

A Reformed Banquet

Covenant Theology in Genesis 3:15-24

¹⁵ "...I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

¹⁶ To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."

¹⁷ And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;

¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.

¹⁹ By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

²⁰ The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.

²¹ And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.

²² Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever-- "

²³ therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken.

²⁴ He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

Genesis 3: 15-24 ESV

What Does it Mean to be "Reformed?"

The word "Reformed" is being used a lot today. There is a whole movement that *Christianity Today* recently called "**The Young, Restless, and Reformed.**"¹ You are familiar with many of the names given in the article: Piper, Mohler, Driscoll, Dever. But its use or definition is not what it was four hundred years ago. In this article, these particular "Reformed" Christians were described as God centered, TULIP tending, Scripture saturated, doctrine devoted Baptists with a passion for Puritans. "Calvinist" was used as a synonym for "Reformed." Each of those is fine I suppose. More are fine descriptions, and this seems to mirror the way many people

¹ Collin Hansen, "Young, Restless, Reformed," *Christianity Today* September (2006), <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/september/42.32.html>

are using the word. But **one word was strikingly absent** from the entire article, and it is the most basic idea of all. It is the word that used to be the very heart of the definition of what it meant to be Reformed. That word is “**covenant**.”

To be Reformed used to mean that you read the Bible covenantally.² To use a metaphor I will develop throughout this sermon, **covenant theology is a great banquet** that Reformed Christians feast upon when they read the Bible. It is the setting, the dishes, the table, the silverware, the goblets, the napkins, the hall, and everything else one needs to hold a great feast. When I use the term with people, I always mean it this way. That is why I tell people that while there are many Calvinist Baptist churches in Denver, to my knowledge, we are the only Reformed Baptist church in the entire state of Colorado. That is, we are the only Baptist church I know of that reads the Bible covenantally.³

I tell you these things because I want us to come to a wonderful feast today. I want to show you the different courses of a wondrous meal provided by the Heavenly Father. I want you to see how deeply rooted at the very beginning of the Bible covenants are, and to help you remember that there are many parts of this feast, not just the appetizers that often fill up a stomach.

A Reformed Covenant Feast: Getting Past the Appetizers

The passage today is **Genesis 3:15-24**. I outline it as follows. **First**, there is a promise of a coming seed that will destroy the works of the devil (**15**). **Second**, there are the repercussions of sin that are assigned to our first parents and/or their posterity (**16-19**; **22-24**). **Third**, there is a most unexpected intrusion of grace given

² For example, “Reformed theology is covenantal in character. Indeed, according to Warfield covenant theology is the ‘architectonic principle’ of the Westminster Confession.” “John Murray,” in Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998). Or, Richard L. Pratt Jr., “Reformed Theology Is Covenant Theology,” ed. Burk Parsons, *Tabletalk Magazine*, June 2010: *The New Calvinism* (Lake Mary, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2010).

³ Many, though not all, Presbyterians refuse to acknowledge that Baptists can even be Reformed, because they deny that even Reformed Baptists read the Bible covenantally. The chief application they use to demonstrate this is how they derive infant baptism from covenant theology. If you don’t see baptism as they do, then you aren’t covenantal. You will hear this from time to time. While it is true that our view of covenant theology is different from many Infant Baptists, it is not true that it is different at the critical points of the unity of Scripture and the unity of the covenants. It is also not the case that their own system is monolithic. Far from it. Covenant theology is a spectrum of views, even within Infant Baptist circles. My own attempt at it tries to demonstrate these things, while also showing that we baptized professing believers based on a covenantal system of the OT. See my soon to be released primer on covenant theology.

to Adam and Eve that comes right in the middle of very bad news. This grace is sealed in the blood of the bloody skin of a sacrificial animal (20-21).⁴

When read apart from covenant theology, the focus often goes to what I'll call theological or ethical appetizers that the congregation chews. These are questions like, "Did Eve have pain in pregnancy before the fall? Did she have babies before she sinned?" Or "Are women subordinate to men as a result of the curse?" Or "Were there weeds before the fall? Is it OK to use Roundup?" Or "Is it possible to find Eden now that we have been kicked out of it and there are Cherubim guarding the gate?" It isn't that these questions are bad. My concern, however, is that people often get so caught up in chewing on them that they miss the rest of the banquet. Our stomachs get so full that we have no place left for the important vegetables, the main course, or the dessert.

The Covenant of Works: Eat your Vegetables

If covenant theology is a feast, the Covenant of Works is the vegetables, and we all know how many people feel about vegetables. George Bush banned broccoli. Popeye couldn't stomach spinach, even though it made him strong. One of my daughters rebels over beans. Many vegetables are disgusting to many people, but they are what our bodies need to live. The law is what our souls need (and it is also good for our bodies). Look at all the law does when we keep it, for it is exactly what Eve believed would happen if she *broke* it. It revives the soul, makes wise the simple, rejoices the heart, enlightens the eyes (Ps 19:7-8; cf. Gen 3:6). It is to be desired more than gold, and is sweeter than honey. In keeping it there is great reward (10-11). Truly, it is the powerhouse of the meal God has sent from heaven.

The law is wrapped up in the Covenant of Works. The Covenant of Works is a covenant of law keeping. It is the "law" part of the law/gospel distinction. If you will remember, this covenant was introduced back in Genesis 2:16-17. It took the form of a **commandment** (law) not to eat of the fruit of the forbidden tree. This was followed by the promise of a **curse** that when they did, they would die. In our passage today (3:22), the **blessing** that was implied then is made explicit. If they had obeyed and eaten of the tree of life, they would have lived forever.

The Covenant of Works is a covenant based on obedience, and every child born in the world is born under its terms. None are excluded. As it says, "Now we

⁴ Or, to take it more broadly, as one commentator does, "God acts and speaks; man rebels; God punishes; God protects and reconciles." Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 201.

know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God” (Rom 3:19). Depending on what you do, God will judge you and give rewards or punishments appropriately. But the terms of this covenant are critical, and many people fail to grasp it. What God demands here is *perfect obedience*, not merely wishing or trying hard or being sincere. “The man who does these things shall live by them” (Lev 18:14; Gal 3:12). “It will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us” (Deut 6:25). The great problem is that no one has kept the terms of this covenant any better than Adam and Eve did. And through the law we become, as they did, *conscious* (the knowledge) of *sin* (of good and evil; see Rom 3:20).

The passage today begins with this idea in the form of judgment, the curse for breaking the law. It began with the curse on the *Nachash*—the Shining Seraphim Serpent of the Mountain-Garden of Eden. We looked at this last week. Perhaps Adam and Eve thought that they had gotten away with their crime because God started with the serpent. But if they did, they were mistaken. From here God moves to the *woman*, and then God turns to the *man*. God does not come to them as harshly as he could have. Nevertheless, what he says has had consequences on all human beings right down to the present moment.

We want to spend some time looking at what happens in God’s sentence upon them, but I want to do so from the perspective of the Covenant. The most important thing to say here is that Adam was the representative of a covenant. He represented all that would be born after him. His covenant became our covenant. As he went, so went humanity. Scripture says, “As in Adam all die” (1 Cor 15:22; cf. Rom 5:12ff). As such, what happens to Adam and Eve does not merely happen to them as individuals, but to their posterity as well. This is important to remember so that we do not spend all of our time eating those appetizers.

The Woman

Vs. 16 is where God addresses the woman directly. It continues the poetry section of this chapter.⁵ The first thing to notice is that the word “curse” is absent. The curse, properly speaking, is put between the seed of the woman and the serpent, and later, on the land (3:17). This curse brings hostility, contention, strife, sweat, toil, and hard labor to all of life. Through word plays and rhymes and other such

⁵ Note the poetical feature of a plethora of words (5 of 16) in this verse ending in *-kg*: *’išš’bônēk w’bērōnēk ... ’išēk t’sūqātēk ... bāk*.

devices, each of these ideas are circling over the entire passage like vultures awaiting a dying prey.⁶

What Dr. Boice says about this is probably true, “Although they are not cursed personally—being objects still of God’s tender concerns and mercy—Adam and Eve nevertheless experience the doleful effects of sin and thus participate in the curse of God against sin indirectly.”⁷ The whole creation is subject to decay, and is groaning with pains of childbirth up until the present moment, awaiting the sons of God to be revealed (Rom 8:22-23). Paul uses this fascinating language knowing full well that God’s pronouncement upon the woman dealt with childbirth and marriage.

God says two things to Eve. The first involves childbirth, the second involves marriage. The ideas are related. The childbirth lines repeat one another, but in repeating, the second adds something. “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children.” What is the addition? Aren’t they identical? The second line involves not only the pains that come in physically giving birth, but also the pains that will come in raising a baby. It encompasses the pains that children can bring to parents throughout their whole lives.

Most get caught up in this idea of pains in giving birth. They will ask, “Does this mean Eve knew about those pains because she had already had children? For it does say God will increase them.” But this is not really the point. Rather, the “increase” of trouble is “in everything having to do with children ... these who are now born in sin dishonor their parents and experience in their own lives the consequences of their own disobedience?”⁸ This is in line with experience and with the Covenant of Works. The ramifications of breaking the covenant extend much farther than pregnancy.

Seeing this covenantal can help us keep from focusing merely on the one problem, as bad as that must be for women. In expanding our thinking, we move to the consequences that Eve’s sin has not only on women’s bodies, but on each and every one of us in the form of war. For we are all children, and we have all brought grief to our parents. This is not a good thing. Rather, the law tells us the good thing. “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your

⁶ Think about the idea of labor. In English, a woman can go into labor and a man can labor at a field. While different words in Hebrew, there is clearly a word play going on in the poem. Or hostility. Wars are certainly about hostility. But later, another word will arise describing the Nachash. That word is Mastema. Mastema means “hostility.”

⁷ James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 221.

⁸ Ibid.

father and mother' (this is the first commandment with a promise)" (Eph 6:1-2).

Though sin desires us, we must rule over it, and be obedient to God's law, for this is good and right. How sad it is when children bring grief to their parents, not only in youth, but as adults. We will see this in the very next chapter of Genesis.

This signals **work that must be done**. The proverb says, "The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother" (Prov 29:15). Into this situation, parents and children must both work through love and discipline to overcome the effects of sin that have so ravaged each and every one of us.

I alluded a moment ago to something said in the next chapter about Cain, Eve's son. It says, "Sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it" (Gen 4:7). I bring this up now, because in the second half of Gen 3:16, you find the only other place in the Bible where such a thing is said. It is not a coincidence that these two verses occur a mere fifteen verses from one another. For the story of Cain helps us interpret the meaning of this very misunderstood saying, "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."

Sometimes it is thought that somehow, what God is doing is putting some kind of **infatuation or sexual drive into the woman** that allows man to then rule over woman, as if a spell is being cast over her. It is also thought that **his ruling is somehow a part of the curse**. If experience says anything, the infatuation often goes the other way, and the wife ends up controlling the man through it. Furthermore, contrary to feminism and democracy, there is nothing about "rule" that is inherently evil. So we must think properly about this. Again, covenant theology can come to the rescue.

Covenants teach us that there are relationships that bind parties, even though they are not functionally equal. The Great King comes to the vassal lord and extends a covenant through which both will benefit. God comes to men and extends a covenant that benefits both parties. In both cases, the greater rules over the lesser, and the lesser thinks nothing of it. He does not rebel and say, "How dare you think you are superior to me. How dare you think you rule over me." Well, sometimes he does, but if he does, war ensues. The ideal (always kept when God is the great party) is that the great rules in equity, justice, and keeps his word and promises.

The ideas that God is casting a spell and that Adam's rule is part of the fall are rotten fruit in the appetizer bowl. The former may be a result of **sexism** against women; the other is seems to me to be **a kind of reverse sexism** known as feminism. The facts are, the NT repeatedly says that man was created first, and then the woman, and for this reason, the wife is to submit to her husband (Eph 5:22; Col

3:18; 1 Pet 3:1). This is not an application, but a basic historical fact upon which the applications are always derived. The NT then teaches that women need to be taught to submit, because unlike the first interpretation, her desire does anything but bringing about voluntary submission. The principles of the NT are not culturally relative, such that we can just cast the principle off because our culture isn't like that today. Yet, this is exactly what many Christians, let alone non-Christians are doing.

Contrary to feminists who live in a democracy, “rule” is not the problem here. As one author reminds us (a woman no less), “The rule of the husband, *per se*, is not a result of or punishment for sin. The headship of the husband over his wife is a part of the creation order (1 Cor 11:8; 1 Tim 2:13a. The source of and reason for the creation of the woman is significant. Man is created first; he is the source of the woman's existence; and she is created for the sake of the man. Therefore, the head of the woman is man).⁹ Some believe “Before the fall, man's rule was gentle; afterwards it is tyrannous.” But this also misses the point, if by it we mean that the man is the one at fault here. This is directed towards the woman, not the man.

The problem, as it is with the children and the seeds prior to that, is that we have here the beginnings of yet another war, and both parties are culpable. This we call the **Battle of the Sexes**. Meredith Kline believes that what is taking place between our first parents is actually a divorce.¹⁰ It is an interesting, albeit speculative idea. But what do divorces almost always bring? Strife, conflict, and war. I'm dating myself, but if you've ever seen the *War of the Roses* with Michael Douglas and Kathleen Turner, you get the picture. It is an escalating battle that ends in the most ridiculous things imaginable.

We need to think about sin and Cain. It says “sin is crouching and it desires you, but you must master it.” What does sin desire? The desire of sin towards Cain is a desire to usurp the authority of God and break the law of God, just like Satan desired for Eve to usurp the authority of God and break the law. Like Satan, sin desires to possess or control Cain, to put him under its cruel whip, to make him its slave. In fact, as we will see when we come to this story, the word for “crouching” is actually the name of a demon, making the idea that much closer to Satan desiring Eve to usurp God's command. That is why Paul uses the language of slavery regarding sin. You were slaves to sin (Rom 6:16-22). After stating what sin wants,

⁹ Susan T. Foh, “What Is the Woman's Desire?” *WTJ* 37 (1975) 376–83.

¹⁰ Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 150-51; also John S. Weaver, “A Just Divorce: Divorce That is Right and Just and Fair,” as M.A. paper to Reformed Theological Seminary (May 2007): n. 20, p. 89, http://maryland-familylaw.com/images/Thesis_A_Just_Divorce.pdf

God then tells Cain what he must do. He must master sin. A good verbal parallel is “rule.” He must rule over it.

Let’s take this thinking to the Eve verse. The idea is that **the woman has the same sort of desire for her husband that sin has for Cain, a desire to possess or control him, to contend for leadership in their relationship.**¹¹ This is because the man, as demonstrated by Adam just verses earlier, is soft and weak on his moral responsibility as head. In turn, God is saying that **Adam must assert his headship and “rule” (in a good way) over his wife**, by not allowing her sinful desires to destroy the created order of the relationship. He must not abdicate his spiritual authority. And so, we should read the verse with the two clauses being antithetical, “and your desire to control shall be to your husband” and “*but* he should master you.”¹²

Let me tell you what this **does not** mean. The recent fall of a “Family Integrated” “Calvinist” empire has led to some shocking revelations, including sexual scandals and the way they treat women. For example, the men used to sit around a living room in a circle on couches with their wives forced *stand* behind them, silent. A new man came to the meeting with his wife, and he had her sit beside him on the couches. Beams of fire began shooting out of the eyes of these religious superheroes. The new man was asked a question by the leader that he couldn’t answer, because it didn’t apply to him, but to his wife. So he asked her, and she volunteered a response. Immediately, the leader said, “Excuse me! I’m speaking to the men.” They instantly got up and left, because it was like being in a cult, very uncomfortable and spiritually perverted.¹³ This is not headship, but domination, control, and slavery.

The marriage is not this, but a covenant. Covenants are the opposite of this. The Lord Jesus is the model of this covenant. In places like 1 Corinthians and Ephesians (**1 Cor 11:1ff; Eph 5:25-27**), Christ as *head* of his bride, did all things in his role of headship in a way that was loving, helpful, sacrificial, and beautiful for his wife. Song of Solomon explains his love and their relationship beautifully.

Christ does this as part of another covenant that he entered into with his Father, where Christ is now the *servant* rather than the head, servant to his Father, doing all things in obedience to him. The Father was not tyrannical towards the son, not a slave-master beating his only begotten, silencing him, de-humanizing him, but leading him as Christ leads the church. This proper order, which even the Godhead

¹¹ *Westminster Theological Journal* 37, no. 3 (1974): 381.

¹² *Westminster Theological Journal* 37, no. 3 (1974): 382.

¹³ Recounted in T. W. Eston, “Doug Phillips’ Mentor and Spiritual Father Speaks Out,” Dec 19, 2013, <http://jensgems.wordpress.com/2013/12/19/doug-phillips-mentor-and-spiritual-father-speaks-out/>

follows, is what Paul is getting at in the places where he raises the issue, and he has to command this kind of thing to us, because it is not what either party desires.

The opposite, and probably much more common problem is what happened to Adam and Eve themselves. There is a **vicious cycle** here that often spirals downward. Men and husbands neglect their spiritual responsibilities to their wives and this extends outward to their children, churches, and more, and I am talking about Christian men here. Maybe they do not know they have such responsibilities. Maybe they do not know what to do about them, and either do not know where to go to find out or do not care to do so. So they end up doing little to nothing. Whatever the reasons, Women often have it stuck in their minds that the solution is to just do it themselves. If he won't do it, I will. **And so the** wives, who are frustrated, often pick up the slack and become the spiritual leaders: of the home, of the church, even of a nation. **In turn**, this causes the man to see that **"the job is getting done,"** and since it is much easier for him to become involved in other things (sometimes good, sometimes bad), which is what his is inclined to naturally anyway, he neglects the problem all the more.

This is not a comment in any way saying that women do not have proper roles in any and all of these spheres. Of course they do. They are man's helper. They have teaching roles in the family in the church and in the nation. They can take leadership roles in certain situations (just like men, who do not have every role in any of these institutions), and so on. It is to say that there is a real problem, and the solution is for men and women to both behave in ways that honor God and the roles they were given, not giving into the temptation to do what comes naturally for either, but praying, waiting upon God, and in the bonds of fellowship with the church, helping one another press towards the goal. For it was usurping the man and in letting her usurp him that got us into this problem in the beginning.

The Man

Vv. 17-19 is where God addresses the man. It concludes the poetry section of this chapter. Adam was cowardly in blaming Eve when it was his responsibility to deal with the Nachash. Notice that it is to the man that God addresses the issue of disobedience of the commandment. God did not tell the woman **"You shall not eat of it,"** though she was under the same law as he was. But God said this to the man. In fact, he said it to Adam before Eve was even created. Thus, his responsibility is greater. Thus, God's address to him is the longest of the three.

Notice the idea of obedience that is front and center. This relates to the Covenant of Works. Wenham translates it as, “Because you have obeyed your wife.”¹⁴ There is a word play here between the “voice” of the LORD who is coming in judgment and the “voice” of the woman to whom Adam listened. Then it talks about eating of the tree which God “commanded.” The theme is clearly on obedience, *doing* what is right. This is exactly what the Covenant of Works is about.

There is a curse here, but notice that it is the ground that is cursed (17). Why does God curse the ground, and what is the meaning of this? Land is a very important theme in this entire story, and this theme runs all the way through the Bible. “Ground” (*adamah*) is a wordplay on man (*adam*). Adam was taken from the ground (Gen 2:7). Adam will soon “return to the ground” (3:19). The very substance that was used to form him is now cursed. Can you see the irony in this? Can you see the intimate connection that Adam has with the *adamah*, and what a burden it must now be for the ground to be cursed?

It says five things with regard to Adam and the ground. 1. In pain you shall eat of it. 2. Thorns and thistles will spring up from it. 3. Plants you shall eat from it. 4. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread. 5. You will return to it. Let’s look briefly at each one.

“In pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life” (17). Implied here is that Adam will die. But the pain is the focus. This is a play on what God has just said to Eve. “I will increase your pain.” Both the man and the woman will now have great pains. For both, the pain is labor, though each will have different labors to bear. These pains refer to the basic roles as husbands and wives in the ancient world. In other words, all of their work will be cursed because of what they have done. Work will become a great pain. Obviously, this was not the intention from the beginning, but now we are subjected to such things because of sin.

“Thorns and thistles.” Back in chapter 2, God caused plants (2:5) and the trees to “spring up” (2:9). Now, God will cause those things which rob the plants of light, water, and nutrients will spring up to make man’s life miserable. In Hosea 10:8, these same thorns and thistles are related to the altars of the gods that Israel has erected. If we remember that the earth is God’s temple, the idea is eerily parallel.

Again, appetizing questions often consume us. We ask, “Were there no thorns and thistles before the fall?” I believe this misses the point. I want you to

¹⁴ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 82.

think about Adam's punishment as a "giving over" to do exactly what he wants to do in his sin. To not cast Satan out of the Garden was to not purify the sanctuary. It was to not keep it clean.

In the verse in Hosea, God is casting Israel out, so that they can no longer tend to their idols. Thus, thorns and thistles will grow up in the cracks of their evil altars. Adam's negligence was a lot like letting thorns and thistles grow on the altar of the Holy Temple of Eden. He did not clean it out. The natural extension of such laziness and negligence is that sin will not be removed, weeds and thistles will grow up. It is as much the result of our own faithlessness in obeying God's command as it is anything else. This is exactly what we see happen, again, in homes and churches and civilizations when men and women do what their inclinations are to do rather than overcoming and mastering the sin.

"**You shall eat the plants of the field.**" Next comes "**eating the plants.**" Some want to focus on how this must mean God is **cursing man to be a vegetarian**. But again, this misses the point (being a vegetarian isn't a curse, but is actually very good for you). The point here involves the word "plant." We saw it back in **Gen 2:5** where we saw that it referred to **cultivated plants**. The point is, God put man on the earth to work the ground and even gave him this command (**2:5, 15**). Man is going to have to work to get his food and it won't be easy.

"**By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread.**" Thus, because of God's curse on the ground and also because of his own spiritual dullness, it becomes that much more difficult to do the work. This is the image of toiling in sweat in laboring to get bread. Bread, of course, comes from grain, and grain comes from the land. Today's farmers, and especially today's consumers really have no idea how difficult it was to be a farmer in olden times. Any person in Israel would have immediately understood and attached the difficulty of even finding food to the curse and the fall when they read this story.

Returning to dust. The final part of the sentence is that **Adam is going to die**. The only relief he will find from his burdensome toil is death. He will have to eat in sweat until he returns to the ground. In this way, death is almost viewed as a blessing for the man, rather than a curse. For it is death alone that finally gives him relief. But how can this be? Aren't we to think of death as part of the curse? Certainly, but this is one more reason why covenant theology is so important.

The Covenant of Promise: The OT Main Course

Suddenly, God finishes pronouncing his terrible judgment. God is now silent and we see Adam speak. What would you say at this moment? What would most people say? Would they be angry all the more? Would they be recalcitrant in their sin, hardened all the more because of the judgment?

What does he say? The story takes a wonderful turn. It says, “**The man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living**” (20). Notice how vs. 20 and “**living**” is juxtaposed with vs. 19 and **death**. Adam finds **hope in his wife!** One of the things judgment is meant to do is to get people to think about what they had done and repent. It is clear that Adam’s response to the judgment of God is not hardening, but softened repentance.

View his response **covenantally** and through the lens of **faith**. Adam is doing two things here. First, he is taking hope in life, in living. He does not dwell on the judgment of God, but somehow is able to move past it. He moves past it by now **obeying God**. What do I mean obeying God? Where is he obeying here?

If you will remember, **naming a thing is ruling over** a thing. We have seen this throughout the story up to this point (**Gen 1:5, 8, 10; 2:19, 23**). For Adam to name his wife Eve is for him to pick up his sword and begin fighting the evil. It is for him to take that first step in carrying out the function of image bearing that he was given. In his family, it is for him to rise up and become the spiritual head. The name, it seems to me, is a clear response of faith in the promise of God. Kline believes this is a re-marriage ceremony between Adam and Eve, a making new of the covenant that was broken.

Following on the heels of justice and Adam’s faithful response, we find the first intrusion of grace in the actual life of Adam and Eve. **Genesis 3:21** may only be one verse, but it is beautiful and vital. “**And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.**” This is the establishing with Adam and Eve a formal covenant of promise in the blood of an animal. Here there is shedding of blood. Here there is covering of sin. Here there is forgiveness and grace. And it is done by the very hand of the LORD God. It was not enough to God that Adam respond in faith. God decided that more was needed. God needed to respond in grace, because no matter what happened with the man at this moment, grace alone could overcome future sin or past sin.

There is more than a hint here that **God is to be viewed physically**, as actually being present with Adam and Eve. We have seen hints of this before, as he seems to be speaking with Adam and coming physically in judgment. But how else can we understand an animal being slaughtered and God himself covering them with the

skins apart from a man actually killing a beast, drawing the blood, preparing the hide, and wrapping our parents in clothes? So this is not the Father we are talking about. This LORD God will appear many times in the book of Genesis as the Angel of the LORD, someone who walks, talks, grabs, and even wrestles with men. He is Yahweh, and yet he is also distinct from Yahweh.

The [skin of the animal](#) is very important. For this is to be viewed as a [sacrifice](#). In the story of Cain and Able we will have two different sacrifices contrasted: one of fruit, one of an animal. The same thing is going on here. Yet another play is occurring. Adam and Eve had [clothed themselves with plant leaves](#). God [clothes them with animal skins](#). Again, throughout Genesis, the killing of an animal and the shedding of its blood is the sign of a covenant being “cut” (in the blood). Moses did not feel the need to get into all of this here and now, only to hint at it, to prep your mind, to foreshadow as a good author will do. But it is here, and it is precious, for God is showing himself kind and gracious through the Lord Jesus Christ.

One final point about this verse. If you were living in the first century, you may very well have been able to walk into a Synagogue and heard the Priest reading this from the scroll of a Genesis targum, “[And the Lord God made garments of glory for Adam and for his wife from the skin which the serpent had cast off \(to be worn\) on the skin of their flesh, instead of the adornment of their own beauty of which they had been stripped, and he clothed them.](#)” The targums which were read in those days saw the clothing as variously a [clothing of light](#) or a [clothing of the serpent skins](#). Both ideas are fascinating, though speculative. But they each show in their own unique way, the grace of God towards Adam and Eve. As Reformed Christians, we read the whole story together as one of law and grace, two different covenants, each having their own place and purpose in our lives.

The Covenant of Grace: The Coming Dessert

I would love to end this morning on this note, but the story does not end quite this way. It impresses upon you the grace of God, but it will not allow you to think that the Covenant of Works can just be overlooked because man starts to do the right thing. Thus, the last three verses of the story show that though they are now clothed in the skins of the animal, there are still consequences for their sins. These verses are both tragic and gracious.

It begins by God acknowledging that humanity has become like himself and the other members of the divine council ([Gen 3:22](#)). They “[know good and evil](#)”

meaning, they have now made their own judicial decisions about it, and it has turned out poorly. But God is more concerned with what will happen if they are now allowed to stay in the Garden. If they stay, they will still have access to the tree of life, and surely, they will want to eat and live forever. Why should this be a problem? My view is that if they had eaten, they would have **lived forever, but in a state of sin**. This is the definition of hell. It is only through death that sinners can put on immortality in a body that had been ridded of such an evil companion.

So God “sends” Adam out of the garden. **Vv. 23-24** give **two reasons** for such a move. The first has to do with Adam’s continue responsibility as an image bearer. His job is going to be recapture the earth and bring it under the authority and rule of God. He is to **tame the wild places** and make the earth into the sanctuary it is prescribed to be. So, he is sent away to go and work the ground from which he was taken. If he had stayed in the Garden, there would have been a great temptation to never leave, not wanting to endure the pain of the toil that was awaiting him out there, thus refusing to obey the dominion mandate. We find this very thing in Acts, where the Christians will not leave Jerusalem and go into the world to be witnesses, so God bring persecution to force them out.

The other reason is more negative. It also relates to **Eden as a sanctuary**. It gives the direction “**east**,” which is almost always related to sanctuaries in the Bible. They are now “**driven out**.” They will have to return to the door of Eden via the eastern path, in accordance with the law of the sanctuary which is imprinted into the creation with the sun rising in the east and will be further elaborated throughout the Bible. They will have to obey God and do things his way. And to make sure that they do so, God sets up cherubim to guard the Most Holy Place where God dwells. We find the very same theme in the Most Holy Place of the temples of the Bible, with cherubim guarding the way to the throne of God and the holy law.

Yet, there is still that promise. Return to **Genesis 3:15**. It is a promise of a final covenant: The Covenant of Grace. The covenant of promise made with Adam and Eve in the skins of the animal anticipate the Covenant of Grace to come, a covenant made with Jesus Christ. For them, this was the desert that was to come. But for us, the desert has been served. Christ has entered into the Covenant Grace and is saving many people given to him by the Father to be in his kingdom and sanctuary. In the center of this kingdom, in the center of this great NT temple, there we find that access has been regain to the Tree of Life. It has been regained by the obedience to the Covenant of Works by the Lord Jesus himself. Now, through the covenant, he offers it to any who would believe in him.

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.” (Rev 2:7). “Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates” (Rev 22:14). May you enter by the Gate and the Door, and not, as a wolf, by finding your own way inside. And may covenant theology help you to read the Bible as a grand story fulfilled in Christ.

