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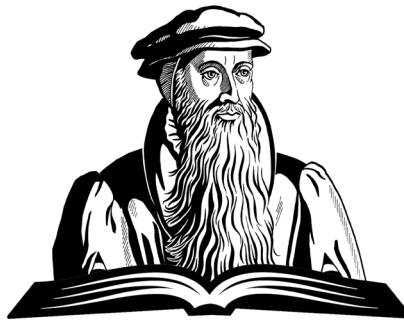
Shorter
CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #14

The Covenant of Grace
Catechism Question 20



The John Knox Institute
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Rev. Jonathan Mattull is minister of the gospel at Sovereign Grace Presbyterian Church, in St. Louis, Missouri, a congregation of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), Presbytery of the United States of America.

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16. The Incarnation—*Question 22*
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26. Sanctification—*Question 35*
27. Blessings of Salvation in this Life—*Question 36*
28. Blessings of Salvation at Death—*Question 37*
29. Blessings of Salvation at the Resurrection—*Question 38*
30. The Duty Required of Man—*Questions 39 through 42*
31. The Ten Commandments—*Question 43*
32. The Ten Commandments: Love for God—*Questions 45–8*
33. The Ten Commandments: Love for God's Worship—*Question 49–52*
34. The Ten Commandments: Love for God's Name—*Questions 53–56*
35. The Ten Commandments: A Day for Holy Love—*Questions 57–59*
36. The Ten Commandments: Love for God's Day—*Questions 60–62*
37. The Ten Commandments: Love within Our Relationships—*Questions 63–66*
38. The Ten Commandments: Love for Life—*Questions 67–69*
39. The Ten Commandments: Love for Purity—*Questions 70–72*
40. The Ten Commandments: Love for the Lord's Allotment—*Questions 73–75*

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42. The Ten Commandments - Love from Within—*Questions 79 thru 81*
43. Understanding Our Sin—*Questions 82 thru 84*
44. Escaping God’s Wrath and Curse: Saving Faith—*Questions 85 and 86*
45. Escaping God’s Wrath and Curse: Repentance unto Life—*Question 87*
46. Escaping God’s Wrath and Curse: Means of Grace—*Question 88*
47. Means of Grace: The Word of God—*Questions 89 and 90*
48. Means of Grace: The Sacraments—*Questions 91 thru 93*
49. Means of Grace: Christian Baptism—*Questions 94 and 95*
50. Means of Grace: The Lord’s Supper—*Question 96*
51. Means of Grace: Receiving the Lord’s Supper—*Question 97*
52. Means of Grace: Prayer—*Questions 98 and 99*
53. The Lord’s Prayer: The Preface—*Question 100*
54. The Lord’s Prayer: The First Petition—*Question 101*
55. The Lord’s Prayer: The Second Petition—*Question 102*
56. The Lord’s Prayer: The Third Petition—*Question 103*
57. The Lord’s Prayer: The Fourth Petition—*Question 104*
58. The Lord’s Prayer: The Fifth Petition—*Question 105*
59. The Lord’s Prayer: The Sixth Petition—*Question 106*
60. The Lord’s Prayer: The Conclusion—*Question 107*

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Lecture #14

The Covenant of Grace

Question 20: *Did God leave all mankind to perish in the estate of sin and misery?*

Answer: *God having, out of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer.*

Our past few lessons have surveyed the sad facts of sin in our fallen state. It would be just of God to have left all mankind in the state of sin and misery. We should remember that none of the fallen angels, known as demons, will ever experience God's mercy and grace. They will justly suffer for their rebellion. There is no hope for any of them. How excellent then that God has established something different for us.

In today's lesson, we consider question #20 of the *Shorter Catechism*. It introduces to us the way of salvation, which is, of course, good news indeed. Our question then is, "Did God leave all mankind to perish in the estate of sin and misery?" The answer: "God having, out of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer." Now there's a lot in this answer. But let's look at two words briefly before heading into our lesson.

You'll notice the word "salvation." This word is related to the word "save," that carries the idea of deliverance or rescue. And here the word refers to being delivered or rescued from the state of sin and misery.

Notice, as well, the word "Redeemer." The word itself refers to one that redeems. To redeem something is to make payment in order to gain possession of it. A redeemer then is one who makes that payment. We'll see that the Redeemer spoken of is Jesus Christ.

Well, let's move into our lesson, and we have three points: first, God's gracious election; second, God's Gracious Covenant; and third, The Relationship between God's Election and Covenant.

Well first then, God's Gracious Election. Our answer states: "God having, out of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life." This introduces us to that beautiful teaching throughout the Bible regarding God's gracious sovereignty in salvation. Let's start with the main point, "God...elected some to everlasting life." The word "elected" refers to the fact that God chose those who would have everlasting life. This is a truth that's taught throughout the

Bible. You can see this clearly in Ephesians 1, verses 3 through 6. Paul writes, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.” Jesus also mentions this very truth in his prayer recorded in John 17. He refers, in verse 6, to a specific people God the Father gave to him out of the world. Notice, he says, “I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me.”

What this means, as we look at these passages, is that God has chosen—or as our *Catechism* says, elected—a specific an unchangeable number of people. Paul uses the term “predestinated,” which is a word meaning “determined beforehand.” It is this people whom he will most certainly save, for they were determined beforehand for that to be brought to pass. Notice that he elected “some.” God has made a distinction. Jesus prayed for those that were given to him. He did not pray for the rest of the world, as he says in John 17. While all men deserve damnation for their sins, God chose to save some sinners by grace, through the redemption in Christ Jesus.

But why did he choose some? The Bible does not give us answers that satisfy all of our curiosity, however, it does give us to have some understanding. First, it tells us that he did not choose some because they deserved it. We could say this positively in saying, God chose those he chose freely. He did not look for them to do something. He did not look throughout history and find some who were good. We see this in many places, but notice 2 Timothy 1, verse 9. Paul writes of God, “who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.” God gave his chosen people, before the world began, as Paul says, to Jesus Christ. And he gave them to him that he would save them. This is not based on any works they did or would do. It was “according to his own purpose in grace.” This is what our *Catechism* means when it says, “of his mere good pleasure.” It’s a gracious choice.

Second, the Bible tells us that he did this to magnify his grace, to show his grace, and to display it. We see this in Ephesians 1, verses 5 and 6, mentioned earlier, when Paul says that all this was “according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace.” We see this also in Romans 9, verse 23, when Paul says that God did this to “make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory.” In other words, the fact that he did not punish every sinner with everlasting damnation, the fact that he chose to save some is a tremendous display of his grace. All throughout heaven, there will be praise given to God for his gracious way of saving sinners, which saving of them was because of his gracious choice of them.

Notice also that God has chosen them so that they would believe in Jesus Christ. In other words, he did not choose his people because they trusted in Jesus, he chose them so that they would believe in Jesus. The truth of election is simply another way we see what the Bible teaches throughout all of its pages, that salvation, deliverance, the rescue of sinners is by grace alone. It is not based on foreseen faith or works. It is based solely on God’s grace.

Now, to summarize some important points regarding this teaching, notice the following. God delivers his chosen ones, his elect, out of the estate of sin and misery. He’s rescuing them from that. His chosen people, notice, do not enter into this world as believers. They enter this world as sinners in need of salvation. They are born into this state of sin and misery. But praise God, he saves them from that sin and misery. This is what he’s chosen to do.

Notice also that he delivers his elect into a state of salvation. He brings them to a place of safety and protection, and this is called “everlasting life”. Notice those precious words of Jesus Christ, found in John 17, verse 2—again, his High Priestly Prayer, as we often call it. He prays to his Father, “As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.” And so, as he prays to his Father, he’s acknowledging that he’s been given a certain number of people, and to them he will give eternal life—not just life, but eternal life. There’s much more to discuss about this everlasting life, but you can see even now, that his people are given a great blessing indeed.

And finally, as we have emphasized, notice that all of this is done by a Redeemer. God has chosen a people that they would be saved by a Redeemer. He’s not chosen them to be saved in a different way. He’s not chosen them to be saved by their works, or by their own efforts, or by some other thing. He’s chosen them that they should be saved by the Redeemer, even Jesus Christ.

Well, we’ve looked at God’s Gracious Election. Second now, let’s look at God’s Gracious Covenant. Notice the words in our *Catechism*, “covenant of grace.” We’ve already been introduced to another covenant, the covenant of life, also known as the covenant of works. But this covenant, however, is of grace. While the covenant of works promised life by the personal obedience of men themselves, this covenant operates differently. It works for the life of men by God’s grace. This covenant refers to the way, in other words, that God saves sinners. The covenant of works is only useful for one who has not sinned, and therefore, all of us have no hope by the covenant of works. But the covenant of grace is the way of salvation for sinners. You’ll remember that we discussed what a covenant is in question #12. The word “covenant” refers to a special relationship established between two or more people. In a covenant, there are promises, and responsibilities; there are often blessings for keeping those promises, and consequences for failing in our responsibilities.

Now, where do we find such a covenant of grace? Well, we cannot point to one single text in the Bible. Instead, we must point to the whole of the Bible, because the whole of the Bible is telling us of this gracious covenant. The Bible tells us that God entered into a covenant to save his people. There are far too many passages to look at every one, but we see an example of this, when God spoke to Abram, and changed his name to Abraham, in Genesis 17. Notice verses 2 and 7—God says, “I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly...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.” God is promising to be the God of Abraham and his children forever. He’s calling these people to trust him and to obey him. And so this covenant then becomes clearer and clearer throughout the scriptures. We see that the covenant promise is forgiveness of sins and everlasting life. We find that in the Old Testament, this forgiveness and everlasting life is foreshadowed and, as it were, displayed by the sacrificed animals that were offered up. And one good example of these sacrifices is found in Leviticus chapter 16. I encourage you to read the whole chapter, and you’ll see much of the detail that’s given there. But notice the effect of the sacrifice stated in verse 30 of Leviticus 16. It’s there we read, “For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the LORD.” The sacrifice was for the atoning of sins. “Atonement” means to bring forth forgiveness. The judgment, and the guilt, and the damnation that rests upon the sinner is now forgiven by virtue of the substitute and his sacrifice.

Well, as we read through the Bible, we discover that the animals that shed their blood were all pointing to that one Lamb of God, even Jesus Christ. It’s he who shed his blood. You’ll remember John the Baptist’s words, in John 1, verse 29. We read there that “John seeth Jesus coming unto him,

and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” The book of Hebrews explains this truth very clearly. It is by the shedding of Christ’s blood, that true forgiveness, that true eternal life is enjoyed. Notice Hebrews 9, verses 11 and 12: “But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.”

We can say that the Bible is the unfolding of this covenant of grace. We see the first whisper of it in Genesis 3, verse 15, when God promises that a descendent of the woman would destroy the serpent. He says there to the serpent, “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.” In other words, this singular seed, this singular descendent of the woman would be the victor over Satan. Well, this becomes clearer throughout the Bible. God established sacrifices, all of which pointed to the coming Savior. He gives promises of the coming Savior, and there are prophecies of the coming Savior. For instance, in Isaiah 53, verses 5 through 6, we read of Jesus Christ, “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

Well finally, the promised and prophesied Savior, Jesus Christ, comes. He accomplishes his great work, as is recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. This work is proclaimed throughout the book of Acts, and it’s further explained throughout all the epistles. And finally, John refers to Jesus in his writing of the book of Revelation. Notice chapter 1, verse 5—he mentions “Jesus Christ...that loved us, and washed us from our sins ion his own blood.” In other words, this covenant of grace, this way of salvation for sinners is taught from Genesis through Revelation. There is one way of salvation, and that way of salvation is by Jesus Christ. This is why the *Catechism* says that the elect are brought “into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer.” There’s no salvation for the elect without Jesus Christ. The covenant of grace directs us to be saved by this Savior.

There’s one covenant of grace. Of course, there are differences between the Old Testament and the New Testament. There were sacrifices offered in the Old Testament, and we no longer offer sacrifices. There were priests in the Old Testament, and there are no longer priests in the same way in the New Testament. And yet both the Old and New Testaments show us that there is one way of salvation. In fact, Paul indicates that the covenant made with Abraham is the same covenant by which we are saved today through faith in Christ. Notice Galatians 3, verses 16 and 17—he writes, “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.” In other words, the same promise, and the same covenant direct us to Christ Jesus. This is the only way of salvation—trusting in the only Savior, Jesus Christ. The one covenant of grace is what is taught throughout all of the Bible.

In his covenant, God gives promises and signs of those promises. We’ll think more about some of those signs later in our lessons. But we can see this generally as you think of the Old Testament. Think of the sign of God’s covenant, which was circumcision. This would be applied to believers, as in Abraham, and to their children. We can see this in Genesis, chapter 17. Circumcision pointed to the need to have our uncleanness removed. There’s something filthy and sinful about us that needs to be removed. Now circumcision itself didn’t remove that uncleanness, but it was a sign

pointing to it. We see it in the New Testament, with the sign of baptism. Baptism, of course, is applied to believers and their children as well, as in the case of Lydia and her household, in Acts chapter 16. Baptism is a sign that God will wash and cleanse his people from their sins. As water is applied to the one being baptized, it's pointing to the promises of God to cleanse us of our sins. In other words, these signs are, as it were, pointing out the message of the covenant. They're showing God's promises. God is offering to save sinners, and to do all that's needed in order that they would be saved.

Well, there's much more to say about the signs, as well as about the covenant of grace, some of which will come out in future lessons. But for this lesson, simply remember that this covenant of grace is that relationship that God establishes with us, by which he gives promises, and he offers to save us, through faith in the Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

Well third, notice The Relationship between God's Election and Covenant. God has been gracious to elect sinners unto everlasting life. And he has been gracious as well to enter into a covenant with them, promising salvation, and to his elect, applying salvation to them. But we must note some important relationships between these two truths of the election and the covenant. The *Catechism* presents to us both the fact that God has elected some to everlasting life, and that he did enter into a covenant of grace to deliver them. We should see that, in the relationship between these two truths, there is a distinction. God's election is not the same thing as his covenant. In other words, election and the covenant of grace are not synonymous. They're not referring to the same thing. God's election guarantees that those he has chosen shall be saved by Jesus Christ, and he brings this to pass by means of using his covenant of grace to their good. The promises he gives he makes effectual, and causes them to believe in those promises. We'll talk more about this later, an exciting and encouraging truth.

However, while God's elect are those whom he has appointed to eternal life, God's covenant will include both the elect and others. So let me explain. All those whom God appointed to everlasting life by Jesus Christ will be saved. However, not everyone in the covenant of grace are the elect. In other words, some in the covenant are chosen, others are not. We see this in God's covenantal dealings throughout the Bible. As one example among many, notice Isaac. He has two sons, Jacob and Esau. Both are born under God's covenant, both receive the sign of God's covenant, but only Jacob was chosen unto everlasting life. What you'll notice is that Esau was given many promises. However, he Esau despised those promises. He rejected the promises of the covenant. We see this as well in many of the Israelites mentioned who died in the wilderness. Hebrews 4 warns us today of rejecting the promises of God's covenant. It does so by reminding us of the Israelites, in chapter 4 and verse 2—we read there, "For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." In other words, though they were in covenant with God, and though they had heard the promises of that covenant, though they had the sign of God's covenant, yet they rejected the promises of the covenant and died in unbelief.

This tells us then how great a need we have for God to give us the gift of faith. You see, the covenant of grace holds forth the promise of everlasting life by Jesus Christ. It does so, calling us to believe upon him. And this, of course, is a great privilege that God himself comes to us in his covenant, and says, "I will be your God." He promises to forgive our sins, he promises to give us eternal life. But as the Bible shows, his promises in his covenant call us to believe him. In other words, we must trust his promises, we must believe the One who promises. And if we don't, we'll prove to be covenant-breakers.

Well, in light of this as we close, let me direct you to two things. First, there's reason to rejoice that God has made known the way of salvation by the covenant of grace. I doubt not that many of you are in this covenant. You should think of the many privileges that are yours. To you the gospel is preached. To you the Redeemer is made known. To you the Word of God is read. To you the way of salvation is held forth. To you, God says, "I will be your God, and you shall be my people." This is a privilege worthy of much meditation and thanksgiving.

But second, remember that this covenant calls you to trust in the Savior. In other words, do not rest satisfied with hearing of the covenant of grace. Do not rest satisfied with these privileges you are aware of. Instead, cry out to God to give you that faith, to trust in these promises. Study these promises. Study the covenant of grace. And as you do, plead with God to give you faith that you would trust the Savior who is held forth to you, who is offered unto you, and by whom you may have salvation.

Well, gladly, our next few lessons focus on this Savior. As we consider him, may the Lord bless us with faith to trust him, not just to learn about him, not just to learn right teaching regarding this Redeemer, but that he would give us faith that we might trust him and take hold of him as he is freely offered to us in the gospel.