

PROMISES, PROMISES...

God as
Promise
Giver
&
Promise
Keeper

Introduction

I. Why a class on covenant now?

A. Justification is often used in the Lutheran tradition to cover the range of being a Christian.

1. Justification—*Romans 3:21-27; Romans 4:22-25; Romans 5:1-8; Ephesians 2:5-10.*
2. Works—*Romans 2:13; Romans 6:1-4; Romans 4:16-18; Romans 6:15-23.*
3. Inclusion—*Romans 3:28-31; Romans 8:9-17; Ephesians 2:11-13.*

B. “Strangers to the covenant”—Gentiles have been brought near.

1. Covenant/promise as the strand that runs through the Older and Newer Testaments.
2. Covenant, not justification or righteousness, as the dominant theme in the text; covenant as indicating the God who breaks down the dividing walls of hostility (*Ephesians 2:14-22*).

II. *Campanology*—hearing the bells ring.

A. Motto of the local association of ringers.

1. *Ars incognita contemnitur*—“an unknown art is despised.”
2. *Ars audita celebratur*—“an art that is heard should be celebrated.”

- B. To many people, biblical covenantal theology appears as incomprehensible as the changes in ringing—unknown, lacking wisdom.
- “Single plan” of Paul’s understanding of God’s purpose is that God, the Creator, called Abraham so that through his family (descendants as numerous as the stars), families shall be blessed (*Genesis 12:1-3*).

III. Justification really does make someone righteous

- A. The status of being made right: the artificial heart analogy (N.T. Wright).
1. “Righteousness” (*tsedaquah* in Hebrew, *dikaioyne* in Greek) means the court has found in your favor—you have a new heart.
 2. Justification means transforming the very lifeblood of the person—a righteousness implant.
- B. But “justification” as an “imputed righteousness” lacks an ability to speak what the new status means.
- The court has found in your favor, even as one guilty—so do you go back to stealing and withholding, overlooking the stranger or the poor, because you are justified? By no means.
- C. Covenant may extend the understanding as the thread that runs through the Older and Newer Testaments (N.T. Wright).
1. The way in which Israelites understood themselves as a people under covenant.
 2. The particular focus of the scriptures that were foundational for Judaism and Paul.
 3. Second temple Judaism, post Babylonian incursion, understood itself in the exile.
 4. Paul’s retrieval of this underlying story and developing a single plan through Israel for the world in the One Jesus who at last has fulfilled the covenant—the operating theme throughout covenant.