

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

SOTERIOLOGY

The Doctrine of Salvation

By Grace Alone, Through Faith Alone, In Christ Alone, To the Glory of God Alone

UNIT 2: THE ETERNAL FOUNDATION

Election and the Covenant of Redemption

Lesson 4

The Covenant of Redemption

The Eternal Plan of the Triune God

The Pactum Salutis — Before the World Was Made

“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out”

Key Texts: John 6:37–39; 17:1–5; Ephesians 1:3–14; Isaiah 53:10–12; Psalm 2:7–9; Hebrews 10:5–10

“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.”

John 6:37–39, NASB 1995

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Introduction

When did your salvation begin? The question, put to most believers, will elicit an answer rooted in experience: the day I heard the gospel and believed, the Sunday morning I responded to an altar call, the evening in my bedroom when I prayed in genuine repentance for the first time. These answers are not wrong, they describe real events in the history of real souls, moments when the sovereign grace of God broke through into conscious experience with life-transforming power. But they are not the beginning. The beginning of your salvation is not located in any moment of your personal history, however decisive and irreversible that moment may have been. The beginning of your salvation is located in eternity, in a sovereign, Trinitarian, purposeful agreement made within the Godhead before the foundation of the world, before you existed, before the human race fell into the ruin from which it needed to be rescued, and before a single event of the redemptive history through which that rescue would be accomplished had yet taken place.

This eternal, intra-Trinitarian agreement is what Reformed theology has called, since the seventeenth century, the covenant of redemption, in Latin, the *pactum salutis*: the covenant, or pact, of salvation. It is the doctrine that stands at the head of Unit 2 of this Soteriology series, the unit devoted to the eternal foundation of salvation, because it is the eternal foundation of the eternal foundation. Before the election of the Father, before the decree of predestination, before the covenant of grace through which the benefits of salvation are administered to God's people across the ages of redemptive history, there was an agreement within the triune God Himself, between the Father who would send, the Son who would go, and the Spirit who would apply, that determined everything that would follow. The covenant of redemption is the headwaters of the entire river of saving grace.

The doctrine of the *pactum salutis* is among the most theologically profound and pastorally comforting in the whole of systematic theology, and yet it is among the least known in the popular life of the church. Most believers have never heard the term. Many would find the concept unfamiliar, the idea that the triune God entered into a binding intra-Trinitarian agreement with Himself, with defined roles and obligations and a guaranteed outcome, before the creation of the world. Yet the biblical evidence for this doctrine, as we will see in the course of this lesson, is both substantial and convergent: it appears in the Psalms' royal poetry about the Father's decree to the Son, in Isaiah's Servant Songs with their language of a mission assigned and a reward promised, in the high priestly prayer of John 17 with its retrospective account of a task completed and a people secured, and in the Pauline and Petrine letters with their repeated references to an election and a grace "given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began" (2 Timothy 1:9, NASB 1995).

This lesson will proceed through six major sections: the definition and historical development of the doctrine; the Father's role in the covenant of redemption; the Son's role and the biblical evidence for His willing acceptance of the terms; the Spirit's role in applying the redemption the covenant secured; the broader biblical evidence for the intra-Trinitarian covenant across both Testaments; and the theological and pastoral significance of the whole doctrine for the life of the believer and the mission of the church. Throughout, the governing conviction is the one that Calvin articulated at the beginning of the Institutes and that every subsequent lesson of this series has reinforced: the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves are inseparable, and nowhere is that inseparability more vividly displayed than in the moment when the believer discovers that the God who saved him has been committed to that task from before time began.

There is a pastoral warmth to this doctrine that tends to be missed by those who approach it as a piece of technical scholastic theology. The covenant of redemption is, at its heart, the answer to the question that every anxious soul eventually asks in the dark hours of the night: does God really mean this? Is His commitment to my salvation genuine, binding, and certain? Could He change His mind, or could some failure of mine undo what He has begun? The answer that the *pactum salutis* provides is not a philosophical argument about divine immutability, however true that argument is. It is a disclosure of the eternal seriousness with which the triune God has treated the salvation of His people: seriously enough to covenant about it within Himself before the world existed, seriously enough to send the Son into the conditions of human flesh and the horror of the cross to fulfill its terms, and seriously enough to commission the Spirit to pursue every last one of the elect with the sovereign, irresistible, life-giving grace that the covenant required. This is not a God who might change His mind. This is a God who covenanted.

I. The Pactum Salutis Defined

The Eternal Intra-Trinitarian Agreement and Its Place in the Covenant Structure of Scripture

A. *Definition, Terminology, and Historical Development*

The covenant of redemption (*pactum salutis*) may be defined as the eternal, intra-Trinitarian agreement between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit to plan, accomplish, and apply the salvation of a specific people chosen by the Father and given to the Son, an agreement in which each Person of the Trinity accepted distinct and complementary obligations, and in which the outcome was guaranteed by the immutable faithfulness of God Himself. The word “covenant” is used here in the technical theological sense that it carries throughout the biblical covenantal tradition: a formally established, binding agreement between parties, with defined terms, obligations, and promises, ratified by an oath or sign and certain of fulfillment. What makes the *pactum salutis* unique is that the parties to this covenant are not God and a creature but the three Persons of the one triune God, covenanting with one another in the eternal counsel of the divine will.

The doctrine received its most systematic development in the Reformed scholastic theology of the seventeenth century, particularly in the work of Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669), who made covenant theology the organizing framework of his entire theological system, and in Francis Turretin’s *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, which provided the most precise and technically rigorous defense of the *pactum*. Wilhelmus à Brakel’s *The Christian’s Reasonable Service* gives the most pastorally rich treatment. In the English-speaking world, John Owen’s *Communion with God* and his extended treatment in the posthumously published *Biblical Theology* provide the exegetical depth that grounds the scholastic formulation. The Westminster Confession of Faith, while not using the precise term *pactum salutis*, affirms its substance in Chapter VIII’s account of the eternal appointment of the Son as Mediator and in the Confession’s consistent reference to those whom the Father has “given” to the Son.

It is important to address at the outset a potential objection to the coherence of the doctrine: can there be a covenant within the one God, among the three Persons, when covenant by definition implies distinct parties? The answer that the Reformed tradition has consistently offered is that the three Persons of the Trinity are genuinely and irreducibly distinct, even while they are one in substance, essence, and nature. The Father is not the Son; the Son is not the Spirit; the Spirit is not the Father. These distinctions are real, not merely modal, they are the eternal personal distinctions that the Nicene tradition has always affirmed. The *pactum salutis* does not require that we speak of three gods covenanting with each other; it requires only that we take seriously the personal distinctness of the three divine Persons and recognize that those distinct Persons, in the one divine counsel, took on distinct covenantal roles with respect to the accomplishment of salvation. The unity of the divine will guarantees that the covenant is not a negotiation between competing interests; the distinctness of the divine Persons makes it a genuine covenantal agreement rather than a mere internal divine decree.

The *pactum salutis* is to be distinguished carefully from both the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, which are the two great redemptive covenants that Reformed covenant theology has traditionally identified as the organizing structure of the biblical narrative. The covenant of works is the pre-fall arrangement between God and Adam as the representative head of humanity, in which life was promised on the condition of perfect obedience and death was threatened as the consequence of violation. The covenant of grace is the post-fall

arrangement between the triune God and His people, in which the blessings of salvation are freely promised and received through the mediatorial work of Christ and the gift of faith. The covenant of redemption stands behind and beneath both of these, as the eternal, intra-Trinitarian ground from which they both flow: it is because the triune God covenanted within Himself to redeem a people that the covenant of works was established with Adam as its representative head, and it is because that covenant was violated and the pactum provided for its resolution that the covenant of grace was instituted after the fall. The pactum salutis is, in the most literal sense, the eternal foundation of the entire covenantal architecture of Scripture.

B. The Pactum and the Broader Covenantal Structure

Understanding the pactum salutis in relation to the broader covenantal structure of Scripture is essential for grasping its theological significance. The whole of biblical history is, in the Reformed covenantal tradition, a history of covenants: the covenant of redemption (eternal and intra-Trinitarian), the covenant of works (pre-fall, with Adam as federal head), and the covenant of grace (post-fall, progressively revealed through the Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New Covenants, and finally consummated in the Lord Jesus Christ). The pactum salutis is the eternal backstory of this entire history, the ante-temporal agreement that gives every element of the redemptive-historical sequence its theological ground and its ultimate guarantee.

The relationship between the pactum salutis and the covenant of grace is especially important for pastoral theology. The covenant of grace is the form in which the benefits of the pactum are administered to God's people across the sweep of redemptive history: in promises to Abraham, in types and shadows under the Mosaic covenant, in the Davidic promise of a son on the throne forever, and in the New Covenant established in the blood of Christ. But the covenant of grace is not itself the ultimate ground of the believer's confidence; its ground is the pactum salutis, the eternal agreement that preceded and guaranteed everything the covenant of grace administers. When the believer rests in the promises of the New Covenant, she is ultimately resting not merely in promises made in time but in an agreement made in eternity, and the God whose faithfulness guarantees those promises is the same God whose faithfulness to Himself in the eternal pactum is as immutable as His own nature.

The pactum also illuminates the unity of the two Testaments in a particularly powerful way. The Old Testament's elaborate sacrificial system, its prophetic anticipations of a coming Servant-Mediator, its royal psalms depicting the Father's address to the enthroned Son, and its covenantal history of promise and fulfillment are not independent religious developments that Christianity subsequently appropriated; they are the progressive historical unfolding of what was covenanted in eternity. The continuity of the two Testaments is not primarily a continuity of literary tradition or religious community; it is a continuity of covenantal purpose, with the pactum salutis as the eternal origin point from which the entire unfolding proceeds.

II. The Father's Role in the Covenant of Redemption

The Sender, the Elector, and the Promiser

A. The Father as the One Who Chooses and Sends

Within the covenant of redemption, the Father assumes the role of the one who chooses a people, commissions the Son to accomplish their redemption, and promises to reward the Son's obedience with the securing of those

people as His eternal possession. This is the aspect of the pactum that is most directly reflected in the Pauline language of election: “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4, NASB 1995). The election of the Father is not an abstract decree directed into the void; it is a specific act of covenantal choosing embedded within the eternal relationship between the Father and the Son, in which the Father identifies a people, gives them to the Son, and appoints the Son as their Mediator and Head.

The Johannine literature provides the most extended and explicit account of this giving relationship between the Father and the Son. In John 6:37–39, Jesus speaks of “all that the Father gives Me” as a defined, specific group whose coming to Him is certain and whose eternal security is guaranteed: “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day.” The language of giving (the Father to the Son), coming (the elect to Christ in faith), and raising (the Son’s final securing of the elect in glorification) is precisely the language of covenantal obligation fulfilled: the Father has given a people; the Son has accepted them; and the Son’s commitment to “lose nothing” is His covenantal pledge to honor the terms of the pactum.

In John 17, the high priestly prayer that Jesus offers on the eve of His crucifixion, the language of giving reaches its most concentrated form. Seven times in the span of twenty-six verses, Jesus refers to those whom the Father “gave” or “gives” to Him (vv. 2, 6, 6, 9, 11, 12, 24). He speaks of having accomplished the work the Father gave Him to do (v. 4), of having given the Father’s word to those whom the Father gave Him (v. 8), of having kept them in the Father’s name (v. 12), and of having been glorified in them (v. 10). The prayer is, among other things, a covenantal report, the Son presenting to the Father an account of the terms fulfilled and the people secured, and asking for the consummation that the covenant promised: “Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world” (v. 24, NASB 1995). The phrase “before the foundation of the world” reaches back behind the incarnation and the redemptive-historical mission to the eternal covenantal relationship in which the Son’s glory and the Father’s love for Him are the ultimate ground of everything.

The Father’s role in the pactum also includes the specific covenantal promises that He made to the Son as the reward for His obedience. Psalm 2:7–9 presents the Father addressing the Son in terms of a royal covenant: “I will surely tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to Me, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession’” (NASB 1995). The nations given as an inheritance, the ends of the earth as a possession, this is the Father’s covenantal promise to the Son that His mission will succeed in gathering a people from every tribe and tongue and nation, the very multitude that appears before the throne in Revelation 5 and 7. Psalm 110:1–4 deepens this covenantal character by adding the element of oath: “The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek’” (v. 4, NASB 1995). The Father’s commitment to the Son is not merely a promise but a sworn oath, as irrevocable and as certain as God’s own character.

B. The Obligations the Father Undertook

The Father’s covenantal role in the pactum was not merely that of the one who sends and promises; He also accepted specific obligations toward the Son as the condition of His mission. He would prepare a body for the Son (Hebrews 10:5, citing Psalm 40:6–8 in the Septuagint), provide Him with the Spirit without measure to equip His human nature for the fulfillment of His Messianic vocation (Isaiah 61:1; John 3:34), uphold Him through the

suffering that His mission entailed (Isaiah 42:1–4), vindicate Him through resurrection after His atoning death (Romans 4:25; Acts 2:24), exalt Him to the place of supreme authority at the divine right hand (Psalm 110:1; Philippians 2:9–11), and give Him the reward of a people who would be His own forever (Isaiah 53:10–12; John 17:24).

The fulfillment of each of these paternal obligations is narrated in the New Testament with a precision that suggests the evangelists and apostles understood the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ as the historical execution of a prior covenantal commitment. When the Spirit descends upon Jesus at His baptism (Matthew 3:16–17) and the Father’s voice declares “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased,” the covenantal overtones of Psalm 2 are unmistakable. When the resurrection is described in Acts 2:24 as the impossibility of death holding the One who was the Author of life, the Father’s covenantal obligation to vindicate the Son is being fulfilled. And when Paul writes that God has “highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name” (Philippians 2:9, NASB 1995), the Father’s pactum promise of supreme authority as the reward for covenantal obedience is reaching its culminating fulfillment. The pactum salutis, in other words, is not a speculative theological inference; it is the eternal backstory that makes the historical narrative of the New Testament theologically intelligible.

III. The Son’s Role in the Covenant of Redemption

The Servant, the Surety, and the Mediator

A. The Son’s Willing Acceptance of the Covenantal Mission

If the Father is the One who sends and promises in the pactum salutis, the Son is the One who goes and performs. But it is absolutely essential to understand that the Son’s going is not coerced; it is the free, glad, eternal expression of the love that the Son bears toward the Father and toward the people whom the Father has given Him. The Trinitarian perichoresis, the mutual indwelling and interpenetration of the three Persons of the Trinity, means that the will of the Father and the will of the Son are, in their deepest ontological ground, one will. The Son’s acceptance of the pactum is not the reluctant compliance of a subordinate with a superior’s command; it is the eternal and joyful concurrence of the Son with a plan that is as much His own as it is the Father’s. Yet the personal distinction between Father and Son means that this concurrence has the genuine character of covenantal agreement: the Son, as distinct Person, accepts a defined mission, undertakes specific obligations, and is promised specific rewards.

The clearest New Testament expression of the Son’s willing acceptance of the covenantal mission is found in Hebrews 10:5–10, where the author cites Psalm 40:6–8 in the Septuagint version and applies it to the incarnation of the Son: “Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says, ‘Sacrifice and offering You have not desired, but a body You have prepared for Me; in whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You have taken no pleasure. Then I said, “Here I am, I have come (in the scroll of the book it is written of Me) to do Your will, O God.”’” The significance of this passage for the pactum is profound. The Son, at the moment of His incarnation, quotes from the scroll of the book, that is, from the eternal covenantal agreement written concerning Him, and declares His willing readiness to fulfill its terms: “Behold, I have come to do Your will.” The incarnation is not a response to an

emergency; it is the historical execution of an eternal commitment. The Son enters the world not as someone pressed into service but as someone who has covenanted from eternity to come.

Philippians 2:5–8 provides the Pauline account of the same willing condescension. The Son, who existed in the form of God, “did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (NASB 1995). The voluntary character of the humiliation is unmistakable: He did not regard, He emptied Himself, He humbled Himself. These are acts of sovereign, willing self-giving, not acts of compulsion. The Son’s descent from the form of God to the form of a servant to the death of a criminal is the historical execution of the covenantal mission He accepted in eternity, and the Father’s response, “Therefore also God highly exalted Him” (v. 9), is the covenantal reward the Father promised when that mission was accepted.

The Son’s covenantal obligations in the pactum were twofold, corresponding to what Reformed theology has called His active and passive obedience. His active obedience was the fulfillment of the entire moral and ceremonial law of God on behalf of those whom the Father gave Him, procuring for them the positive righteousness that the covenant of works demanded and that no fallen sinner could provide. His passive obedience was the bearing of the covenant’s penal sanctions, the wrath of God against sin, on behalf of those same people, satisfying the justice that their violations had incurred. Both dimensions of the Son’s obedience were required by the terms of the pactum: the Father had given Him a people who owed both a perfect righteousness they could not produce and a penalty they could not survive, and the Son’s covenantal mission was to provide both on their behalf. This is what Paul means when he writes that God sent “His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us” (Romans 8:3–4, NASB 1995).

B. The Son as Surety and Mediator

The technical theological terms that Reformed theology has used to describe the Son’s covenantal role are surety and Mediator. A surety is one who assumes the legal obligations of another, who stands in the place of a debtor and undertakes to pay the debt that the debtor cannot pay. Hebrews 7:22 applies this precise term to Christ: “Jesus has become the guarantee [Greek: *engyos*, surety] of a better covenant” (NASB 1995). As the surety of the new covenant, the Son accepted upon Himself the full weight of the obligations of the pactum, the duty to fulfill the law and to bear its curse, so that those for whom He served as surety would receive the benefit of His perfect compliance without being required to produce that compliance themselves. This is the mechanism of the great exchange that Luther called the joyful swap: the sinner’s debt is transferred to Christ the surety, and Christ’s righteousness is credited to the sinner’s account.

A Mediator is one who stands between two parties and effects the reconciliation between them by satisfying the requirements of both. The Son is the “one Mediator between God and men” (1 Timothy 2:5, NASB 1995) because He alone is qualified by His person and His work to stand in that position: fully God, so that His obedience and sacrifice have infinite worth; fully human, so that He can represent humanity and bear its liabilities; and without sin, so that He has nothing of His own to account for before the divine tribunal and may freely apply the full value of His obedience and death to those He represents. The Son’s mediatorial work in the pactum is not merely the performance of a religious function; it is the fulfillment of an eternal covenantal appointment, the execution of a

role that the Father designed, the Son accepted, and the Spirit would apply to the specific people for whom it was undertaken.

The Isaiah Servant Songs, particularly Isaiah 52:13–53:12, provide the Old Testament’s most extended and profound description of the covenantal mission the Son accepted. In Isaiah 53:10–12, the language of covenantal agreement and reward reaches its highest Old Testament expression: “But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand. As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, and He will divide the booty with the strong; because He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors” (NASB 1995). The covenantal structure is unmistakable: a mission assigned (bearing iniquities, being crushed, rendering Himself a guilt offering), a mission fulfilled (justifying the many, bearing their sin), and a reward promised and given (seeing His offspring, dividing the booty, receiving a portion with the great). The *pactum salutis* is written in the language of Isaiah 53 before the New Testament gives it its systematic theological name.

IV. The Spirit’s Role in the Covenant of Redemption

The Applier, the Seal, and the Guarantee

A. *The Spirit’s Distinct Covenantal Commission*

The third Person of the Trinity has a distinct and indispensable role in the covenant of redemption, a role that is as essential to the *pactum*’s purpose as the Father’s electing and the Son’s redeeming. If the Father planned and the Son accomplished, the Spirit applies, and without the Spirit’s applying work, the Father’s plan would remain unexecuted and the Son’s accomplishment would reach no one. The Spirit’s covenantal commission in the *pactum* is to take the redemption secured by the Son in history and apply it effectively, personally, and irresistibly to each of the specific individuals whom the Father gave to the Son in eternity. He is the Agent of the application, the one who executes the final and most personal dimension of the *pactum*’s purpose: the actual transformation of dead sinners into living children of God.

The most sustained New Testament account of the Spirit’s covenantal commission is found in John 16:7–15, where Jesus describes the Spirit’s coming as the continuation and completion of His own mission: “But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you” (v. 7, NASB 1995). The Spirit comes not as an independent agent but as the One sent by the ascended Son, and His mission is defined by its relationship to the Son’s accomplished work: He will convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (vv. 8–11); He will guide the disciples into all truth (v. 13); He will glorify the Son by taking what belongs to Him and disclosing it to the disciples (v. 14). The Spirit’s entire mission is, in the most precise sense, the application of the Son’s accomplishment to the hearts and minds of those for whom the accomplishment was made.

The Spirit’s covenantal work in applying redemption encompasses the full range of what the Reformed tradition has called the *ordo salutis*: regeneration (Titus 3:5; John 3:5–8), effectual calling (1 Corinthians 2:4–5; 1

Thessalonians 1:5), the production of saving faith (Ephesians 2:8–9; Philippians 1:29), the sealing and guaranteeing of the inheritance (Ephesians 1:13–14; 2 Corinthians 1:22), progressive sanctification (2 Corinthians 3:18; Galatians 5:16–25), and ultimately the resurrection of the body in glory (Romans 8:11). Each of these works is the Spirit’s execution of the covenantal commission He accepted in the pactum, the specific, personal, effective application of the benefits that the Father planned and the Son purchased to each member of the people that the covenant identified as its beneficiaries.

It is worth pausing to appreciate the Trinitarian coherence that the pactum salutis provides for the whole of salvation. Without the pactum, the three Persons’ distinct saving works can appear as loosely related divine activities that happen to converge on the same outcome; with the pactum, they are revealed as the coordinated, covenantally integrated execution of a single eternal plan, in which each Person’s work is defined by its relationship to the others. The Spirit does not regenerate randomly or according to His own independent criteria; He regenerates those whom the Father elected and the Son redeemed. The Son did not die to accomplish a salvation that the Spirit might or might not apply; He died to secure the salvation of a specific people whom the Spirit would certainly and infallibly reach. The Father did not choose a people and then leave their salvation to chance; He covenanted within the Godhead that the Son would purchase and the Spirit would apply what His electing love had determined. The pactum salutis is the eternal guarantee of the Trinitarian coherence of salvation.

B. The Spirit as the Seal and Down Payment

The New Testament’s most specifically covenantal language for the Spirit’s applying work is the language of sealing and guarantee. In Ephesians 1:13–14, Paul writes: “In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation, having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory” (NASB 1995). The word translated “pledge” or “down payment” (Greek: *arrabōn*) is a commercial term from the ancient world denoting the first installment of a larger payment that legally obligates the payer to complete the transaction. The Spirit as the *arrabōn* is not merely a comforting presence or a spiritual gift; He is the covenantal guarantee of the full inheritance to come, God’s binding, legally significant commitment that everything the pactum promised will certainly be delivered.

The seal carries equally significant covenantal weight in the ancient world. A seal marked ownership, authenticated identity, and guaranteed security. When Paul writes that believers “were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise,” he is declaring that the Spirit’s indwelling presence marks the believer as God’s own possession, authenticates his identity as a child of God (Romans 8:16), and guarantees his security in that identity against every assault. The sealing is not provisional or conditional; it is covenantal, as certain and as binding as the pactum that ordained it. This is why Paul can move from the language of sealing in Ephesians 1:13–14 to the doxology of verse 14 (“to the praise of His glory”) without anxiety: the seal of the Spirit is the most secure guarantee that a redeemed soul could possess, because it is nothing less than the presence of God Himself as the living seal of His own covenantal commitment.

The Spirit’s role in the pactum also illuminates the New Testament’s language about grieving the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30) and quenching the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19). These exhortations are directed to believers, not as warnings that the Spirit might withdraw from those He has sealed, but as appeals to live consistently with the covenantal identity that the Spirit has established. The believer who grieves the Spirit is not in danger of losing

the seal, Paul grounds his exhortation in the very fact that they “were sealed for the day of redemption” (Ephesians 4:30), but he is failing to honor the covenantal relationship that the Spirit’s presence represents. The pastoral application is clear: the indwelling Spirit is not a possession to be taken for granted but a covenantal Guest whose presence calls the believer to the holiness that is consistent with the pactum’s purpose of conformity to the image of the Son.

V. The Biblical Evidence for the Pactum Salutis

Converging Testimony from Psalms, Isaiah, John, and Paul

A. The Old Testament Witness

The biblical evidence for the covenant of redemption, while not presenting the doctrine in systematized theological form, is both extensive and convergent. The Old Testament provides the foundational texts through its royal and priestly poetry, its Servant Songs, and its repeated anticipations of a Mediator-figure whose mission has been defined and commissioned by the divine counsel before it is executed in history. Psalm 2, which the New Testament applies to Christ with striking frequency (Acts 4:25–26; 13:33; Hebrews 1:5; 5:5; Revelation 2:27; 19:15), presents the Father addressing the Son in the language of royal investiture and covenantal decree: “You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession” (vv. 7–9, NASB 1995). The declaration of Sonship, the covenantal giving of the nations as an inheritance, and the promise of the Son’s dominion over the earth all speak of an eternal covenantal relationship in which the Father has defined the Son’s mission and promised its reward before that mission is executed in history.

Psalm 110, which Jesus Himself applied to His own person (Matthew 22:41–45) and which is the most frequently cited Old Testament text in the New Testament, adds the dimension of priestly commission and divine oath to the covenantal picture. “The Lord says to my Lord: ‘Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet’” (v. 1, NASB 1995). And in verse 4: “The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.’” The sworn oath of verse 4 is particularly significant for the pactum: the Father’s appointment of the Son to the eternal Melchizedekian priesthood is made with the full weight of a divine oath, making it as irrevocable as the divine character itself. The author of Hebrews develops this extensively in chapters 6–7, arguing that the very immutability of God’s oath is the anchor of the believer’s hope (6:17–20) and the basis of Christ’s superior priesthood (7:20–25).

Isaiah 53:10–12, as noted in the previous section, provides the Old Testament’s most detailed account of the covenantal assignment given to the Servant and the covenantal reward promised for its fulfillment. But the Servant Songs as a whole (Isaiah 42:1–9; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12) contribute to the pactum theology in important ways beyond the fourth song. Isaiah 49:1–6 presents the Servant speaking of a commission given before birth: “The Lord called Me from the womb; from the body of My mother He named Me” (v. 1, NASB 1995). The mission is then described: to restore Israel and to be “a light to the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (v. 6, NASB 1995). The scope of the mission, to the ends of the earth, matches precisely the inheritance promised in Psalm 2:8, confirming that the Servant Songs and the royal psalms are describing the same

eternal covenantal mission from complementary perspectives: one regal, one servile; both pointing to the same eternal agreement.

The protoevangelium of Genesis 3:15, while not a developed covenantal text, stands as the first redemptive-historical revelation of the pactum's existence and intent: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel" (NASB 1995). The divine initiative in establishing the enmity, the promise of a Seed who will crush the serpent's head at the cost of His own wounding, and the certainty of the outcome, all of these elements reflect the pactum's fingerprints on the earliest post-fall redemptive declaration. The entire subsequent redemptive history of both Testaments is the progressive unveiling of what was promised here and covenanted in eternity: a Redeemer who will come, suffer, and conquer.

B. The New Testament Witness

The New Testament's evidence for the pactum salutis is both explicit and pervasive. The Johannine literature, as we have already seen in detail, provides the most sustained account through the giving language of John 6 and the covenantal report of John 17. But the Pauline letters add their own indispensable contribution through their repeated references to a grace and purpose that predate the creation of the world. In 2 Timothy 1:9, Paul writes that God "has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity" (NASB 1995). The phrase "granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity", literally, "before eternal times" (pro chronon aionion), locates the origin of saving grace not in any event of temporal history, including the believer's conversion, but in the eternal counsel of God. The grace was there, in Christ, before time began.

Titus 1:2–3 provides a similarly striking reference: "in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago" (NASB 1995). The phrase "long ages ago" (pro chronon aionion) is identical to the formulation in 2 Timothy 1:9, and both texts are pointing to the same eternal reality: a promise made by the God who cannot lie, in a time before the ages began. To whom was this promise made, if it was made "long ages ago", before the creation of any human creature to whom it could be addressed? The Reformed tradition has consistently answered: it was made within the Godhead itself, in the eternal covenantal agreement of the pactum, where the Father promised the Son the gift of eternal life for those He would redeem, and where that promise was as binding and as certain as the God who made it.

Ephesians 1:3–14 serves as the comprehensive New Testament exposition of the pactum, tracing its Trinitarian dimensions from the Father's pre-temporal election ("chose us in Him before the foundation of the world," v. 4) through the Son's historical accomplishment ("in Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses," v. 7) to the Spirit's present applying work ("you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise," v. 13). The three-part Trinitarian movement of the passage, Father, Son, Spirit, is not accidental; it is the apostolic account of the pactum's Trinitarian structure, with each Person's contribution described in its proper relation to the others and the whole movement concluding with the recurring doxological refrain: "to the praise of His glory" (vv. 6, 12, 14). The pactum salutis, Paul is saying, was designed from eternity to produce exactly this: the praise of the glory of the triune God by a redeemed people whose every spiritual blessing flows from the eternal Trinitarian purpose that the pactum established.

VI. The Theological and Pastoral Significance

What the Eternal Covenant of Redemption Means for the Believing Soul

A. The Theological Significance

The theological significance of the covenant of redemption for the whole of Christian doctrine is difficult to overstate. It provides, first and most fundamentally, the ultimate guarantee of the sovereignty of grace in salvation. If salvation originated in a Trinitarian covenant made in eternity, then the human creature's contribution to its procurement is precisely zero: the plan was made before the creature existed, the people were chosen before they had done anything good or bad (Romans 9:11), the Son was appointed as Mediator before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:20), and the Spirit was commissioned to apply the redemption before any sinner had expressed any desire to receive it. The sovereignty of grace is not merely a theological inference from a set of proof texts; it is the logical consequence of the *pactum salutis*, the eternal structure of salvation itself.

The *pactum* also provides the most secure possible ground for the Reformed doctrine of the definite or particular atonement, the teaching that Christ's death was designed to secure the certain salvation of a specific people rather than merely the possible salvation of all people without distinction. If the Son accepted a covenantal commission from the Father to redeem a specific people whom the Father had given to Him, then His atoning work was designed and directed toward those specific people. He did not die to create a vague salvific possibility that might or might not be actualized; He died to fulfill His covenantal obligation to the Father with respect to the specific people the Father had given Him, and His fulfillment of that obligation secures their salvation as certainly as the *pactum* itself is certain. The atonement is as particular as the giving, and the giving was specific and personal.

The *pactum salutis* also illuminates the coherence of the two Testaments and the unity of the covenant of grace across all its historical administrations. The covenant with Abraham, the Mosaic covenant, the Davidic covenant, and the New Covenant are not separate soteriological arrangements accommodating different peoples in different circumstances; they are the progressive historical unfolding of a single eternal covenantal purpose, administered in different forms suited to different stages of redemptive history but rooted in the same eternal *pactum*, securing the same people, and ultimately fulfilled in the same Mediator, Jesus Christ. The Bible is not a collection of diverse religious documents; it is the progressive narrative of an eternal covenant's historical execution.

The doctrine of the *pactum* also provides the most theologically precise account of the incarnation. The Son did not become incarnate as a response to a crisis; He became incarnate in the execution of a plan. "He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you" (1 Peter 1:20, NASB 1995). The "last times" of the incarnation are the appointed moment when the eternal *pactum* broke into historical time, when the Son who had covenanted in eternity to come finally came, not because conditions finally permitted it, but because the fullness of time had come (Galatians 4:4) as determined by the Father who set the terms of the covenant.

B. The Pastoral Comfort of the Pactum

The pastoral comfort of the covenant of redemption flows directly from its theological content, and it is comfort of the most stable and soul-grounding kind. Your salvation was not an afterthought. It was not a divine improvisation in response to a human emergency. It was not a plan that God put together after the fall, in the hope that it might work out for enough people to make the effort worthwhile. It was a covenant, made within the eternal Godhead, before the foundation of the world, with your name, and the names of every elect soul who has ever lived, written into its terms before you or they existed. The God who committed Himself to your salvation in the eternal pactum is not the kind of God who abandons His covenantal commitments. He is the God who fulfilled every term of the pactum through the obedience, suffering, and resurrection of the Son, who sealed every term of the pactum through the indwelling of the Spirit, and who will complete every term of the pactum in your glorification at the last day.

For the anxious soul who wonders whether her salvation is secure, the pactum provides an answer that reaches far deeper than any assurance based on the quality of her present spiritual experience. Your salvation is secure not because your faith is strong enough, not because your repentance has been sufficiently thorough, not because your sanctification has reached an adequate level. Your salvation is secure because it was covenanted by the triune God before you existed, because the Father chose you before the foundation of the world, the Son bore your sins and fulfilled your obligations in history, and the Spirit sealed you for the day of redemption. The chain of covenantal commitment runs from eternity to eternity, and you are held within it not by the strength of your grip but by the faithfulness of the God who holds you.

For the grieving soul who wonders whether the death of a loved one who professed faith has ended in their salvation, the pactum provides the comfort that no human assessment can give. The sovereign God who covenanted in eternity to save His people does not leave the execution of that covenant to human observation and verification. He knows those who are His (2 Timothy 2:19), and the certainty of the pactum's fulfillment rests not in our ability to verify it but in the faithfulness of the One who made it. The pastoral application is not presumption, the pactum does not guarantee the salvation of everyone who has made a profession; it guarantees the salvation of those the Father actually gave to the Son, but it provides the comfort that the One who knows His own will certainly keep them, and that the sovereign pactum is more secure than any human assessment could ever be.

For the preacher, the pactum salutis provides the most profound motivation for earnest, urgent, confident gospel proclamation. The God who has covenanted to save His people uses the preaching of the gospel as the ordinary means by which the Spirit applies that salvation, the external call through which the effectual call reaches the ears and the hearts of the elect. The preacher does not know who the elect are; he is not required to know. He is required only to proclaim the gospel with faithfulness, urgency, and love, trusting that the Spirit who is commissioned by the eternal pactum to apply the redemption will use that proclamation to accomplish exactly what the pactum determined. Preaching is not a gamble; it is a covenantally guaranteed means of grace, wielded by the Spirit who has promised to make it effective in the hearts of those for whom it is ordained.

"This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day."

John 6:39, NASB 1995

Theological Terms and Definitions

Pactum Salutis	Latin: “covenant of redemption” (pactum = covenant, pact; salutis = of salvation). The eternal, intra-Trinitarian agreement between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to plan, accomplish, and apply the salvation of the elect. The Father elects and commissions; the Son assumes human nature and fulfills the law and bears the penalty; the Spirit applies the accomplished redemption to the elect. The pactum is the eternal foundation of the covenant of grace and the ultimate guarantee of the sovereignty and certainty of salvation. Developed systematically in Reformed scholastic theology, especially by Cocceius, Turretin, à Brakel, and Owen.
Covenant of Works	The pre-fall arrangement between God and Adam as the representative head of humanity, in which life and blessing were promised on the condition of perfect, personal, and perpetual obedience to God’s law, and death and curse were threatened as the consequence of any violation. Adam violated the covenant of works in the fall, plunging himself and all his natural posterity into condemnation and spiritual death. Christ, as the second Adam, fulfilled the covenant of works in His active obedience, procuring the life and righteousness that Adam forfeited, which is then imputed to all who are united to Christ by faith.
Covenant of Grace	The post-fall arrangement between the triune God and His people, in which the blessings of salvation are freely promised and received through the mediatorial work of Jesus Christ and the gift of faith. The covenant of grace is one covenant administered through multiple historical dispensations: Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New Covenant, each a progressive unfolding of the same eternal purpose rooted in the pactum salutis. The covenant of grace is not a new arrangement separate from the pactum; it is the temporal administration of the eternal covenantal purpose that the pactum established.
Active Obedience	Christ’s fulfillment of the entire moral and ceremonial law of God on behalf of those the Father gave Him, constituting the positive righteousness that the covenant of works demanded and that no fallen sinner could produce. The active obedience of Christ is the ground of the believer’s justification in its positive dimension: the sinner is not merely forgiven (pardoned from debt) but declared positively righteous (credited with a perfect righteousness). Grounded in Romans 5:19 (“through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous”), Philippians 3:9, and 2 Corinthians 5:21.
Passive Obedience	Christ’s bearing of the full penal sanction of the covenant of works on behalf of those the Father gave Him, specifically, His suffering and death as the substitute for sinners, absorbing the divine wrath that their violations had incurred. The passive obedience is the ground of the believer’s justification in its forensic dimension: the sinner’s debt is fully paid, the wrath fully satisfied, and the condemnation fully exhausted in the death of the Son. Grounded in Isaiah 53:4–6; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13; Romans 3:25.
Surety	One who assumes the legal obligations of another, standing in the place of a debtor and pledging to pay the debt the debtor cannot pay. Hebrews 7:22 applies this precise legal term to Christ: “Jesus has become the guarantee [Greek: engyos, surety] of a better covenant.” As the surety of the new covenant, Christ accepted upon Himself the full legal obligations of the pactum, perfect obedience and the bearing of the curse, so that those He represents receive the benefit of His perfect compliance without being required to produce it themselves.
Mediator	One who stands between two parties and effects the reconciliation between them by satisfying the requirements of both. Christ is the “one Mediator between God and men” (1 Timothy 2:5) because He alone possesses the qualifications for that office: fully divine (so that His obedience and sacrifice have infinite worth), fully human (so that He can represent humanity and bear its liabilities), and sinless (so that He has no personal liability before the divine tribunal). Christ’s mediatorial work encompasses both His priestly sacrifice (reconciling

	humanity to God) and His prophetic and kingly functions (revealing God to humanity and governing His redeemed people).
Arraōōn	Greek: “pledge,” “earnest money,” or “down payment” (Ephesians 1:14; 2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5). A commercial term from the ancient world denoting the first installment of a larger payment that legally obligates the payer to complete the transaction. Paul applies this term to the Holy Spirit as the arraōōn of the believer’s inheritance, the Spirit’s indwelling presence as God’s binding, legally significant covenantal commitment that the full inheritance of eternal life will certainly be delivered. The Spirit is not merely a foretaste of glory; He is the covenantal guarantee of its certain arrival.
Federal Headship	The theological principle that one person can stand as the representative head of a corporate group, so that his actions have legal and covenantal consequences for all those he represents. Adam served as the federal head of the entire human race in the covenant of works; his transgression is therefore legally imputed to all his natural posterity (Romans 5:12–19). Christ serves as the federal head of all those the Father gave Him in the pactum; His obedience and death are therefore legally imputed to all His covenant people through faith. Federal headship is the mechanism by which both condemnation (from Adam) and justification (from Christ) are transmitted representatively.
Covenant Theology	The hermeneutical and theological framework, developed in Reformed scholastic theology, that organizes the whole of Scripture around the theme of God’s successive covenants with humanity: the covenant of works (with Adam before the fall), the covenant of redemption (the eternal pactum), and the covenant of grace (with God’s people after the fall, progressively administered through the Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New Covenants). Covenant theology holds that these covenants are not separate soteriological arrangements but successive administrations of a single eternal covenantal purpose, all rooted in the pactum salutis and all fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Practical Application

A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe that salvation is not merely a historical event, something that happened at the cross and the resurrection, glorious as those events are, but an eternal plan, executed in history, whose origin is in the counsel of the triune God before time began. This means believing that the ground of our salvation is not ultimately any event within time but the eternal, immutable, covenantal purpose of the God who planned it. The cross is the historical execution of an eternal covenant; the resurrection is the Father's vindication of the Son's covenantal faithfulness; the Spirit's regenerating work in the heart of the sinner is the application of what was planned in eternity and accomplished in history. To believe in the pactum is to believe that the salvation you have received has a backstory that precedes the creation of the world.

We must also believe that the distinct Trinitarian roles in the pactum are not merely theological categories but living realities that define the character of our relationship with each Person of the Godhead. The Father is not merely the Creator who watched His Son die; He is the One who commissioned that death from eternity and who promised its reward. The Son is not merely the Teacher and Example who happened to be executed; He is the Surety and Mediator who accepted from the Father a covenantal mission and fulfilled every term of it in His person and work. The Spirit is not merely a comforting Presence; He is the Agent of the covenant's application, commissioned from eternity to bring the benefits of the pactum to each of its specific beneficiaries. Believing rightly about the pactum means believing rightly about the triune God who made it.

We must believe, thirdly, that the pactum salutis provides the most secure possible ground for the confidence that not one of those given by the Father to the Son will ultimately be lost. Jesus' words in John 6:39 are the most unqualified statement of this certainty in the Gospel: "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day." The will of the Father expressed in the pactum, that the Son should lose nothing of all that the Father gave Him, is the ultimate guarantee of the perseverance and final glorification of every believer. Believe this, and the anxiety that attaches itself to the question "Will I make it to the end?" is addressed not by the quality of your own spiritual resolve but by the covenantal commitment of the God who cannot lie.

B. For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?

The pactum salutis, rightly received, ought to produce in the heart of the believer a sense of wonder that borders on the inexpressible. Consider what the doctrine actually claims: before you existed, before you sinned, before you were in any position to either deserve or desire salvation, the three Persons of the eternal God were in counsel about you, specifically, about your redemption, your union with Christ, your regeneration, your justification, your adoption, your sanctification, your perseverance, and your glorification. They covenanted about you. They assigned roles, accepted obligations, and made irrevocable commitments, all before a single event of your personal history had occurred. This is the God you are dealing with. This is the love that sought you. And the appropriate emotional response to this discovery is not merely intellectual appreciation but the kind of broken, astonished, tear-filled gratitude that comes when a person realizes, perhaps for the first time, that the God who made the universe was thinking about her before time began.

Desire, above all, to let the pactum reshape the way you approach God in prayer. If the Father covenanted to give you to the Son, then you come to Him not as a stranger petitioning for a hearing but as one of His own, as a person whose standing before Him is grounded in an eternal commitment made before you knew to ask for it. If the Son covenanted to lose nothing of all that the Father gave Him, then your prayer is not a desperate attempt to maintain a precarious hold on divine favor but the communication of a child with the Father who covenanted to keep her. If the Spirit was commissioned from eternity to apply the benefits of the pactum to your soul, then your prayer for greater faith, deeper repentance, and more consistent holiness is a request directed to the very One who has pledged, in the eternal counsel of the Godhead, to produce exactly those things in you. Pray, therefore, with the confidence of those whose prayers are addressed to a God who has covenanted to answer them.

Desire, also, the kind of joyful security that the pactum is designed to produce. Not presumptuous security, the false confidence of one who claims the covenant's benefits without any evidence of its fruits, but the settled, warfare-tested, suffering-enduring security of a soul that knows it is held not by its own hand but by the eternal covenantal commitment of the triune God. The Christian life involves suffering, doubt, failure, and seasons of spiritual darkness. But the believer who has received the pactum knows that none of these is evidence that the covenant has been broken. They are the conditions under which the covenant is being kept, the circumstances through which the Spirit is executing his covenantal commission to sanctify and preserve. Let the pactum produce in you not the presumption that nothing matters but the confidence that nothing is lost.

C. For the Hands: What Must We Do?

- Read John 17:1–26 slowly and completely, paying attention to every occurrence of the giving language (“you gave Me,” “those whom You gave Me”). Count the number of times Jesus refers to the people the Father gave Him, note what He claims to have done for them (manifested Your name, given Your word, kept them, sanctified them), and observe what He asks the Father to do for them (keep them, sanctify them, unite them, bring them to see His glory). Ask: how does this prayer illuminate the pactum salutis? And what does the fact that Jesus is praying this prayer on the eve of His crucifixion, reporting to the Father on a mission about to be completed, reveal about the covenantal character of His death?
- Read Isaiah 53 in full. Identify every element of the covenantal transaction described: what the Servant is commissioned to bear (our griefs, sorrows, transgressions, iniquities, the chastening for our peace, stripes), what the Servant will accomplish (justify the many, intercede for the transgressors), and what the Servant will receive as His reward (offspring, prolonged days, the good pleasure of the Lord prospering in His hand, a portion with the great). Ask: how does this passage illuminate the Father's covenantal obligations to the Son, the Son's covenantal acceptance of the mission, and the certain outcome of the pactum?
- Read Hebrews 10:5–10 alongside Psalm 40:6–8 (the passage it cites). Note the specific words the Son speaks upon entering the world: “I have come to do Your will, O God.” Ask: what does this declaration reveal about the voluntary character of the Son's obedience? What does the phrase “in the scroll of the book it is written of Me” imply about the pre-temporal existence of the covenantal mission? And how does the author of Hebrews use this passage to establish the superiority of Christ's once-for-all sacrifice over the repeated Levitical sacrifices?
- Study the *arrabōn* language of Ephesians 1:13–14 and 2 Corinthians 1:22 and 5:5. Research the commercial background of the term in first-century Greek papyri, where it appears in property transactions as the down payment that legally obligates the buyer to complete the purchase. Then ask: what are the theological implications of Paul's use of this commercial term for the Spirit? What does it mean for God to be the “buyer” who has already paid the down payment of His own Spirit as the guarantee of the full inheritance?

And how does this language of binding covenantal obligation change the way you relate to the Spirit's presence in your life?

- Write a one-page personal reflection on the following question: How does the doctrine of the pactum salutis change the way you understand your own conversion? Specifically: if your faith was the fruit of the Spirit's covenantal commission to apply the redemption secured by the Son to the people chosen by the Father, what does that imply about the ultimate source and security of your salvation? And what does it imply about the appropriate response, not pride in having believed rightly, but gratitude for a grace that covenanted to give you the very faith you exercised?

Key Texts: *John 6:37–39; 17:1–26; Ephesians 1:3–14; Isaiah 53:10–12; Psalm 2:7–9; 110:1–4; Hebrews 7:22; 10:5–10; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 1:2–3; 1 Peter 1:20*

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

- Before studying this lesson, had you ever encountered the term “pactum salutis” or “covenant of redemption”? If so, in what context, and what was your initial reaction to the concept? If not, what is your reaction to the claim that the triune God entered into an eternal intra-Trinitarian agreement about your salvation before the foundation of the world? What questions does the doctrine raise for you, and what aspects of it do you find most compelling or most challenging?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

- Read John 6:37–39 carefully. What three groups are named or implied in these verses: (1) those the Father gives to the Son, (2) those who come to the Son, and (3) those whom the Son will raise up on the last day? Are these three groups identical or different? What does the identity (or non-identity) of these groups establish about the relationship between election (the giving), conversion (the coming), and glorification (the raising)? What does the phrase “I certainly will not cast out” (v. 37) establish about the security of all who come to Christ in faith?
- Read John 17:1–26. List every occurrence of the word “gave” or “given” in the passage and identify in each case who gives what to whom. What does Jesus claim to have given those the Father gave Him (vv. 8, 14, 22)? What does He claim to have done for them (vv. 6, 12, 26)? What does He ask the Father to do for them (vv. 11, 15, 17, 24)? And what is the ultimate goal He expresses for them (v. 24)? How does the cumulative picture of these giving relationships illuminate the structure of the pactum salutis?
- Read Psalm 2:7–9. What specific promises does the Father make to the Son in this passage? What is the scope of the inheritance promised (“the nations” and “the very ends of the earth”)? How do the New Testament citations of this psalm (Acts 4:25–26; 13:33; Hebrews 1:5; 5:5) apply these verses to the specific events of Christ’s resurrection, exaltation, and priestly appointment? What does the application of this psalm to the resurrection specifically suggest about the relationship between the Father’s covenantal promise and the vindication that the resurrection represents?
- Read Isaiah 53:10–12. Identify the three parties mentioned or implied in these verses: the Lord (Father), the Servant (Son), and “the many” (the people for whom the Servant suffers). What does the Lord do to the Servant (v. 10)? What does the Servant do for “the many” (vv. 11–12)? What does the Lord give to the Servant as the reward for His mission (vv. 10–12)? How does the structural sequence, commission, fulfillment, reward, map onto the theological structure of the pactum salutis?
- Read Hebrews 10:5–10. What does the Son declare upon entering the world (vv. 7–9), and what does this declaration reveal about the voluntary character of His obedience to the pactum? What does the phrase “in the scroll of the book it is written of Me” imply about the pre-temporal existence of the Messianic mission? What does the author of Hebrews argue about the relationship between the Son’s fulfillment of “the will of God” and the sanctification of believers (v. 10)?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

- The lesson argues that a potential objection to the pactum, that there cannot be a covenant within the one God, because covenant requires distinct parties, is answered by taking seriously the genuine personal distinctness of the three divine Persons. Evaluate this response. What does Nicene Trinitarian theology

affirm about the relationship between the unity of the divine essence and the personal distinctness of Father, Son, and Spirit? How does the Trinitarian distinction between the Persons (as genuinely distinct, not merely modal) make intra-Trinitarian covenanting coherent without implying tritheism?

- The lesson distinguishes the pactum salutis from the covenant of works and the covenant of grace and argues that the pactum is the eternal foundation from which the other two covenants flow. How does understanding the relationship among these three covenants illuminate the unity of the Bible's covenantal structure? How does the pactum explain why the covenant of grace was instituted after the fall rather than God simply condemning all of Adam's posterity without offering redemption? And how does the pactum explain the specific form that the covenant of grace takes, a mediated covenant through the promised Seed?
- The lesson argues that the pactum provides the most secure ground for the doctrine of definite (particular) atonement, the teaching that Christ's death was designed to secure the certain salvation of a specific people. Trace the logical argument: if the Father gave specific people to the Son in the pactum, and if the Son accepted a covenantal commission to secure the salvation of those specific people, what does this imply about the design and intention of the atonement? How does this argument differ from a merely statistical claim about who ends up being saved, and why does the covenantal framing make the argument stronger?
- The lesson describes the Spirit's role in the pactum using the language of the *arrabōn* (Ephesians 1:14), the down payment that legally obligates the payer to complete the transaction. What are the implications of this language for the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints? If the Spirit's indwelling presence is the covenantal down payment that obligates God to deliver the full inheritance, what does this establish about the possibility of a genuinely Spirit-indwelt believer ultimately failing to receive that inheritance? And how does this language address the pastoral concern of those whose assurance fluctuates with the quality of their spiritual experience?
- The lesson suggests that the pactum salutis provides the ultimate motivation for confident gospel proclamation: the preacher does not know who the elect are, but he knows that the Spirit who is commissioned to apply the pactum will use faithful preaching to reach them. How does this perspective on preaching differ from the Arminian account, in which the preacher is essentially presenting an offer whose reception depends on the free decision of the human will? And how does it guard against both the Arminian reduction of preaching to persuasion and the hyper-Calvinist reduction of preaching to mere information?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

- The lesson opens with the question: "When did your salvation begin?" and argues that the answer is not located in any event of your personal history but in the eternal pactum salutis. How does this change the way you think about your own conversion? Does understanding the eternity of the covenantal purpose that preceded and produced your conversion increase your sense of gratitude? Does it change the way you describe your conversion to others? And how does it affect the way you think about the sovereignty of grace in the salvations of others?
- The lesson argues that the pactum provides the most secure possible ground for the anxious soul's assurance. Do you personally find the pactum to be a source of comfort and assurance, or does it remain abstract and theoretical? What would it take for the doctrine to move from your head (a theological affirmation) to your heart (a lived confidence that shapes your emotional experience of the Christian life)? What specific aspect of the pactum, the Father's choosing, the Son's securing, or the Spirit's sealing, do you need to receive more personally and practically?

- The lesson describes the Spirit's covenantal commission as the application of the benefits of the pactum to each specific believer through regeneration, effectual calling, sanctification, and sealing. How does understanding the Spirit's work in this covenantal framework change the way you think about the struggles of your own sanctification? Specifically: when sanctification seems to stall, when the progress is slower than expected, when the Spirit seems distant, does the knowledge that He is under covenantal commission to complete the work He began (Philippians 1:6) provide comfort? How should the theology of the pactum shape the way you pray for and with believers who are struggling in their sanctification?
- The pactum salutis is described in the lesson as virtually unknown in the popular life of the church. If you are a pastor or teacher, how would you introduce this doctrine to a congregation or class that has never encountered it? What analogies, illustrations, or entry points would you use to make the concept accessible without losing its theological precision? And what aspects of the doctrine do you anticipate generating the most resistance or the most wonder?
- The lesson closes with the claim that the pactum provides the preacher with the most profound motivation for earnest, urgent, confident gospel proclamation. How does your own practice of evangelism or gospel witness reflect or fail to reflect the theological confidence that the pactum should produce? Do you speak of the gospel with the confidence of one who knows that the Spirit is covenantally commissioned to apply it to the elect? Or does your evangelism tend to reflect a more Arminian anxiety, a sense that the outcome depends primarily on your persuasive ability or the hearer's willingness? How might a deeper understanding of the pactum reshape your approach to sharing the gospel?

Prayer Focus

Open this lesson's prayer time with a reading of John 17:1–26 in full, not as a theological text to be analyzed but as the prayer of the Son to the Father on the night before His crucifixion, the most intimate window into the Trinitarian relationship that the Gospels provide. Read it slowly, pausing at each giving reference (“the men whom You gave Me,” “the word which You gave Me,” “the glory which You have given Me”) to feel the weight of what is being disclosed: the eternal giving relationship between Father and Son that is the *pactum salutis* in its most personal and relational form. This is not merely a theological doctrine; it is the conversation of two Persons of the eternal Trinity, on the eve of the greatest covenantal fulfillment in history, expressing to each other the covenantal love and purpose that has been in place before the foundation of the world.

Pray with gratitude for the Father's covenantal choosing. The Father who chose you in Christ before the foundation of the world did not do so because He foresaw something commendable in you; He chose you because it was the good pleasure of His sovereign will (Ephesians 1:5), and the pleasure of that will is grounded in nothing outside of Himself. Thank Him that your name was in the *pactum* before your name was given you at birth. Thank Him that His covenantal purpose for your life was established in eternity and is being executed in time with the precision and faithfulness of One who has never broken a covenant in all the history of His dealings with His people. Thank Him that the love He set upon you is the eternal love of the Father for the Son, extended to you as one of those the Son secured.

Pray with gratitude for the Son's covenantal obedience. The Son who declared “I have come to do Your will, O God” upon entering the world did not do so under compulsion; He did so as the free, eternal, joyful expression of His love for the Father and for those the Father had given Him. Thank Him for the active obedience that fulfilled the law you owed and could not pay, procuring the righteousness that now clothes you before the divine tribunal. Thank Him for the passive obedience that bore the wrath you deserved and could not survive, exhausting the penalty that the covenant of works demanded and that your violations had incurred. Thank Him for the words of John 6:39, “That of all that He has given Me I lose nothing”, and receive them as the personal pledge of the Mediator who accepted you as a covenantal charge and who has never failed to keep His covenantal commitments.

Pray with gratitude for the Spirit's covenantal application. The Spirit who was commissioned from eternity to bring the benefits of the *pactum* to your soul is the same Spirit who opened your eyes to see the glory of Christ in the gospel, who softened your heart to receive it, who produced in you the repentance and faith that you could not produce from within the resources of your own dead and enslaved nature. Thank Him for the regeneration that preceded your faith and made it possible. Thank Him for the sealing that marks you as God's own and guarantees your final inheritance. Thank Him for the *arrabōn*, the down payment of His own presence, that binds the triune God to deliver the full glory of the *pactum's* promise to your soul on the last day.

Close with a prayer for those who have not yet received the benefits of the *pactum*, for the unsaved in your family, your neighborhood, your congregation's surrounding community. Pray for them with the theological realism of those who know that they are, apart from the Spirit's covenantal work, spiritually dead and incapable of coming to Christ on their own. Pray also with the theological confidence of those who know that the Spirit is under covenantal commission to apply the redemption to all for whom it was secured, and that the proclamation of the gospel is the Spirit's ordinary means of doing so. Ask that He would use your faithful witness, your love, your

prayers, and the preaching of the Word to accomplish the covenantal purpose He has been commissioned to execute, and trust that the God who cannot lie and who covenants with perfect faithfulness will do what He has committed Himself to do.

“He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.”

1 Peter 1:20–21, NASB 1995

Key Texts: John 6:37–39; 17:1–26; Ephesians 1:3–14; Isaiah 53:10–12; Psalm 2:7–9; 110:1–4; Hebrews 7:22; 10:5–10; 2 Timothy 1:9; 1 Peter 1:20

Soli Deo Gloria
To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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