

The Institute for Catechesis and Formation
ICF 101 – Christian Anthropology

Week 3: The Household of God

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God enters into a series of covenants with man in preparation for the fulfillment of His promised salvation in Jesus Christ. A covenant is not a pact built upon reciprocity, but a free gift, a creative act of God's love for us.

It might be good here to distinguish between a covenant and a contract. Both are to be agreed upon by each party, but a covenant is an exchange of persons and is irrevocable. A contract maybe an agreement or exchange between persons but there are terms that always provide for an escape clause; or as it's often put, a parachute clause. In other words the exchange can be revoked and it is the terms that are exchanged. In a covenant, the exchange is between persons, giving one to the other, and it is permanent.

God initiates the covenant as an offering of Himself, and man is free to accept or reject God's friendship.

- Original covenant with Adam is broken by original sin.

We spoke about this last week. The eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil was a sin against an immeasurable Being and threw man into disorder. Both the original state of holiness and original justice had been disordered as a result of man's free act.

These two things (holiness and justice) should give us an idea of what exactly salvation consists of, i.e., their restoration. In other words, they cannot be separated.

- Covenant with Noah brings about a new creation.

Here we have the story of a single righteous man and his family. The whole idea of a recreation is evident...a beginning again, this time not with a couple, but a family. But ultimately, nothing has really changed, as man disowns God again!

- Covenant with Abraham draws humanity together (Gn. 15) The Father of new life for God's plan of salvation (Gn. 12) Foreshadowing of God's sacrifice of Christ (Gn. 22).

Now as God enters the covenant with Abraham, we saw with Adam the establishment of a covenant with a couple, then with Noah a family, now we see God forming a relationship with a people through Abraham.

Now, the Israelites did become a light to the nations, so the promise on the part of His people was partially fulfilled.

Then there was Moses (the outline omits this). With the covenant between God and with His people through Moses, we find the Israelites enslaved in Egypt. We know the story of Moses being raised Egyptian, Moses venturing into the wilderness and eventually meeting God in the form of a burning bush. He then is commanded (Moses starts with the excuses) to return to Egypt and set God's people free.

Once released (in order that they may rightly worship) and in the Sinai desert (a pilgrimage of God's people), God tells them in Exodus 19, "If you obey my voice, I will make you a kingdom of priests." It is then that God gives His people the Ten Words. After all this, the Israelites still chose to break the covenant and worship the 'golden calf.'

- David receives the promise that the Savior will come from his line (2 Sam 7).

There was a long period after this Mosaic covenant that the Israelites were ruled by Judges. God did not want His people to have a king. But God did yield to their request and provided a monarchy; the prophet Samuel anointed the young man David, and then eventually, his son Solomon (the one who built the great Temple).

Using familial language, God renewed His covenant with David and declared it to be everlasting. The promise was that through David, an offspring shall come and rule for ever. This of course foreshadowed the Messiah Jesus Christ.

In the covenants God works in and through the personal weakness and sinfulness of the ones who represent His people. He works through sin and human frailty, and His actions and encounters with man are transformative.

Have you noticed a common theme in the series of successive covenants? Mankind has always fallen short and broken the covenant, but God continually rewards faithfulness.

How are things going with your covenant with God? I would imagine no different than mine...so again, little has changed

God brings order to His creation from the chaos caused by sin.

Recall the Scripture that does not say, "God's plan will always be followed by those He loves," but "God works all things for the good of those who love Him."

Oikonomia (economia) – God's Household

We are God's family and He cares for us (His household) through a kind of "divine pedagogy":

- Creating "boundaries" to restore order - Commands and precepts designed to help us flourish and become free (10 Commandments, Ex. 20).

Let's stop here and talk about freedom again. We must distinguish between 'freedom to' and 'freedom from'. The issue is that most people cannot reconcile how freedom and law go together. Freedom always seems to be antithetical to law and law seems to impede one's freedom.

'Freedom from' is important, it is describing liberty or autonomy. But this is really the only modern understanding of freedom, which means that any restraint, any laws placed on an individual's person or actions is seen as limiting one's freedom.

- Teaching
- Disciplining
- Healing

These are all part of those boundaries. Teaching and Disciplining seem obvious in how they provide those boundaries, but we're not so certain about Healing. We find it hard to make sense of why some are healed and others are not, but the trick is to keep the whole body of Christ in consideration. If I had a series or terminal illness, my healing would not primarily be for myself, but a witness to the community. So we then fall into this mindset that suffering does not make sense. But the syllogism is this: There is a purpose to life, suffering is part of life, therefore suffering has a purpose. It's not just a matter of keeping us dependent on God, but to understand it as part of the human condition.

Everything God does – teaching, disciplining, giving us boundaries – is oriented toward the good of the person and our happiness; an expression of His love for us; to teach us the right use of our freedom; and to forge an intimate friendship with Him.

Before striking the final covenant with us, God sends **prophets** to foretell the coming of Salvation, to teach the people God's ways, and train them in what is good and true. A prophet is a **truth teller**, and challenges the lifestyle and attitudes of the people.

When we think of a prophet, we quickly think of 'future telling' don't we? But is is really 'truth telling' that is the primary way a prophet is oriented.

What is the role of a prophet?

The prophet:

- Is called out of his comfort zone.
- Called to personal conversion.
- Tells the truth.
- Calls others to conversion.
- Must have humility.
- Faith and radical dependence on God.
- Often endures persecution and suffering.

The last of the Prophets is John, son of Zechariah and Elizabeth. He is the Forerunner of Jesus Christ – the Friend of the Bridegroom

The need for a savior:

- Restore image and likeness.
- Reveals the Father's love.
- Grace to overcome sin.
- Definitive defeat of death (He has destroyed death by undergoing death. He has despoiled hell by descending into hell. He vexed it even as it tasted of His flesh. Paschal Homily, St. John Chrysostom) .
- The Way of pilgrimage back to the Father (cf. Jn 14:6).

We're now going to conclude by talking about the Christological dimension of the human person, but first I want to add something to God's covenantal plan unfolding up to the point of Christ.

What was not mentioned was the Wisdom literature. There came a point where, and we must speak very generally and almost pedestrian here, that the words of poets needed to take over. God had been wooing His people, and the final conversation before the consummation (Jesus the Christ) was 'love talk.' Then we find a period that some have spoken of as a silence...this period between Maccabees and the Christian New Testament. Let's just leave it at the notion, that at some point in this crescendo of God bringing His people to Himself, just like in our own experience, words ceased and the anticipation grew...then Christ was born of a Virgin and became flesh for us.