

Our Relationship with God

John 10:14–15; Westminster Confession of Faith 7.1

Studies in Covenant Theology #2

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I HAVE a relationship with my wife. I have a relationship with my children. I have a relationship with you, my congregation. What's similar about all three of these statements? A relationship exists between me and all three. So often in our discussion about having a "relationship" with God we speak of it as the same as all our other relationships. But we need to distinguish. What's different about my three relationships I just mentioned? The kind of relationship I have. What exists between me and my wife is not the same what exists between me and my children and this is not the same as what exists between me and you. It's so important for us to understand and speak clearly about our relationship with God. It's a totally different kind of relationship and it has a totally different quality than any other relationship I have.

One of the ways we see this is that the concept of covenant is the method by which the infinite Creator relates to us the finite creature. Our relationship with God is covenantal. Remember the memorable words of the Westminster Confession: **the distance between God and the creature is**

so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto Him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of Him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God's part which He has been pleased to express by way of covenant (1.1). Because God is God and we are his creatures, we are to give him our lives in service and worship. But the only way we can receive him as a benefit is by his coming down to us by means of a covenant.¹

What's a covenant? It's the formal way God enters into relationship with us. And the nature of that relationship is described in Psalm 25:14: "The friendship of the LORD (*sod yhw*) is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant." This "friendship" is intimate companionship.² Relationship with the infinite God, therefore, is what covenant theology is all about. This relationship is reciprocal as God communicates himself and his gifts to us and that we respond in love to him.³ It's knowing God and being known by God. And we see that in Jesus' words tonight: **I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the**

¹ Michael Horton says, "God's very existence is covenantal." *God of Promise*, 10. I believe this is a category mistake. God's *ad intra* existence is *relational* among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is not the same thing as being *covenantal*. Relational is a mode of existence; covenantal is a method of relating. While he does not clarify what he means, I can read his statement charitably by distinguishing proper and improper ways of expression.

² Futato, 109.

³ Owen, *Of Communion with God*, 8.

Father. Knowing and being known is a way of describing communion with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I want to focus in tonight on the essence of God's covenant with us as relationship before we dive into the various biblical covenants.

The Archetypal Relationship Between Father and Son

First I want you to see here *the archetypal relationship between Father and Son*. Children, before a house is built an architect draws what are called "blueprints." This is the idea of the house from the architect's mind on paper. We call this an archetype. Before you and I have a relationship with God we have to realize that there is another relationship, a higher relationship that exists between the Father and the Son—and Scripture says elsewhere, and the Holy Spirit. The Father and the Son are the archetype of our relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jesus said, **I know my own and my own know me, just as *the Father knows me and I know the Father*.**

The Father knows, or has communion, with the Son and the Son knows, or has communion, with the Father. Ancient theologians came up with a word to express this concept: *perichoresis*. It's the intimate dwelling of the persons of the Holy Trinity in one another without confusing the three persons. They are three yet one in constant relation.

The idea of a Father should communicate to us love. What kind of love is this? It is eternal. The Father loves his Son. He's always loved his Son. He always will love his Son. And vice versa. It is perfect. The Father loves his Son with perfect love, unstained by anything. And vice versa. I mean, it's so holy that we have a hard time even imagining it because either our relationship with our dad wasn't the best or still isn't the best; or we know someone whose relationship with their father wasn't ideal; or even we as dads have failed so miserably. Yet there is an archetype of this love. It exists in God alone.

The Analogous Relationship Between Us and God

Second, this archetypal relationship that we cannot even imagine has relevance for us. Here's where, as a man whose relationship with his father never has and never will be what I desire and long after, I can experience what I think that could be like, but even better, in my relationship with God. So notice *the analogous relationship between us and God*:⁴ **I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father.** I now I can love Cyprian, Caiden, Daxton, and Sadie and they me not as my father knows me and I him but as my Heavenly Father knows and I

⁴ Thomas Manton, *Works* 11:33.

him! Amen! And I pray that for you too.

The great seventeenth century preacher, Thomas Manton, once said of this analogous relationship, “Believers have a room in Christ’s heart as Christ in the Father’s bosom.”⁵ Obviously God’s love for his eternal begotten Son is of a far greater quality and quantity than I can even conceive let alone experience as a creature, but I can experience it by analogy. In other words, as much as God my infinite Creator and eternal Father can love me his finite and temporal creature, so I am loved.

And we see this expressed in other ways in John 17.⁶ Here Jesus says he has given eternal life to all the Father gave him (v. 2).” And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (v. 3). He then prays for his apostles and those alive during his ministry, but in verse 20 he prays “also for those who will believe in me through their word.” What was his prayer? “That they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you (there’s that idea of *perichoresis*), that they also may be in us” (v. 21). That’s the covenantal communion and relationship! He explains this relationship as “glory”: “The glory that you have given me I have

⁵ Manton, *Works* 11:35.

⁶ Manton, *Works* 11:76–82.

given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me” (vv. 22–23). Then notice one last verse, verse 26: “I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

I have all kinds of relationships: with my wife, with my children, and with you. And you have all kinds of relationships as well. But is there anything like that between us and our God? Is there any other relationship we have that is like the one that exists between Father and Son? As we study covenant theology, let us never forget that this is what it’s all about: a relationship with God. Let us pray...