but you need to be careful not to allow that discussion to deflect you at the outset. Your task is to teach a covenantal approach to faith and life. Parents must then apply the material as they make day school choices.
9. Make copies of the handout.
10. Have books to give to everyone.

Supplementary Material

“Non-Christians believe that the universe has created God. They have a finite god. Christians believe that God has created the universe. They have a finite universe. Non-Christians therefore are not concerned with bringing the child face to face with God. They want to bring the child face to face with the universe . . . (page 3).

“Non-Christians believe that man is surrounded by an absolutely unknowable universe. Man is grasping in the dark, except for the little light that his own mind is radiating as a headlight in the mist. Christians believe that originally man lived in the light of the revelation of God and that in Christ as the fact-revelation and in Scripture as the Word-revelation, man is in principle restored to that true light of God . . . (page 3).

“Perhaps one of the most important points in this connection is to note that on the impersonalistic basis of our opponents there is no forensic relationship between man and his environment. How can anyone stand in a forensic relationship to an impersonal law? You cannot get any notion of what it might possibly mean that you should be legally responsible to law as such. Now the whole structure of Christian ethics or morality presupposes this forensic relationship. Scripture defines sin as a transgression of the law of God. Without the possibility and the actuality of a forensic relationship between God and man, the whole doctrine of sin falls by the board. And if sin falls by the board, the only thing that can be done with the evil in this world is to knit it into the constitution of the universe. . . Thus all ethical distinctions are reduced to metaphysical distinctions. “What ought to be is, and what is ought to be” is not merely the philosophy of certain philosophical schools but is the philosophy of all nonregenerate thought. And a consequence of this is that no Christianity is possible. There would be no sin and therefore no sin to remove. And if there were sin to remove, there would never be anyone able to remove it since it would be impossible that

any one person appearing at any one point in the course of history should occupy the absolutely unique position that Christianity has attributed to Christ (page 8-9).

“The evolutionary theory is only a particular manifestation of this general tendency. It is quite hopeless to fight evolution in the public schools and think that in doing so you have gone to the bottom of the trouble. Back of evolution lies relativism and impersonalism (page 9).

When education is “based upon such a relativistic educational philosophy, the child is sure to learn that it really does not matter at all what he does (page 10).

“ . . . according to modern educational philosophy man is thrown entirely upon his own resources. This is but a natural concomitant of an impersonalist theory of reality. In an impersonal universe God can at the most be given the place of a collaborator with man in the field of knowledge. The void surrounds both God and man. Accordingly man makes himself the standard of truth” (page 10-11).

From Louis Berkhof and Cornelius Van Til *Foundations of Christian Education, Addresses to Christian Teachers*, ed.

Dennis Johnson (Philipsburg: P&R Publishing Co., 1990).

Lesson Plan

Cultivating the Context – 10 minutes

Divide the class into groups of five or six. Ask them to take a few minutes to get to know each other by completing this sentence: My favorite food is _____ and my favorite place is _____. You can begin this with early arrivals, and then as others come in let them form additional groups.

The title of this study is *Heirs of the Covenant*. Because of the covenant of grace, we have a glorious inheritance. Notice this theme as we responsively read these verses from God's Word.

Use the responsive reading on the handout.

Ask the groups to share their thoughts about the verses they just read. Suggest that perhaps they were struck with a new idea, or a fresh appreciation of our inheritance, or perhaps a particular verse was especially meaningful to them. If so, share that insight.

After two or three minutes, ask them to spend time thanking God for our inheritance. Suggest that they use words from the responsive reading to praise the Lord. If they are not familiar with praying Scripture in this way, explain that they may want to use the Romans 8 passage and thank God that we have received the Spirit of sonship and that we are co-heirs with Christ. Or they may want to use the Ephesians passage and thank God for his incomparably great power to us who believe. See page vii in this Leader's Guide for suggestions about small group prayer times.

After two or three minutes, conclude the prayer time.

Understanding the Content – 25 minutes

1. Introduction

Refer to #2 on the handout and read the quote. Explain that through this study we want to learn how the covenant of grace should grasp our lives and consciences, and that this involves teaching God's people—it involves the Christian education of God's people.

Too often people think of Christian education in the narrow sense of formal instruction. This study uses the term in the broad sense of educating God's covenant people to think and live Christianity. When we become Christians, we do not automatically think biblically.

Ask the class to turn to Romans 12:2. Emphasize that this is Christian education. We must be trained to think biblically.

2. Creation

The ultimate questions of life are:

Is there a God?

If so, how do I live in relationship to Him?

These are the ultimate questions because our answer determines our understanding of where we came from and why we are here. Thus our answer determines how we live. Answering these questions involves education. There are basically two approaches to education just as there are two approaches to faith and life: God's way and man's way. We need to understand the starting point and the result of both approaches. We cannot simply go into cruise control and assume that because we are Christians we and our children will think Christianly. We must be *trained* to have a biblical world and life view.

Read #3 on the handout.

There are two basic ways to view our lives and the world we live in:

- The world and we were created by a personal God and we live in relationship to Him.
- Neither we nor the world have any relationship to a Creator, therefore any meaning for our existence must be derived from within ourselves—we become our own god because we determine life's meaning.

Where does impersonalism lead us?

Refer to #4 on the handout. Read the two lists.

Ask the small groups to discuss question #5 on the handout.

Ask half of the groups to make a list of the difference the non-biblical approach will make in a person's thinking and acting, and half to discuss the biblical approach.

After about three minutes, ask the groups to report. Only spend a minute or two on this.

Then ask the groups to discuss question #6. You may want to explain that the point of this discussion is for the group to realize that education is not neutral. Regardless of the educational choices of individuals in the class, the Christian home and church must be actively involved in teaching a biblical world and life view to children and adults.

The *Scripture Meditation* and the *Supplementary Material* at the beginning of this lesson will help you in this discussion.

Christian education, whether it is in the home, church, or school, whether it is formal or informal, begins with God and teaches us how to live in relation to Him.

Two of the primary doctrines that determine how we educate God's people are the doctrines of creation and covenant.

Refer to the *Foreword*, on page 11 of the text. Read the first two paragraphs (the quote from Van Til and the paragraph that follows down to "hence it is covenant education.")

3. Testimony, page 13

We have considered the difference our view of creation makes. We will examine the covenant more in the remainder of this study, but hopefully you are beginning to see the importance and relevance of Christian education. As an introduction to this study, let's look at the author's own testimony.

Read or summarize the *Introduction*, page 13 to 16.

4. Content/Context

Go back to the paragraph on page 15 beginning, "Much has been written about the content of the covenant. . . ."

This content/context principle will be emphasized throughout the study. Teaching God's people involves knowledge and relationships. We are to teach the *content* of the covenant in the *context* of covenant relationships that reflect our covenant relationship with God. This is the covenant way, and this is what we will be exploring throughout this study. We will also be experiencing this through our discussion times.

You may want to refer to page vii of this Leader's Guide to give more explanation of the purpose of the discussion times.

5. Why We Do What We Do

Read page 18 (the conversation with Richie).

We could have this same conversation with someone making a decision about involvement in any ministry of the church; his approach to marriage, parenting, and grandparenting; or his participation in church life. We must know *why* we do *what* we do, or we will soon stop doing it or resent doing it. How we behave is driven by what we believe. So we must teach God's people to believe biblically—this is Christian education.

6. An Example

Refer to page 19-22 and read all or parts of the account of the Covenanters.

The King of Glory has bound Himself to us in a covenant relationship. These Covenanters understood this and it made a radical difference in how they thought and how they lived. Their view of the world and their own lives was shaped by their knowledge of Christ's Crown and Covenant. The more we know about Him and His promise, the more compelled we will be to live for His glory. My prayer is that this study will make a radical difference in how we think and how we live.

You may want to read or refer to Psalm 8.

Living Covenantally – 10 minutes

Divide into discussion groups again. Refer to #7 on the handout and ask the groups to discuss these questions. After about two minutes, ask the groups to move to the second question, then after a few more minutes, ask them to go to the last question. Explain that one theme you will be discussing throughout the study is our need to be intentional in leaving a legacy of faith for the next generation. We can begin to think about this by considering the legacy that was left to us. Remind your students that we can even learn lessons from a negative legacy.

Before you conclude with prayer, call attention to the assignment on the handout and emphasize the importance of reading the material and answering the questions at the end of the chapter in the *Becoming A Covenant Keeper* section, page 39. Encourage the students to write out their answers and bring their notes to class. Also suggest that they underline and make notes in the text so they will come prepared to discuss the chapter.

HEIRS OF THE COVENANT

Lesson 1

Introduction

Handout

1. Responsive Reading

Leader: Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you
(Genesis 17:3-7).

People: And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, “Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed” (Acts 3:25).

Leader: If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:29).

People: For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory (Romans 8:15-17).

Leader: At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:3-7).

All: For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe (Ephesians 1:15-19).

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2. In the American ecclesiastical world the doctrine of the covenant is almost entirely unknown. You can take up one work on systematic theology after another without finding a single chapter devoted to it. Such works as those of the Hodges, Thornwell, and Dabney form exceptions to the rule. Moreover, it is quite evident that in most of the churches of our land, even in those who theoretically subscribe to the doctrine of the covenant, this doctrine has no grasp on the life and the conscience of the people in general, and fails utterly to have a determining influence on the education of their children. (*Foundations of Christian Education*, by Louis Berkhof and Cornelius Van Til, edited by Dennis Johnson, P & R Publishing, 1990, page 65.)
 3. Non-Christians believe that the universe has created God. They have a finite god. Christians believe that God has created the universe. They have a finite universe. Non-Christians therefore are not concerned with bringing the child face to face with God. They want to bring the child face to face with the universe. . . (*Foundations of Christian Education*, Page 3.)

4. Two Views of Creation:

Impersonal

No personal God
Impersonal universe
No outside authority to whom I am accountable
No such thing as sin
Relativism
No truth
Every person his/her own standard

Personal

Personal God who created
Man given dominion over creation
We are accountable to God
God's Word is absolute truth
Sin is transgression of God's law
Jesus is the Way, Truth, and Life
God's Word is our standard

5. What differences will each view make in our world and life view?

Impersonal

Personal

6. What differences will each view make in what and how we teach?

Impersonal

Personal

7. Application questions:

- What is your reaction to the story of the Covenanters?
- What are your thoughts about studying a covenantal approach to educating God's people?
- Describe the legacy of faith left to you or to your generation.

ASSIGNMENT: Read Chapter 1 and answer the questions at the end of the chapter in the section
Becoming A Covenant Keeper, page 39.

Heirs OF THE Covenant

LESSON 2 - CHAPTER 1 *The Content of the Covenant*

Getting Ready

Lesson Objectives

For the students to know:

- Creation by a personal God means that we live in the presence of a personal God.
- Adam forfeited that privilege.
- Christ restored that privilege.
- The covenant of grace is the arrangement, the binding agreement, whereby God keeps His promise to be our God and to live among us.
- The purpose of our existence is God's glory. We can only glorify Him—reflect His character—as we live in His presence.

Scripture Meditation: Psalm 19

Notice the two themes of God's general revelation in creation and His special revelation in His Word. This special revelation is given to His covenant people. Again we see the themes of creation and covenant woven together.

Lesson Preparation

1. Read and reflect on the *Scripture Meditation*. Pray through this Psalm, and then pray through the Lesson Objectives. Pray that these truths will permeate the life and conscience of your students.
2. Read Chapter 1, the *Lesson Plan* below, and the *Supplementary Material*. Then read the chapter again.
3. Work through the *Lesson Plan* and make it your own.
4. Make copies of the *Handout* for your students. You may also want to make copies of the *Supplementary Material*.

5. Option for the responsive reading:

In order to emphasize the continuity of the covenant throughout Scripture, cut up a copy of the responsive reading and attach the various readings with red string or heavy thread, using lengths ample enough to reach between people. (The red, of course, symbolizes the blood by which the covenant was fulfilled.)

Then, rather than the leader and entire class reading the scriptures responsively, each person will read the scripture passage in his/her hand. Not only will the thread symbolize the continuousness of the covenant but also our need to be a part of a community (attached to one another) in order to receive the full benefit of the covenant.

The Covenant of Grace

Now let us take a closer view of the covenant of grace. We do not intend—and in fact, it would be quite impossible—to discuss this in all its details, but will only stress the points that need elucidation in an intelligent discussion of this subject. We generally speak of the covenant of grace as being that gracious compact or agreement between the offended God and the offending sinner, in which God promises salvation through faith in Christ and the sinner accepts this believingly. It may be well to use an illustration that will serve to bring out just what the covenant of grace involves, before we stress some of the more important particulars of the covenant relation. We should bear in mind, however that the illustration conveys to us only an imperfect approximation of the truth.

Let us imagine a rich and beneficent slave-holder with a thousand slaves, who are in duty bound to labor faithfully for their master, without any claim to reward, it is true, but with the assurance that, after a period of faithful labor, they will obtain their freedom. After a period of scrupulous attention to duty the slaves gradually grow restive under the yoke, begin plotting against their master, vent their dissatisfaction in murmurings and grumbling and muttered curses, which like the distant thunder announce the coming storm, and finally break into an open revolt in which they seek to shake off their fetters and to overthrow once for all the regime of their landlord. But the latter is well disposed toward his mutinous bond-servants and is anxious to raise them to a higher level. So he himself opens the way to a full and free pardon, though it involves a great deal of self-sacrifice, and resorts to all possible means to insure their future obedience. He even condescends to come down to their level and to deal with them as on a footing of equality. He makes a compact with them, in which he promises to pardon their insurrection, to adopt them and their children into his own family with the full rights and privileges of children, and to make them and their descendants heirs of his extensive possessions; and they, in turn, accept his pardon on the stipulated conditions, vow obedience to him as their lord, and pledge themselves to his service. Naturally they, as bond-servants, were in duty bound to accept whatever arrangement their master might make, and after the compact was closed they were doubly obliged to honor its provisions. Moreover, it was in their interest that they should live up to the terms of the agreement, since it opened up the brightest prospects for them and their children, and brought to them what they could in no way hope to merit by their labors – a congenial home, the precious gift of liberty, untold riches, the pleasure of life, and a choice society in which to move.

Now if we reflect on this covenant arrangement which may, at

least in a measure, serve to illustrate the agreement between God and the sinner in the covenant of grace, we shall notice that, while it certainly has all the essential characteristics of a covenant, it is yet marked by certain peculiarities. There are in this, as in every other covenant, two parties; but the parties are not of such a nature that they can meet on a footing of equality. This is something unusual. We do not ordinarily find a slave-holder making a covenant with his slaves. In his estimation they have no rights that would entitle them to such consideration. He simply issues his commands, and expects them to obey.

Thus our attention is directed at once to a very important feature of the covenant of grace. The distance between God and man is infinitely greater than that between a landlord and his slave, for the latter does not transcend the measure of the purely human. However different their social standing may be, the master and the bond-servants are all men and in that respect equals, and even the latter have certain rights which the former may not disregard. But God is far greater than man; he gives no account of his doings; he is not under obligation to any of his creatures. To the sorely afflicted Job, crushed and perplexed, who had shown an inclination to question the doings of the Almighty, he says: “Who then is he that can stand before me? Who hath first given unto me, that I should repay him? Whatsoever is under the whole heaven is mine” (Job 41:10,11). Man has absolutely no rights in relation to God. God has but to command, and man is in duty bound to obey. And not only that, but sinful man has actually forfeited his life, and forfeited whatever rights he might have had in virtue of an original divine grant.

In the covenant of grace, therefore, we find two very unequal parties: the infinite God, the Creator of the universe, “glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders” (Exod. 15:11), and finite man, a transient creature of the dust, sinful and polluted. The one is the rich possessor of all things, man included, and the other merely a steward of treasures entrusted to his care; the one has rightful claims on the life, the possessions, the time, and the service of his creatures, and is under no obligation to them, and the other is in duty bound to render all to God and yet obtains no claim to any reward; the one can offer riches and honor and joys beyond compare, and the other can offer nothing, not even the bankrupt life which he sometimes calls his own.

In view of this fact it is no wonder that some theologians do not reward what we usually call “the covenant of grace” as a covenant at all, but prefer to speak of it simply as a divine arrangement, a gracious disposition, or a testament, thus stressing the one-sided character of the transaction. And undoubtedly, in its original and in its effective operation, the covenant is one-sided. At the same time it is clearly represent-

ed as a covenant in Scripture, and being essentially a covenant, it is necessarily of the nature of an agreement between two parties. God condescended to come down to the level of man in the covenant of works, and promised to reward a temporary obedience with life eternal. Again, he condescended to come down to the level of sinful man in Christ, and now in the covenant of grace offers eternal life in all that accept Christ by faith. The gracious element that was present even in the first covenant is far more pronounced in the second. What condescending love in God to enter into covenant relationship with sinners in Christ! Well may we be grateful for the dignity thus bestowed upon us, sinful creatures.

In the illustration used I pointed out that it involved a great deal of self-sacrifice on the part of the landlord to enter into covenant relation with his bond-servants. The same thing applies where God enters into a covenant of grace with sinners. He could not simply come down to the level of willful transgressors and make a covenant with them without maintaining his justice and safeguarding his holiness. He could deal with sinners only in the person of someone who undertook it voluntarily to be their surety and who guaranteed that the demands of justice would be met both objectively and subjectively, i.e., that the inflexible justice of God would be satisfied by a sacrificial death, that the original demand of the law would be met by a life of obedience, and those who would share in the blessings of forgiveness would also consecrate their lives to God. Now there is nothing peculiar in the fact that there should be a surety in the covenant of grace. This is a rather common occurrence in covenants. The moral or financial standing of one of the parties to a transaction may be of a rather dubious character, thus making a surety or guarantor quite essential. In our day great companies exist for the

purpose of supplying the necessary bonds. But in the covenant of grace the striking thing is this, that the party known to be absolutely reliable himself supplies a surety for the bankrupt party with which he is dealing. God gives his only-begotten Son, and the Son voluntarily takes it upon himself to become a surety for lost and helpless sinners. Here too the gracious nature of the covenant shines forth.

Wouldst thou learn the depth of sin,
All its bitterness and pain?
What it cost thy God to win
Sinners to Himself again?
Come, poor sinner, come with me;
Visit sad Gethsemane.
Wouldst thou know God's wondrous love?
Seek it not beside the throne:
List not angels' praise above,
But come and hear the heavy groan
By the Godhead heaved for thee,
Sinner, in Gethsemane.

From Louis Berkhof and Cornelius Van Til *Foundations of Christian Education, Addresses to Christian Teachers*, ed.
Dennis Johnson (Philipsburg: P&R Publishing Co., 1990, 68-71.).

Lesson Plan

Cultivating the Context – 10 to 15 minutes

As people arrive, ask them to form groups. Refer to #4 in the section *Becoming A Covenant Keeper*, page 39. Ask the groups to share about a “Mrs. Johnston” in their life.

The King of Glory has promised that He will be our God and we will be His people. He has promised to live among us. As we read the responsive reading, notice how this promise runs through Scripture.

Use the responsive reading on the handout.

This covenant promise should make a radical difference in how we think and how we live. The more we know about God and His promise, the more compelled we will be to live for His glory.

Refer again to *Becoming A Covenant Keeper*, page 39, and ask the groups to discuss their answers to #2.

After about five minutes, ask the groups to spend time thanking the Triune God for His work on our behalf. Encourage them to use the words of Ephesians 1 as they pray.

Conclude the prayer time.

Understanding the Content – 25 minutes

1. Introduction

Last week we pointed out that two of the primary doctrines that determine how we educate God’s people are creation and covenant.

In Genesis 1 and 2 we read that God spoke, and creation came into existence; He created man in His own image, male and female He created them; and He gave man dominion over creation. Laced through that account is the reality of a personal God who exists in perfect unity within Himself. We saw how the harmony of the Trinity in the work of our salvation is expressed in Ephesians 1. The truth that we are created in the image of a personal God, and that we live in relationship to Him, gives definition to whom we are and how we are to live.

2. The Covenant of Grace

Adam and Eve lived in God’s presence. He visited with them and talked with them. When they sinned, they forfeited this privilege, because sin separates us from God. Human history could have ended at that moment. But “before the creation of the world,” God had provided for human history (Ephesians 1:3-5). What did God do?

If necessary, refer to the third paragraph under *The Covenant of Grace* on page 25 and emphasize that God *came*, He *called*, and He *clothed*. This is the essence of the covenant of grace. This is the essence of the Gospel.

God made a way for us to live in His presence. He comes to us, He calls us by name, and He clothes us with the perfect righteousness of Christ so that we are no longer separated from Him. The covenant promise to Adam and Eve, and to us, is: I will still be your God, you will be my people, and I will live among you. The covenant provision is Jesus. God provides the sacrifice to satisfy His wrath against sin and to cover our nakedness before Him. This is undeserved. This is grace.

So human history did not end. From the moment that God came to the Garden and promised to send One who would destroy Satan and redeem us, redemptive history began to unfold and to move toward the consummation that we see in Revelation 21. Human events only make sense when viewed in light of redemptive history.

The covenant is the arrangement whereby God keeps His promise to be our God. The covenant is the scheme, or system, through which we interpret Scripture. So the covenant is the system through which we understand life because the covenant is the way we relate to God. It is because of the covenant that we can live in His presence. The knowledge that we live in His presence determines our view of the world and of our life.

3. What Is My Covenant Privilege? page 33

As we consider developing a biblical world and life view, is there any difference between the sacred and the secular?

Refer to page 34. Call attention to the paragraph “Moses was in the desert. . .”

The Old Testament is filled with amazing object lessons to teach us the centrality of this blessing of living in God’s presence.

Refer to page 34-36. Use the following questions to summarize the material from Exodus 33 and 34.

Why did God threaten not to go with the people into the promised land? (They had made and worshipped the golden calf.)

What word does God use to describe them? (Stiff-necked.)

On what basis did Moses plead with God? (Not the people's performance, but God's covenant promise.)

How did God respond? (My Presence will go with you. Note the result: rest.)

What difference does God's presence make? (It is what distinguishes us from all other people on the planet.)

What did Moses ask to see? (God's glory.)

What was the result of Moses seeing God's glory? (He radiated glory.)

4. What Is Our Purpose In Life?

Refer to #2 on the *Handout*. Ask the question and let the class respond.

The reason for our existence is to glorify God. When Moses asked to see God's glory, what did God show Him?

Refer to Exodus 34:5-11, page 35. Explain that God showed His character. When He proclaimed Himself as The LORD, He used His personal name Yahweh. This revealed that He is a personal God who lives in covenant relationship with His people. He revealed Himself as compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, and forgiving. This is His character. This is His glory. We glorify Him by reflecting His character as we live in relationship to one another. We know His character by studying His Word which is His self-revelation.

5. The Presence

Now let's trace this idea of the Presence in some other passages.

Beginning in Exodus 35, God gives instructions for building the tabernacle.

Read, or ask someone to read, Exodus 40:33-38. The glory of God filled the tabernacle. This was the visible manifestation of God's presence among His people.

When Israel was settled in the promised land, Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem to replace the tabernacle. The account of the dedication is thrilling.

Read 2 Chronicles 7:1-4.

This object lesson foreshadowed the One who would come and live among us and fulfill the covenant promise.

Read John 1:1-5, 14.

Refer to page 29. Read "Even His name confirms the promise," and ask the class to read Matthew 1:23 in unison. Continue (you read the text and the class read the Scriptures) through the Revelation passage.

6. Characteristics of the Covenant, page 30.

Explain that you will only look briefly at these characteristics of the covenant, because as you move through the remainder of the study you will encounter them repeatedly. In a sense, the remainder of the study will explain these characteristics. This overview will help to see the framework of a covenantal approach to faith and life.

You can simply read the list and give one summary statement about each. Where a longer explanation is given, you may want to select one statement within the explanation.

7. What Is My Covenant Responsibility? page 36

Read this section.

Living Covenantally – 5 to 10 minutes

Divide into small groups and ask them to discuss #3 on the handout. You may want to signal them to "move along" by telling them when to go to the next question. Allow about 2 minutes for the first question and the remainder of the time for the second question.

Conclude the discussion by reminding the class that we cannot reflect God's character through self-effort. This is a work of grace. It means being conformed to His image by renewing our minds as we learn more about who He is and what He has done for us. When we reflect His glory, we are leaving a legacy of faith to those who are watching us.

Call attention to the assignment on the handout.

Heirs OF THE Covenant

Lesson 2 - Chapter 1 *The Content of the Covenant*

Handout

1. Responsive Reading

Leader: Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.

People: Who is this King of glory?

Leader: The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.

People: Who is he, this King of glory?

Leader: The LORD Almighty—he is the King of glory (Psalm 24:7-10). *It is this King of glory who has promised to be our God. He said to Abraham:* I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you (Genesis 17:7).

People: I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians (Exodus 6:7).

Leader: I am the LORD who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy (Leviticus 11:45).

People: I will put my dwelling place among you, and I will not abhor you. I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people (Leviticus 26:11, 12).

Leader: For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples (Deuteronomy 7:6, 7).

People: You are standing here in order to enter into a covenant with the LORD your God, a covenant the LORD is making with you this day and sealing with an oath, to confirm you this day as his people, that he may be your God as he promised you and as he swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Deuteronomy 29:12-13).

Leader: I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the LORD. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart (Jeremiah 24:7).

People: “This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people (Jeremiah 31:33 and Hebrews 8:10).

Leader: This is what the LORD Almighty says: “I will save my people from the countries of the east and the west. I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem; they will be my people, and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God” (Zechariah 8:7, 8).

People: What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people” (2 Corinthians 6:16).

Leader: For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good (Titus 2:11-14).

People: Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.

Leader: I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

All: And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God (Revelation 21:1-3).

2. Q. What is the chief end of man?

(*The Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Question 1)

A. Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

3. Application questions:

- For the Christian, there is no division between sacred and secular. All of life is sacred because it is lived for God's glory and in His presence. What difference does this make in your attitude about the seemingly routine tasks of life?

- Our purpose in life is to glorify God. We glorify Him by reflecting His character. Read Exodus 34:6-7. What difference does it make when God's people reflect His character in our families? In our church?

ASSIGNMENT: Read Chapter 2 and answer the questions in the section *Becoming A Covenant Keeper*, page 62.