

A Tale of Two Covenant Systems

By Chris Yokel

When it comes to theological self-awareness and clarity, modern evangelicalism for all of its good points is often woefully lacking. Pastors are often high on managerial skills and low on exegetical skills, and laypeople are often more well versed in Christian-pop psychology than they are in a deep understanding of the Bible. But for all the ignorance that abounds, we cannot help but be the inheritors of theology from the past. Theology is inescapable. The critical part is whether it is done well or done poorly.

As humans we are creatures of habit and tradition. This is not bad in itself. In fact, the steadiness of habits and the patterns of tradition are essential to our lives. But tradition can be soured to its purpose when it becomes an excuse for laziness and lack of critical thought and reexamination. This is never truer than in the realm of theology. Tradition can be a stabilizing force and a spiritual comfort. It strengthens my faith to recite and believe The Apostle's Creed, affirmed by believers century after century since the early church. But if church history has taught us anything, it has taught us that tradition can become a bastion for ignorance, human pride, and for undermining the Word of God itself, our ultimate authority for faith and practice. I'm not just talking about the Roman Catholic Church. Protestants are just as guilty in creating a golden calf of tradition.

Faithfulness to Jesus Christ requires that every generation of Christians first of all have a heart that desires to submit itself to the authority of Scripture above all things, and then a will that seeks to show itself approved as a workman unto God, ready and capable to interpret and divide the Scriptures. Accompanying this must be a willingness to overturn any inherited beliefs that do not show themselves to be consistent with a reasonable interpretation of Scripture.

Today, it is evangelicalism's inherited understanding of covenant theology in Scripture that must be reexamined¹. This is crucial because the concept of covenant is central and fundamental to our understanding of Scripture. Covenant is merely another way of saying a relationship of some form, and when we then consider that biblical covenants deal with man's relationship to God, we realize that we are discussing the most critical aspect of biblical thinking.

Throughout the Bible, covenant is the medium through which God always relates to His people. God has never related to mankind or to His people apart from or outside of a covenant relationship. Covenant then is the atmosphere that we breathe as Christians, and it is the atmosphere that permeates all of Scripture. It is of vital importance then that we properly understand the shape of covenants throughout Scripture, and where that leaves us standing today as people in covenant with the holy God. It is also important how we see the covenants relating to one another, for as we will see, the conclusions that we draw about one often lead to our understanding of the others.

What does the general understanding of covenant theology in the Bible as seen by modern evangelicalism today look like? It tends to appear something like this: in the beginning God made man and placed Him in the garden. He commissioned him with certain tasks like taking care of the earth and

1. I realize that there is not a single "covenant theology" that is embraced by evangelicalism. I recognize the differences between dispensationalism, Reformed theology, Lutheranism, etc. Still I believe there is a general consensus today of a certain overall understanding of how the covenants flesh out in Scripture, an understanding that I will address.

filling it with descendants. Now since man was a new creature, God placed before man a test in the form of a command. He placed in the garden the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and prohibited man from eating its fruit upon pain of death both spiritual and physical. God placed Adam on “probation” as it were, and how he responded during this time would determine what his destiny would be. This means that Adam was placed in a covenant of works with God. If Adam obeyed God and did not eat, he would attain an undying life that would never fail; he would reach his full maturity as a creature of God. However if he disobeyed he would die and never see eternal life. Well, we know what happened next. Adam and Eve ate from the tree, and immediately they were aware of good and evil, and of death. They hid from God's presence in shame. However, even though physical and spiritual death were introduced into the world, God did not leave mankind to destruction. God sacrificed an animal and made clothing (coverings) for Adam and Eve's nakedness from the sacrificed animal's skin. He also promises the coming of a Seed who would crush the serpent's head. This is called the *proto-euangelion*, the proto-gospel. This is the first time we see the lesson taught that man cannot earn salvation from God in his own efforts because God's standards are so very high.

The next major covenant figure in the Bible is Abraham. Abraham has a different relationship with God than Adam, because he is the “father of faith.” Abraham is famous for his great faith in God. We are told in Genesis 15:6 that “he believed the Lord, and [God] counted it to him as righteousness.” Abraham is the first example that man cannot be justified by works, but only by faith in God's redemption. Abraham becomes the model for the New Testament Christian.

Now God made a promise to make Abraham's descendants His people, and these become the Israelites, the next great step in God's covenant scheme. With the law, we have a republication of the covenant of works. The Mosaic law shows forth God's absolute and perfect holiness. It is given to the people to obey, and like Adam, they are placed in a conditional covenant with God. If they obey Him perfectly, they will be blessed, but if not, they will be cursed and destroyed. This is of course meant to show man again that he cannot earn salvation from God, because the standard of righteousness is so very high. Hypothetically, if an Israelite could obey the law sinlessly, then they could earn salvation from God by keeping His perfect and holy standard. This is impossible however, because man in his sin can never obey the law sinlessly. The law only shows him what a miserable failure he is.

But the problem of sin remained. God is holy and righteous, and so He cannot let sin go unchecked and unpunished, so how could He dwell in relationship to His people without destroying them? The answer lay in the coming of Jesus Christ. He was the solution, because as fully man He would die for the sins of men, but also as fully God He was capable of living a sinless life and thus fulfilling all of God's holy requirements. And this is what He did. In His life Jesus fulfilled the law perfectly, earning the righteousness that we could never earn, and then He died on the cross, taking God's anger and wrath over sin upon Himself. Now in the New Testament, we are saved by believing in Jesus. If we believe in Jesus and what He did on the cross for us, and turn away from our sins, we will be saved. Through Jesus' death God absolves those who believe in Jesus of the punishment for their sins, and then He takes the perfectly sinless life that Jesus lived in fulfillment of the law and He “counts” it or “credits” it or “reckons” it to the person who believes in Jesus, so that He looks on them as having fulfilled the law sinlessly even though they have not. The Christian then is to go on from this point and then grow in sanctification with the help of the Holy Spirit, who is the power of God in the Christian. However, they are always and ever justified not by their holiness, but by their faith in Jesus and the righteousness they have received from Him.

This the the basic view of modern evangelicalism in a nutshell. Notice how it is interconnected. We are saved by the righteousness of Christ today because of the failure of Adam's covenant of works.

One thing leads to another. Let us now examine it piece by piece, and as we do so, I believe we will find it inconsistent with Scripture.

The Covenant With Adam: Gaining or Remaining?

The inherited evangelical view of the covenant of God with Adam is that it was a covenant of works, in which Adam would have received the full blessings of God if He had obeyed. Reformed theologian O. Palmer Robinson, in his book *The Christ of the Covenants*, states, “Radical obedience...provides the key to blessing under the covenant of creation. If man will acknowledge fully the lordship of the Creator by obeying his word purely for the sake of obedience, he shall experience the consummate blessing of the covenant. Life in perpetuity shall be his” (85)

Is this what we find in the beginning of Genesis? Were Adam and Eve on some lower plane from which they had to pull themselves up by works to God? Were they lacking in experiencing the full blessings of God? Did Adam and Eve have to earn their way into God's grace?

How do we see God acting? Out of His infinite power He creates a universe that is beautiful and infinitely good. And it is not barely utilitarian. It is lavish in beauty and variety and provision. Then he creates the earth as a unique place and pours His creativity into it. And then on this earth He creates a lush garden, out of which flows four mighty rivers, full of good things to eat and a plethora of flora and fauna. It is here that He creates man in His own image, different from all the other creatures in his divinely reflective glory and his capacity to commune with God. God is no cheapskate. In fact, we see that God has only acted in grace and kindness toward His new creatures in the love and care that He has lavished. And it is important to note that while there are two special trees that are pointed out in the garden, only one is prohibited. Thus, Adam and Eve were not barred from the Tree of Life, symbol of eternal life. Life was theirs already; it was not something they had to attain to. In His initial covenant with man, God made the first move, in love and grace to provide for His creatures all they could need. There was nothing more that Adam and Eve had to gain. Here is what biblical theologian Scott Hafemann has to say in regards to this all important point:

It is important to see, therefore, that the command for Adam and Eve to multiply and fill the earth and subdue it (Gen. 1:28) is not a summons to earn a potential blessing that is not yet theirs but a call to live out the blessing of life that God has already granted them. According to Genesis 2:9, 16-17, Adam and Eve may eat of every tree in the midst of the garden, including the 'tree of life,' except one: only the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is off limits. This means that before Adam and Eve sinned they were already enjoying eternal life as made possible by God's magnificent gifts of grace; they were not trying to prove themselves during a probation period in order to earn the right to eat of the tree of life and thereby gain a higher state of holiness or spiritual existence. Only after they sin does God bar the way to the tree of life, lest they continue to eat of it and live forever in their sinful state (Gen. 3:22-23). (*The God of Promise and the Life of Faith*, 53)

Is this to say that Adam and Eve had nothing at all to do, or that the prohibition to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was not a test? Not at all. But it is important to see the order of things. Understanding that God acted first in grace and love, when He calls Adam and Eve to subdue the earth and to refrain from the tree, He is calling them to remain within the grace that He has given them. It is conditional. If they obey they will remain, but if they disobey they will fall out of blessing and eternal life. The call is not to earn life, but to remain in it. And the only way they can remain faithful is by faith. There is no up-by-the-bootstraps theology here. It is not a conditional covenant of works. It is a

conditional covenant of obedient faith. They will only stay faithful if they trust that God has been and will continue to be good. They must have faith in who God is in order to do what He says. We can see that this is true in how the serpent tempts them—his whole effort is directed to undermining both God's word and His character.

Adam and Eve lived in a covenant of promise and obligation before God. He had graciously provided for them. They did nothing to earn God's love. But once He established them He commanded them to live a certain way in order to continue in His love and grace. And they would obey faithfully by trusting in the goodness of His character. Of course, they did not, which leads us to the rest of salvation's story, and God's focusing of that story in Abraham.

“Abraham Obeyed My Voice”

When it comes to the traditional view, a dichotomy emerges between the Adamic covenant and the Abrahamic covenant. This is because in between them lies the Fall and following it, the beginnings of God's redemptive scheme. With Abraham, God is said to operate now by faith, and not by works, since in that attempt man failed. This is particularly argued from the verse previously quoted in Genesis 15, and from the same chapter where God “cuts a covenant” with Abraham but alone passes through the pieces, signifying that He would take the covenantal curses upon Himself should the covenant not be kept. Abraham is also highlighted in the New Testament as the paragon on faith, particularly by Paul in Romans 4. Abraham then is seen as being the “father of faith,” for in him we see that man can only be saved by trusting in God and not in himself.

But do we see such a great change in the structure of the covenant between the times of Adam and Abraham? We have already seen that Adam was not within a covenant of works. Can we say that Abraham was in a covenant of faith alone?

Just as with Adam, we see God move first in His relationship with Abraham. In Genesis 12, he appears to Abraham (then Abram), who is an idolater in the land of Ur. The first words we hear are those of command: “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (vv. 1-3). Here we see that God's first word to Abraham is a word of command: he must go. If Abraham is be in covenant with God, this is not optional. This is not an unconditional covenant, having nothing whatsoever to do with what Abraham does and doesn't do. He has no other way to walk with God than to obey. But God does not lay some oppressive burden upon Abraham with no hope. God follows up His command with promises of blessing and hope for Abraham, promises he will need to cling to in order to follow out the command to leave his country. As with Adam, the covenant with Abraham is one of promise and obligation. Abraham had to obey God's command to leave. He had to obey God's command to circumcise the males of his house. He had to obey God's command to sacrifice his son Isaac. At any point could Abraham have said to God, “God, I'm not going to do this” and have expected to walk in God's redemption? If the covenant was by faith alone and not by works, why not? In that case his salvation wouldn't be based on anything he did. But the Bible affirms that Abraham's salvation was grounded on his faith and on what he did. The two worked together. For example, Hebrews 11 says that “by faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac” (v. 17), but James says of this incident “was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?” (2:21) and God Himself says in Genesis 22, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know

that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me” (12). Is the Bible contradicting itself? Not if we see the covenant defined by promise and obligation. Abraham was called by grace into God's covenant, but had to walk faithfully in it to receive the blessings and promises. He could not simply rely upon the unconditional mercy of God alone. Neither could his faithfulness simply rely on his own strength alone. His faithfulness was dependent upon faith in the promises of God. This is why the biblical writers can say equally that Abraham was justified by faith and by works. Both are true, for both work together. Both are true, but it is important to our particular discussion here to emphasize the necessity of faithful obedience for justification. Listen to what God said to Abraham's son Isaac after the death of the patriarch: “And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws” (Genesis 26:4b-5). The logic is clear: because Abraham was faithful, the blessings of the promises would extend to his descendants.

“You Shall Be My Treasured Possession”

When it comes to looking at the Mosaic law, given to Abraham's descendants, evangelicals typically have no problem in seeing the Old Testament administration as law-based and conditional upon obedience. However this is usually seen as an unpleasant circumstance that New Testament believers have been relieved of. The Mosaic law is seen as a “republication” of the covenant of works that God made with Adam. Whereas before Adam was one man under probation, now an entire nation is under probation to see if they can remain faithful. Of course, man is now fallen under sin, so in a sense the attempt is doomed from the start. The whole point is to show man his failure to reach God's standard on his own, through his law-keeping efforts. This is where the traditional distinction of Law and Gospel emerges. The Law is seen as only demanding, setting forth God's absolute holiness, and all around making us feel like filthy vermin in the light of a holy God, while the Gospel is seen as proclaiming grace, free forgiveness and pardon, and uniting us to God through Jesus' sacrifice. Some evangelicals will even talk about a “Law-way” of salvation and a “Gospel-way”. The Law-way is the hypothetical salvation achieved through keeping God's law sinlessly, while the Gospel-way is the salvation that we can have by being justified by Christ through faith, apart from works. In the Mosaic covenant, we apparently see this Law-way looming over Israel and their relation to God. But is this the full picture of the Old Testament witness?

In Exodus 19 we have the inauguration of the Mosaic covenant and the introduction of the law, summarized in the Ten Commandments. Much like our own presidential inaugurations it is a ceremony imbued with solemnity and preparation. God speaks to Moses about how the people are to prepare themselves to meet Him. The first words of His mouth, the words to introduce this supposed covenant of works, are these: “You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself” (v. 4). The first words out of God's mouth are words about grace, redemption, and salvation. God recounts the mighty way in which He moved to save them from the clutches of the Egyptians, out of slavery and death. Once again, God has initiated, He has acted in grace and mercy to save His people. Certainly it was in response to the promises He made to Abraham that He did so, but nonetheless the strong opening theme of salvation is palpable. It cannot be argued then that the Old Covenant is devoid of grace.

That said, we must consider what the following verses of Exodus 19 say: “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel” (vv. 5-6). These verses are logically

connected with what was stated in verse 4. Notice the “now, therefore” at the beginning of verse 5. This establishes verse 5 and 6 as the logical response to what has happened in verse 4. That is, since God has worked such a great and gracious salvation on behalf of Israel, now therefore they need to respond by obeying God and keeping covenant, and if they do so they will be God's treasured possession. The interesting part is that they are already God's treasured possession; this is manifest in the very fact that God has promised to Abraham they would be His people, and in the fact that He saved them from Egypt. But as with Adam and Abraham, so also Israel has been placed in a covenant of promise and obligation. They do not have to earn their way into being God's treasured possession, but having been placed in such a unique relationship they must seek to remain in it by obedience. And their obedience once again, will not be grounded in self-willed effort, but in faith in God's promises. They have already seen the faithfulness of God in the exodus. This witness will stand as proof that God will be true to His word in the future; that He will bless obedience and most assuredly judge and curse disobedience. It is not merely about trusting that God will be nice—but trusting that He will be true to whatever He says, whether to punish or to bless, because both are important. The fear of God and the love of God are two guardrails on the way of righteousness.

Another evidence of grace in the Mosaic law was the presence of the sacrificial system within it. This stands as a testament to God's mercy and His understanding that His people could not keep the law sinlessly and never would, and He did not (in one sense) expect them to. He provided mercy and forgiveness for sins through substitutionary sacrifice. And it is important to understand that the commands and ordinances regarding sacrifices were part and parcel with every other command in the Mosaic law. That is to say, even having sinned, an Israelite was capable of keeping God's covenant. Repenting for sin and making atonement was just as much a part of obeying God as was honoring the Sabbath or not committing adultery. We do not often make this connection today because we like to partition off the Ten Commandments from the rest of the law, but all of the law was given as one covenant whole to Israel, and all of it was to be kept.

This leads to the discussion of another aspect of the Old Testament which is troubling to the traditional view, which is that many saints in the Old Testament are said to have “kept” the law, or were said to be blameless. How can this be if the Mosaic covenant was covenant of works in which man had to keep sinlessly in order to please God? It does not, unless we understand the covenant to be embedded with repentance and grace.

We do see, however, multiple testimonies to the faithfulness of Old Testament saints. God says to Solomon that he must keep the commandments as his father David did (1 Kings 3: 14). Asa “did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as David his father had done... the heart of Asa was wholly true to the Lord all his days” (1 Kings 15:11,14b). Jehoshaphat, Asa's son, “walked in all the way of Asa his father. He did not turn aside from it, doing what was right in the sight of the Lord” (1 Kings 22:43). Jehoash “did what was right in the eyes of the Lord all his days” (2 Kings 12:2). Hezekiah “did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, according to all that David his father had done....He did not depart from following [the Lord], but kept the commandments that the Lord commanded Moses” (2 Kings 18:3,6). God says to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?” (Job 1:8).

David in the Psalms speaks many times about his own righteousness, blamelessness, and faithfulness before God. “You have tried my heart, you have visited me by night, you have tested me, and you will find nothing; I have purposed that my mouth will not transgress. With regard to the work of man, by the word of your lips I have avoided the way of the violent. My steps have held fast to your paths; my feet have not slipped” (Psalm 17:3-5). “The Lord dealt with me according to my

righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he rewarded me. For I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God. For all his rules were before me, and his statutes I did not put away from me. I was blameless before me and I kept myself from my guilt. So the Lord has rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his sight” (Psalm 18:20-24). “Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have walked in my integrity, I have trusted in the Lord without wavering” (Psalm 26:1). “I hope for your salvation, O Lord, and I do your commandments” (Psalm 119:166). David's self-proclamations of faithfulness to God here are staggering in their firmness. I submit that a strong majority of Christians would feel extremely uncomfortable praying like this today, and yet it is the Bible. What is going on? After all, we all know that David was a sinner—quite a sinner. So were all the kings listed above: Asa, Jehoshaphat, Jehoash, and Hezekiah. None of them obeyed the Lord sinlessly. This can only lead us to conclude that to be righteous, or blameless, or to keep the commands and ways of the Lord does not necessarily mean to be sinless. Some have argued that in the instances where David proclaims his righteousness he is speaking Messianically. But this argument is weak, because it assumes that what is being said is all about Christ and not about David. But understanding Messianic allusions in the Psalms does not eliminate the humanity or experience of the psalmist. The words may ultimately be about Christ, but they are also about the psalmist's experience. Even if these words of righteousness are true of Christ, they are also true of David in some sense.

I believe the key to resolving this dilemma is looking back at the presence of the sacrificial system within the law. God understood His people would not be able to walk sinlessly before Him, and so within the covenant itself He embedded forgiveness and the means of forgiveness. This is to say that, if an Israelite sinned, they could still be in obedience to the covenant in the very act of making atonement for their sin. In this sense the Biblical writers were able to say of the kings of Judah mentioned above that they followed God faithfully. It's not to say that they never sinned, but it is to say that they always turned from sin and back to God. We see the same in David's life. David committed horrific sins: adultery and murder (among other things). But after being confronted he abased himself in repentance and came back to God. And in doing so he walked in the path of covenant righteousness.

We see here the confluence of several ideas. First, God's covenant with Israel was conditional: He expected them to walk in faithfulness before Him. Second, God did not expect the Israelites to forge their obedience out of their own self-will, but out of faith in His character. Third, God's standard was not so unattainably high that one sin would damn an Israelite forever in trying to walk obediently and please God. God offered mercy and forgiveness as part of the covenant itself. As with Adam and Abraham, God's covenant with Israel was founded in grace and faith but required faithfulness from His people, a faithfulness that would be walked out in obedience and repentance.

“Remain in My Love”

Whatever position you take on the covenants in Scripture, the New Covenant is where it all comes to a head. In the traditional view, the imputation of Christ's righteousness is based on the fact that in the very beginning God demanded sinless obedience from man in order to attain to salvation, an obedience which Adam failed to render, and which Israel later could not give to God under the law. Jesus came as the only sinless man, and in His life He obeyed God's law perfectly, never sinning even once. Because of this, He earned the right to salvation that man could never earn. He also faced God's punishment on the cross and died for the penalty of sins that man had accumulated under the law. These two sets of actions called the active (law-keeping) and passive (self-sacrificing) obedience of Christ. In the traditional scheme, when we come to faith in Christ, both active and passive obedience are said to

be imputed to us. That is, we are cleansed from the guilt of our law-breaking, and we are also counted as having been law-keepers. This is all based on the idea of a covenant of works. As Protestant theologian J. Gresham Machen said, “Every event of [Jesus'] life was a part of his payment of the penalty of sin, and every event of his life was a part of that glorious keeping of the law of God by which he earned for his people the reward of eternal life” (191).

However, if as we have seen there has never been a covenant of works, then the ground beneath imputation, at least one type of imputation, is undercut—the imputation of Christ's law-keeping life to the believer. Christ did not have to come and live out the law perfectly on behalf of Christians because God never demanded that man earn salvation by the sinless obedience of his own efforts. Remember, Adam was already in a state of life, he had nothing to earn, but he had to remain in his state by an obedience of faith. Israel was not under an intolerable law but one infused with grace.

Am I saying that Jesus did not obey the law? Not at all, I am merely challenging a position on the purpose of why He obeyed. Jesus had to live a perfect life in order to be a spotless sacrifice. And in His life He also provided an example for how we are to live, that as Peter said, we might “follow in his steps” (1 Peter 2:21) and as Hebrews says, that we might look unto Him and how He ran the race (12:2).

If the whole covenant history of God and man has been one in which man lived under both promise and obligation to God, then it does not make sense for Jesus to come and live a perfectly holy life on your behalf so that it may be transferred to you someday, rendering your own personal holiness effectively unnecessary. The confusion of the traditional view is that it says you are justified with Christ's law-keeping righteousness by faith when you are first saved, but then you must walk in sanctification in order to actually become holy yourself and demonstrate your faith. Nevertheless there is nothing you can or should “do” to be saved. This seems like an accidental way of saying that Christ's law-keeping righteousness is actually not enough. Think about it—if you've been credited with the fullness of Christ's sinless life, then where is all that other righteousness from your own life going? What is it doing for you? “Well, doesn't the New Testament call us to walk in holiness?” might be the reply. It does indeed. But this does not make sense within the traditional framework. It only makes sense if, once again, we understand that man has always walked with God in terms of a faith-infused cycle of promise and obligation.

What is the purpose of the New Covenant? Jeremiah prophesied about it hundreds of years before its appearing, saying, “This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (31:33). Ezekiel echoes this sentiment: “And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put in you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules” (36:26-27). The purpose of the New Covenant then, was never to free us from the “oppressive” burden of the law. The only reason the law was oppressive was because of the stony hearts of most of Israel. But God promised a powerful unleashing of the Spirit with this New Covenant, in which the heart would be made alive in order to follow after the law. Christ came then to free us from the bondage and penalty of sin, in order that we might with renewed hearts live in the way that God had required of man in the first place. A wealth of Scriptures testify to this fact. Notice the logical relationships in these verses (which I have highlighted):

"And he died for all, *in order that* the ones living should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them and rose again." (1 Corinthians 5:15)

"For our sake he made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, **so that** we might become the righteousness of God." (1 Corinthians 5:21)

"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, **in order that** we might die to sin and live for righteousness." (1 Peter 2:24)

"For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him **in order that** the body of sin might be brought to nothing, **so that** we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. **So you also must consider yourselves** dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. **Therefore, let no** sin reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. **Do not** present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, **but** present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace." (Romans 6:5-14)

Let me reiterate: Jesus did not come to live and die for us so that He could transfer to us all His law-keeping righteousness, leaving our pursuit of holiness in some strange category of "confusingly optional but somehow necessary." Jesus died so that we would be freed to run in the path of life *to obtain* life! As with Adam, Abraham, and Israel, it is gloriously true that we have given the gift of grace. While we were still sinners God showed His love for us in sacrificial death of Jesus. As Paul says, thanks be to God for this indescribable gift! But as with Adam, Abraham, and Israel, it is our responsibility to remain in the mercy of Christ by an obedience of faith. The New Covenant does not change in terms of promise and obligation. Hear the words of Jesus:

"For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, **but if** you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matthew 6:15)

"Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, **but the one who does the will of my Father** who is in heaven." (Matthew 7:21)

"If you love me, **you will keep** my commandments....Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me." (John 14:15, 21)

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. **If you keep** my commandments, **you will abide** in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love." (John 15: 9-10)

The New Testament writers follow in the same vein:

"He will render to each one **according to his works**: to those who by patience in doing well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury." (Romans 2:7-8)

"For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap **eternal life**. And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due seasons we will reap, if we do not give up." (Galatians 6:8-9)

"Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need

of endurance, *so that* when you have done the will of God *you may receive* what is promised....For we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.” (Hebrews 10:35-36, 39)

“Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? ...You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.” (James 2:21, 24)

“Whoever says 'I know him' *but does not keep* his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, *but whoever keeps* his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. *By this* we know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him *ought to walk* in the same way in which he walked.” (1 John 2:4-6)

“Blessed are those who wash their robes [some translations: “do his commands”], so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.” (Revelation 22:14)

We have seen in this journey through Scripture two systems or paradigms through which to view the covenants of Scripture. Though the traditional view is so predominant and holds the loyalty of most of evangelicalism, this examination has shown that it does not take into account the full witness of Scripture. The theologians of this system are forced to take Procrustean measures, lopping off verses and passages of the Bible in order to make the system work. In light of this it has been found wanting. We must embrace a covenantal paradigm that seeks to take into account all of Scripture's meaning and sense. My hope is that this article has taken steps in that direction.

Works Cited

Hafemann, Scott. The God of Promise and the Life of Faith. Crossway, 2001.

Machen, J. Gresham. "The Active Obedience of Christ," in God Transcendent. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982, 191.

Robinson, O. Palmer. The Christ of the Covenants. Presbyterian & Reformed, 1980.