

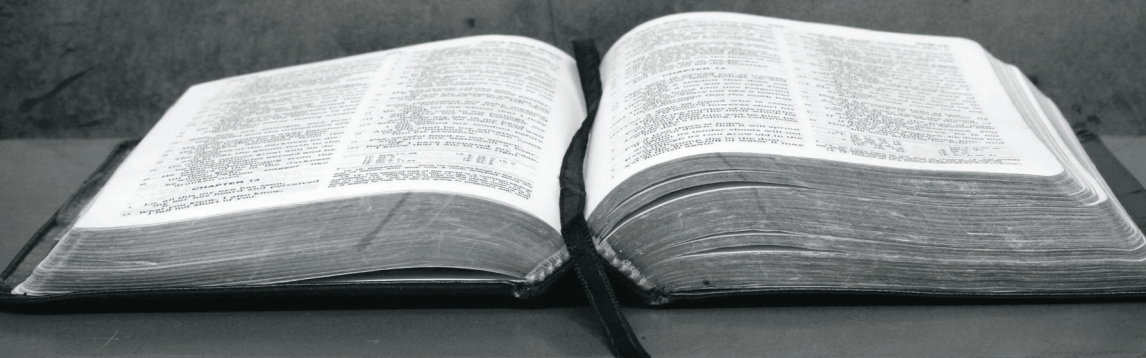
“This is the first book I would give to a scholar or layperson  
desiring to learn more about justification.”

— THOMAS R. SCHREINER

*Explorations in Biblical Theology*

# Justification by Grace through Faith

Finding Freedom from Legalism, Lawlessness, Pride, and Despair



Brian Vickers

*Robert A. Peterson, Series Editor*



“In creative ways Vickers juxtaposes Adam, Abraham, Israel, and the Mosaic law respectively with their supreme and crowning counterpart—Jesus, the obedient second Adam, the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham, and the atonement as the goal of the Mosaic law.”

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“Vickers has done the church a service, not by laboring through the recent challenges for a negative result, but by offering a positive, fresh exposition from the Scriptures. With breathtaking scope he traces Christ’s imputed righteousness from the pages of Genesis all the way to Paul and James.”

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“In the important debate about justification that continues within much contemporary evangelical theology and church life, Brian Vickers provides sound biblical and theological instruction on the key issues involved. With questions for guiding study and further reflection included, it will serve a broad audience: pastors and other church leaders, college and seminary students as well as their teachers, and others with an interest in these issues.”

—**Richard B. Gaffin Jr.**, Westminster Theological Seminary

“Brian Vickers is both a brilliant scholar and a faithful teacher. In his new book, *Justification by Grace through Faith*, he offers both theological edification and spiritual encouragement. Those who love the gospel will welcome this new book.”

—**R. Albert Mohler Jr.**, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Brian Vickers’s *Justification* is a delightful read with its pastoral warmth and engaging style. Too easily and too often this crucial doctrine becomes merely an abstract, academic debate. Vickers, while aware of the debates, constantly roots the discussion in the impact and benefit this teaching should have for life according to the Scriptures. Vickers’s years of teaching this material

in seminary and missions settings are apparent as he explains carefully and well, writing in a way that flows easily. I warmly commend it to all.”

—**Ray Van Neste**, Union University

“This book is a positive, clear, constructive treatment of the biblical doctrine of justification by faith. Vickers is never unaware of the present-day narratives on this doctrine and he allows them to inform his discussion where necessary, but he does not stray from his purpose of letting the progressive biblical narrative determine the elements of his treatment. His personal conversation with Protestant confessional developments is ever present, giving consistency and historic substance to his discussion, but it does not override his relentless movement from the biblical text to doctrinal formation. The treatment is fulsome—Adam and Christ, Abraham and Christ, Moses and Christ, covenantal unity and personal responsibility, imputation and transformation, Paul and James, the Law, the cross, and the Spirit—and results in a high-quality presentation of a central biblical teaching. It is accessible in its diction, illustrations, and careful and clear development of paragraph-to-paragraph and chapter-to-chapter thought, but it finally allows entrance to those who are convinced that learning about justification is an important, perhaps supremely vital, pursuit for all people.”

—**Tom J. Nettles**, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Vickers’s new work is to be warmly welcomed. Here we find a clear and accessible and, most importantly, biblical restatement of what the Scriptures teach about justification.”

—**Thomas R. Schreiner**, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Written discussions of justification are often topical or historical in bent, and understandably so. Brian Vickers has produced a concise and Reformed survey of justification that is exegetical and biblical-theological in focus. Taking us from Genesis to the

New Testament—and never losing us along the way—he admirably shows the flowering and unfolding of the doctrine of justification in Scripture. Vickers’s scholarship makes this informed study an important contribution to the literature. Well-organized and accessibly written chapters and study questions, as well as a pastor’s heart, make it a delight to read. I heartily commend it.”

—**Guy Prentiss Waters**, Reformed Theological Seminary

“For nearly half a century now the historic and biblical doctrine of justification has been hotly debated. Brian Vickers lays hold of the wealth of wisdom produced by this debate, seen in the light of his years of study and rich international teaching experience. The result is a well-organized and gripping synthesis of the many biblical passages that speak to the simple but infinitely profound question posed by the Philippian jailer: “What must I do to be saved?” Vickers shows that the answer lies first of all in what God in Christ has done. It is hard to imagine a more wide-ranging, sure-footed, and user-friendly study upholding the doctrine by which, indeed, the true church stands or falls.”

—**Robert W. Yarbrough**, Covenant Theological Seminary



Justification by  
Grace through Faith

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# Justification by Grace through Faith

Finding Freedom from Legalism,  
Lawlessness, Pride, and Despair

Brian Vickers



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For Tom Schreiner,  
Teacher, Colleague, Friend, Brother in Christ



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# Series Introduction

BELIEVERS TODAY need high-quality literature that attracts them to good theology and builds them up in their faith. Currently, readers may find several sets of lengthy—and rather technical—books on Reformed theology, as well as some that are helpful and semipopular. *Explorations in Biblical Theology* takes a more midrange approach, seeking to offer readers the substantial content of the more lengthy books, while striving for the readability of the semipopular books.

The series includes two types of books: (1) some treating biblical themes and (2) others treating the theology of specific biblical books. The volumes dealing with biblical themes seek to cover the whole range of Christian theology, from the doctrine of God to last things. Representative early offerings in the series focus on the empowering of the Holy Spirit, justification, the presence of God, and preservation and apostasy. Examples of works dealing with the theology of specific biblical books include volumes on the theology of the Psalms and Isaiah in the Old Testament, and books on the theology of Mark and James in the New Testament.

*Explorations in Biblical Theology* is written for college seniors, seminarians, pastors, and thoughtful lay readers. These volumes are intended to be accessible and not obscured by excessive references to Hebrew, Greek, or theological jargon.

Each book seeks to be solidly Reformed in orientation, because the writers love the Reformed faith. The various theological themes and biblical books are treated from the perspective of biblical theology. Writers either trace doctrines through the Bible or open up the theology of the specific books they treat.

## SERIES INTRODUCTION

Writers desire not merely to dispense the Bible's good information, but also to apply that information to real needs today.

Explorations in Biblical Theology is committed to being warm and winsome, with a focus on applying God's truth to life. Authors aim to treat those with whom they disagree as they themselves would want to be treated. The motives for the rejection of error are not to fight, hurt, or wound, but to protect, help, and heal. The authors of this series are godly, capable scholars with a commitment to Reformed theology and a burden to minister that theology clearly to God's people.

Robert A. Peterson  
Series Editor



# Foreword

DO WE REALLY NEED another book on justification? Haven't these issues been rehearsed over and over again? Is there anything new to say? Martin Luther rightly observed that we need to relearn the gospel every day, since we are so prone to forget it. What is true of individuals is also true of each generation. We don't learn about justification merely by studying what the Reformers or other venerable ancestors wrote on the subject. Such study, of course, is immensely valuable. Still, understanding justification is finally a spiritual matter. The Spirit of God helps us to comprehend the things of God (1 Cor. 2:12–13). This understanding is granted to us, as Luther taught us, in the midst of our trials, sufferings, and afflictions. We grasp the significance of justification the more we understand ourselves, the more we see deeply into our hearts, the more the Holy Spirit reveals to us our own selfishness and idolatry. And such self-comprehension is furnished through our sufferings.

The necessity of spiritual understanding explains why we can read formulations about justification that are accurate and still fail to comprehend the truth about our standing before God. Theologians prize precise formulations, and surely expressing and explaining the truth rightly is essential. Genuine understanding, however, must not be equated with grasping propositions, as if distinct and clear mental ideas were all that is needed. We need something deeper than (although not less than) mental cognition, which is why John Calvin begins the *Institutes* by saying that true theology stems from a knowledge of God and a knowledge of ourselves. A theologian isn't formed solely in the study but also in the crucible of life. In other words, we won't and can't

learn about justification apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. Apprehending justification is a miracle of grace. It can never be reduced to a formula.

I love this book by Brian Vickers. I don't love it simply because he is a dear friend. I love it because it is the first book I would give to anyone interested in learning about justification. Let me explain why. First, Vickers sets justification in the context of the story line of the Bible. He doesn't just give us an abstract and sterile explanation of the doctrine. We learn how justification fits with the biblical story and how it fits with our story. What we find here is biblical theology at its best. Justification is explained in light of the whole canon of Scripture.

Second, the writing is engaging. I have read many books on justification, but I found this book hard to put down. It drew me in with its insights and ruminations on the doctrine. I think it drew me in because the book weaves together so well the exegetical, theological, and practical. Vickers says things in fresh ways, which helped me to grasp anew how stunning and wonderful justification is. I sensed in reading the book that the author knows his own heart and so he knows our hearts. Hence, he administers well the medicine of justification to troubled souls, to those who ache to know whether they are right with God.

Third, it may seem that I have left out a central truth. No one understands justification apart from the Spirit, but the Spirit illumines and casts light on the Word of God. Martin Luther was a professor of biblical exegesis for many years, and his intense study of Romans, Psalms, and other Scriptures was the means by which he came to understand the meaning of the righteousness of God. The Spirit doesn't work in a vacuum, for the Spirit helps us to interpret what is deposited in the Scriptures.

What characterizes this work by Vickers is a clear and convincing interpretation of the Scriptures. He sets forth in a compelling way what the Scriptures teach on justification, listening

FOREWORD

patiently to all that they teach on the matter and expounding it with clarity and conviction.

My prayer is that readers will be informed, challenged, encouraged, and comforted as they read, as they are reminded anew that our righteousness is not in ourselves but in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Thomas R. Schreiner  
James Buchanan Harrison Professor of  
New Testament Interpretation  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary



# Acknowledgments

I WANT TO OFFER a word of thanks to all the people who have helped me along the way of writing this book.

- Colleagues here at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary who have either read parts of the book or discussed with me so many of the texts and issues related to justification: Gregg Allison, Jim Hamilton, Peter Gentry, Mark Seifrid, Tom Nettles, Bruce Ware, Steve Wellum, and Shawn Wright.
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- Finally, to my wife Denise, my partner in everything.

# Introduction

*“Look unto Me and Be Ye Saved”*

ONE EVENING in the nineteenth century, a young C. H. Spurgeon visited a small church where a man was preaching from Isaiah 45:22: “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.” When Spurgeon left that church that evening, he was not the same man who had walked in earlier. His gaze, his heart, and his faith had been directed outside himself toward God. Here is his account of what he heard and experienced that night:

He [the preacher] began, “‘Look,’ that is not hard work. You need not lift your hand, you do not want to lift your finger. Look, a fool can do that. It does not need a wise man to look. A child can do that. It don’t need to be a full-grown to use your eyes. Look, a poor man may do that, no need of riches to look. Look, how simple; how simple.” Then he went on, “‘look unto me.’ Do not look to yourselves, but ‘look to me, that is Christ. . . . Look unto Jesus Christ;’” and then he went on in his own simple way to put it thus: “‘Look unto me; I am sweating great drops of blood for you; look unto me, I am scourged and spit upon; I am nailed to the cross, I die, I am buried, I rise and ascend, I am pleading before the Father’s throne, and all this is for you.’”<sup>1</sup>

1. C. H. Spurgeon, “Temple Glories,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. 7 (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1969, 1973), 224. The KJV is the translation most likely heard by Spurgeon.

Spurgeon was led away from himself and his own efforts, means, and works to Christ alone. He was converted, saved through faith in Christ. There are many ways to describe salvation through Christ, but no description is complete unless it stresses this one thing: that help and hope, forgiveness and righteousness, and freedom and assurance are found only by turning away from ourselves to believe in Christ's all-sufficient work.

In the context of the sermon text that C. H. Spurgeon heard that night (Isa. 45:22), God the Judge calls the people, hopelessly lost in idolatry (the heart of works righteousness), to stand before him and present their case. Of course, they have no case to make; their only plea is *guilty*. God is the Creator (v. 18) who reveals himself and who speaks “the truth” and proclaims “what is right” (v. 19), and their sole hope is in him, the only God and Savior (v. 21). He knows their sin, their idolatry, their hard-heartedness, but he does not tell them to try to do a better job, or to reform themselves, or to meet him halfway. God the merciful judge simply calls them to look to him. That is the background for the great gospel call: “Turn to me and be saved.” That is the offer to everyone, to “all the ends of the earth.” In New Testament terms, we might say to “both Jews and Gentiles.” Salvation for everyone comes only one way: through faith in God.

Justification, foundational for salvation, is the legal declaration from God that a person stands before him forgiven and as one who lives up to the entirety of God’s will. It absolutely depends on turning, by faith, away from our own works to receive God’s verdict of “righteous” in Christ as a pure gift. In justification by faith in Christ alone, God speaks the truth and proclaims what is right in his eyes. Justification is not the whole of salvation or of the gospel, but it provides what is necessary to make us right with God and reorients us toward God’s ultimate goal in creation and salvation of having a people who trust him and, as a result of that trust, obey him from the heart. The goal for which God created us is reached only through sinners’ being justified, forgiven, and counted righteous in Christ—all by grace through faith. Justifica-



tion by faith is not the whole of the gospel, but there is no gospel without justification by faith.

### **Justification: Not in Ourselves but in Christ Alone**

Compare the perspective in Isaiah 45 to this statement: “We deplore efforts to denigrate human intelligence, to seek to explain the world in supernatural terms, and to look outside nature for salvation.”<sup>2</sup> Consider that last clause again: “We deplore efforts . . . to look outside nature for salvation.” I take it that “nature” includes not just the outside physical world but the nature within as well—the individual human being. As Christians, we read that and shake our heads at how entirely wrong and hopeless that statement really is. It should not, however, surprise us all that much that ordinary people, apart from the “supernatural” work of God, would say and believe such a thing. Too often we engage people as though we expect them to see things in ways we know on biblical grounds to be impossible apart from God’s revelation. Of course, the lack of special revelation excuses no one; just the opposite is the case: the general revelation comprehended by all is enough to hold everyone accountable (see Rom. 1:18–23.). Nevertheless, what should concern us more than the fact that secular humanists want to rely on nothing outside themselves for salvation (whatever that means to them) is the shocking reality that people who call themselves *Christians* rely on practically everything for salvation except what lies outside themselves. It is one thing for secular humanists to trust in themselves; it is an altogether different matter for Christians who claim salvation in Christ alone to cling to self-reliance and self-justification.

Before our mental list of “those Christians” who do such things grows longer, we should turn the mirror around and say “we Christians.” Inside each of us lurks the same tendency shared

2. The statement comes from Paul Kurtz, “The Affirmations of Humanism: A Statement of Principles,” in *Free Inquiry* 25, 1 (December 2004/January 2005). The Statement of Principles may be purchased as no less than a “parchment copy . . . suitable for framing.”

by our father Adam, namely, that in spite of knowing what God says, what he expects, and what he promises, we want to turn from him to ourselves and our own better plans. We do this in many ways, often cloaked in words, actions, and slogans that are all quite religious, orthodox, conservative, and pious—but we do it nonetheless. This is why we need to turn continually to the subject of justification.

God's justifying work in Christ is the best and most effective remedy against the idolatry of relying on ourselves and falling into the trap of believing that it is what we *do* that identifies and establishes us before God. Justification rightly understood points us to the One through whom we are counted righteous by God, not on the basis of anything *we* do, whether past, present, or future, but on the basis of *his* perfect life, death, and resurrection for us.

Ultimately, justification is not about us but about Christ. It is about what he endured and accomplished on our behalf so that we might be made right with God. To be right with God, we must turn from ourselves and by faith lay hold of him who was raised for our justification.

## The Aim of This Book

The goal throughout this book is to trace the basic contours of justification in the Bible from Adam to Abraham, through Israel, and into the New Testament. However, as a glance at the table of contents will show, this does not mean following justification in a straight line through the main eras of redemptive history. While the chapters do move forward from Adam, they do so, particularly in the first half of the book, in a cyclical way. So, for instance, the chapter on Adam is followed by a chapter on Christ as the second Adam. In this way, the events in the garden, particularly Adam's disobedience, are followed directly by a study of Christ, with particular focus on his obedience. So the two primary covenantal heads, one the head of the human race and the other the head of the new covenant, are considered side

by side without recounting the entire Old Testament history that lies between them. Similarly, the chapter on Abraham in the Old Testament is followed by a chapter on Abraham and justification in the New Testament. The chapter on the righteousness required but not provided in the Mosaic law is followed by a chapter that explores some of the central New Testament texts that speak to how God's gift of righteousness in Christ becomes ours by faith.

The benefit of such an approach is that we may study how particular concepts flow together from both the Old Testament and the New Testament without leaving large gaps in the basic narrative of the book. The idea for such an approach is not particularly novel, but over the course of a few years of teaching justification in seminary classes, in Sunday school, and overseas with pastors and students, following this outline has proved helpful for tying together the various biblical strands related to justification.

### **The Motivations behind This Book**

Besides my students, nothing has influenced the writing of this book more than my experience of teaching the Bible to pastors and students living in South and East Asia and engaging people in those regions, and here at home, who represent other major world religions. I spend time every year on short-term mission trips and have found that justification is not just a Western concern. Emphases may differ, cultural and historical factors may to a degree shape the way that justification is cast, and the doctrine may need contextualizing apart from the various figures associated with the justification debates swirling within the Western church since Luther, but the core issues remain front and center. This includes, by the way, the issues that lie perpetually at the heart of justification debates. For instance, I have found that questions about the grounds upon which God accepts people, whether the work of Christ is all-sufficient for our justification, what role our works play in our standing before God, and how justification fits into a larger understanding of salvation are not

particularly Western or Eastern questions. I am more than aware of and sensitive to the differences that exist between Christians north and south of the equator, or between Christians east and west, but the basic question of how sinful human beings can stand before God without fear of judgment is neither culturally nor historically bound. The question may be clothed in different terms and circumstances, and a whole host of various cultural, social, and religious factors may influence how the question is framed, but it is *the question* that needs to be answered in every corner of the world in every generation.

The question is universal and transcends culture and history because the basic human condition is universal and transcends culture and history. Whoever we are, wherever we come from, whoever our ancestors may have been, we are by nature (fallen human nature) apt to rely on our works and accomplishments for our ultimate, even eschatological, well-being. That is who we are; we all inherited that from our common father, Adam. Whether people are rich or poor, democratic or theocratic, religious or secular, pleasant neighbors or suicide bombers only changes the ways and means by which ultimate ends are pursued. Similarly, whether from Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist backgrounds, all share the same mortal illness found among Protestants, Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and, for that matter, atheists and secular humanists: a universal love of idolatry in some form or another. Ultimately all idolatry is a matter of works and self-reliance, and everyone without exception is an idolater. You do not need a statue or a talisman to be an idolater; all you need is to be a child of Adam, and it will come naturally. That realization shaped and motivated the writing of this book.

Second, I have heard numerous pastors and students express a desire for a book that can help serve as an entryway into the larger discussion of justification in the Bible. In seminary classes and in churches, I am often asked to recommend books that present basic, biblical teaching on justification. There are several such works that are excellent, but it seemed to me that a book that takes a biblical-theological approach to justification and that takes little for granted in terms of background study, theological

tradition, or knowledge of controversies would make a contribution to the larger discussion.<sup>3</sup>

This book, like the Explorations in Biblical Theology series in general, is written with an eye fixed on where the topic is most vital: in pulpits and churches. I sincerely hope that pastors preaching through biblical books and texts associated with justification, preaching justification topically, or preaching their way through the big picture of the Bible will find the material in these pages helpful for their own study, reflection, and preparation. I also hope that Bible students interested in studying justification—whether they are in formal classroom settings or not—will find that this book helps them get their foot in the door of studying the doctrine upon which the church, it is often said, stands or falls. This is a broad and potentially presumptuous goal, but it is what I set out to accomplish. It remains up to the reader to judge to what degree the goal is met.

## Writing in a Climate of Debate

Controversy is nothing new to the doctrine of justification. Although Paul's doctrine of justification is certainly not limited to letters written in the midst of controversy, it is in those early controversies that he goes into the most detail. In Paul's letter to the churches in Galatia, beset by Judaizers seeking to add aspects of the law to requirements for salvation in Christ, justification is central. Likewise, writing to the Romans in a context in which there was some confusion or tension over the relationship between Jews and Gentiles, Paul again emphasizes justification. We should also note that Romans is not just a letter about Jew and Gentile relations; it also introduces Paul and much of his core theology to people who had not yet met him. It should get our attention that in such a letter Paul has much to say about what it means to be righteous before God.

3. See the Select Resources at the back of the book for examples of helpful works on justification.

Justification has remained a hot-button topic for much of church history, including today. Whether engaging the New Perspective on Paul in general, or focusing on individual writers who deny the traditional view of the imputation of Christ's righteousness and/or present a formidable recasting of the biblical story of justification, much of the literature published in the last several years by writers from a Reformational background aims to defend traditional views of justification. Just as important, several works have been published that carefully distinguish the differences between views associated broadly with traditional Reformed and Lutheran traditions and views that are either modified forms of those traditions or, in a few cases, stand outside Protestantism altogether (from people loosely in the "Protestant" tradition).

When I began writing this book some years ago, I also set out to write primarily in response to others with whom I disagree. Ironically, I never had a strong desire to write another response book and was not personally very interested in doing so, but I felt as if that approach was required if I were going to write a book on justification. Finally, my lack of desire to write such a book was met with encouragement from various people who expressed a wish for a book on justification that was not primarily polemical (i.e., against contrary views). As a result, I do not devote either chapters or major sections to direct engagement in the contemporary debates.

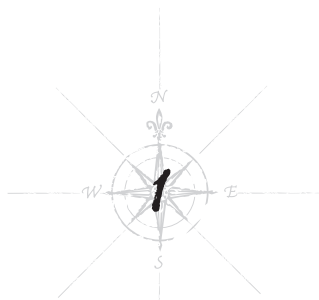
Just to be clear: I am not saying that this book is written in a vacuum, outside time and space and apart from the debates—it is just not primarily *in* the debates. To be sure, many of the emphases found here are clearly influenced from the context and climate in which they are written, and the debates are undoubtedly beneath the surface of this book in several places, but that is not the focus. Readers familiar with the controversies will hear their echoing, at times loudly, in various places. For instance, when I assert that it is impossible to deny the concept of works righteousness in Paul's description of himself as a zealous persecutor of the church and as one who had his

own “righteousness” apart from Christ in Philippians 3, I do so in part as a response to contemporary claims to the contrary. There are also, of course, times when I address specific issues and individuals, but for the most part the driving idea behind this book is to set forth the foundational truths of justification from an unapologetically traditional Reformational perspective as they arise from Scripture. It is my prayer that I have accomplished something of what I set out to do between the covers of this book.<sup>4</sup>

4. There is some material here that overlaps with my book *Jesus' Blood and Righteousness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006). That book deals specifically with the imputation of Christ's righteousness, and this book focuses more generally on justification, but it was inevitable that many of the biblical texts studied in that book (e.g., Rom. 4:1–8; 5:12–21; 2 Cor. 5:17–21; Phil. 3:8–10) would appear here too. When those texts come up in the course of this book, I often refer readers to specific sections in *Jesus' Blood*. I realize that doing so runs the risk of giving the impression that it is necessary to read that book first, but that is certainly not the case. I tried to keep such references to a minimum, and they are meant only to point readers to the more detailed and technical exegesis that lies behind many of the conclusions and assertions found here.







# The Legacy of Adam

THIS CHAPTER CONSIDERS the biblical-theological themes in the story of Adam that directly impact the larger study of justification. The beginning, however, is read from the standpoint of the end. So while this chapter focuses on Adam, what follows is based on the whole scope of the Bible. We could wall off later revelation found in the Bible, but that is not, in my opinion, the typical way that Christians should read the Old Testament. We should read the Old Testament as those who are members of the new covenant established by the second Adam. We are bound to read the entire Bible in its specific canonical, historical, and redemptive contexts, including our own new covenant context.

Here are the focal points.

- Creator and Creature
- God and Man
- The End and the Beginning

## Creator and Creature

Genesis 1:26–28 answers many of life’s ultimate questions. How did I get here? Who am I? What am I? What am I supposed to do? There may be more to the answers than what is in these verses, but not less. Most importantly, this text tells us what we need to know fundamentally about ourselves and our relationship

with God. It can be narrowed down to one word found in verse 27: “created.” That may not seem like a groundbreaking observation, but we have a long track record of forgetting, denying, and militating against this most basic thing about our being. Consider this: our collective habit of forgetting or ignoring this basic truth lies at the root of every problem from Adam on down. It is no exaggeration to say that *every* sin begins with a refusal to accept this truth about ourselves. Whether we acknowledge it or not, we are *creatures* and not the Creator. Contrary to what we so often seem to want to believe, we are not independent, autonomous beings. We are creatures, created in the image of God. In other words, our life is, from the beginning, not strictly our own.

### *Dependence and Purpose*

Beginning with a solid grasp of the fact that we are creatures, not the Creator, brings our lives into focus. We are created beings made to be absolutely dependent on God. This is how we were designed. Our dependence on God is further evidenced when we consider that God also designed our purpose in life. All human creativity, gifts, and abilities were given to us to fulfill our appointed task. In other words, we received the gift of life *and* the gift of work (cf. Gen. 2:15). Typically, discussion of the commands in the garden is limited to the negative command (“you will not”) concerning the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (2:17), but this misses an important part of the picture. The responsibilities that God gives Adam in 1:28 are commands. In his created innocence, Adam has positive commands to fulfill, and even though the entire creation was “good,” it is not static. There is movement and purpose built into it. The creation, with humanity at the center, is going somewhere. God says to his creatures, “Have children, tame the earth, and rule over it.” There is work to be done in this good creation. It appears from the outset that there is a goal to reach. Presumably the earth could reach a state of being filled, tamed, and ruled. A divinely appointed goal is woven into creation.

*A Goal from the Beginning.* We tend to think of eschatology as only the “end times” that wind up when Christ returns, but that is not all there is to it. Geerhardus Vos was right to refer to “pre-redemptive Eschatology.”<sup>1</sup> Before the fall of Adam and the subsequent unfolding of redemption, there was an end for which God created the world. We need to be crystal clear on this—it is not the case that God had one plan before the fall and then a backup plan afterward. “God forbid,” as Paul would say. There is, and I am not the first person to say it, no “plan B” in the Bible. There was and continues to be one end goal woven into the fabric of creation. Of course, at this precise point in the biblical narrative we do not yet see that the planned end point of creation will be summed up in another Adam (see Eph. 1:10). The goal we see at this point in the narrative is life. This goal is symbolized in the Tree of Life (Gen. 2:9) and, together with the outward trajectory of subduing and reigning over the world, the narrative implies that life *eternal* is the ultimate goal. Later we will find that the goal and promise of life is attached to obedience in the Mosaic law, will be announced by the prophets, and will be attained finally in the second Adam.

## God and Man

A special kind of history begins in Genesis 2. What I mean is that Genesis 2 refocuses the historical narrative on the creation of humanity, the particular place we have in the created order, and especially the special relationship that exists between us and God. Genesis 2:4 picks up and expands the story that began in 1:1 and then unfolds through the rest of Scripture and beyond. Unlike anything in the rest of creation, the text places special emphasis on God’s creation of mankind: “Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his

1. As Vos says, “It is not biblical to hold that eschatology is a sort of appendix to soteriology. . . . The universe, as created, was only a beginning, the meaning of which was not perpetuation, but attainment.” Geerhardus Vos, *The Eschatology of the Old Testament*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001), 73.

nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature” (2:7). What jumps off the page of Scripture is the sovereignty of God the Creator and the dependence of man his creature upon him. The ways and means of the creation of man should get our attention. Adam is formed from the dirt and given life by God himself. God creates a special place for Adam to live, a garden from which he is to fulfill the creation mandate of 1:28 (2:8). This is also a place where Adam enjoys unique fellowship with God (see 3:8). Adam the creature dwells in the creation in fellowship with the Creator. This will not be the last time in Scripture when people, land, and God are linked together. God provides everything that Adam needs for life and happiness. Not only do the trees around him provide fruit, they are also “pleasant to the sight” (2:9). Then we are told of two special trees—the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. So God sculpts Adam into form, breathes him into existence, and sets him to work (v. 15).

### *The Covenant God*

In chapter 2, a change takes place that has repercussions for how we read this narrative. In chapter 1 the Hebrew word “God” (*Elohim*) is typically used, but after the initial account of God’s creative work comes to an end in 2:3, his special covenant name “LORD” (*Yahweh*) is also used. Bearing in mind that the first hearers/readers of this text were Israelites under the Mosaic covenant, it is striking that when the text of Genesis turns to focus particularly on the creation of man and his relationship with God, the name of God is precisely that covenant name later revealed to Moses on Sinai (Ex. 34:6). Genesis 2 spells out God’s care for Adam in more detail, including the planting of Eden where Adam would enjoy special communion with God and the provision of food to sustain Adam’s life. All the good gifts come specifically from “the LORD God” (*Yahweh Elohim*). The God of creation, the God who created Adam, is the God with whom Israel has a covenantal relationship.

### *Setting the Boundaries*

In the midst of paradise there is one thing forbidden, and it is mentioned along with a threat that seems out of place in the pastoral scene of Eden.<sup>2</sup> Adam may eat from any tree except one, and God warns Adam that if he eats of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, he will die (2:17). The story is about creation, life, and abundance, but a foreign and future enemy appears, and with it a challenge confronts Adam. In paradise, in his created innocence, Adam is given a command, and a curse is attached to it in the case of disobedience. Death is God's condemnation for disobedience. Adam must obey perfectly or he will die.

*Adam's "Probation."* Sometimes Adam's situation in Eden is referred to as *probation*. That is, Adam was put in Eden for a period during which he needed to prove himself through obedience and maintain his innocence until he reached or was granted a perfected, glorified state of being. For nearly everyone living in the twenty-first century, the word *probation* has negative associations. Probation is typically something one is put on after committing a crime. Someone charged with a crime may be given probation, or a prisoner may be granted probation to see if he can make it on the outside. Innocent citizens are not on probation. About the only time we speak of a probationary period apart from the idea of guilt or offense is when we are offered a trial period to sample a product, although we do not call that probation. Theologians of earlier generations could use *probation* and expect readers to understand their meaning, but English usage has changed, and with it the word *probation* has a more narrow use. Someone might object that technical language in any field, not least in theology, must always be explained. However, the word *probation* itself was the explanation used to describe Adam's situation in Eden. This is simply not true today. Modern people might hear the word *probation* and easily think that Adam was somehow created guilty, or at

2. James Montgomery Boice's description of chapter 2's casting "shadows over Eden" is fitting. He points out that in the midst of all the good things—relationship with God, a garden in which to live and work, and a wife—"there are forebodings." *Genesis, Volume 1: Creation and Fall* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 113.

least think him suspect. But Adam was innocent, and that is a vital part of the story. Is there a word that better captures Adam's situation in the garden? There is, but to prove it we have to expand our biblical vision past Genesis and note a particular pattern that arises and helps us to understand Adam's circumstances in the garden.

*Testing—a Biblical Pattern.* The better alternative to *probation* is *test*. Granted, the word does not appear in the text, but there is a pattern here that can be seen throughout Scripture. In the Bible, obedience to God is not taken for granted. God gives commands and then tests the obedience of those who receive the commands. At pinnacle points in Scripture, obedience is tested because obedience, which means submitting to God and acting on his command (including not eating fruit), displays one's trust in and loyalty to God. Testing may also reveal distrust and disloyalty. In three crucial eras in the biblical revelation of God's salvation, he tests his servants. God tests Abraham, Israel, and finally his own Son, Jesus. Although the tests have varying results, they are all tests for obedience.

*"Now I Know You Fear God."* Abraham is associated with many things, but in the discussion of justification, he is best known for his faith: "And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness" (Gen. 15:6). There is also a well-known time in Abraham's life when God tested him. In Genesis 22, God tells Abraham to take his only beloved son, the son of the promise, to Mount Moriah and to sacrifice him as a burnt offering (vv. 1–2). Far and away the emphasis in the text is on Abraham's obedience. We will return to this scene later, but for now it is enough to note that Abraham's inner struggle as he trudged up the mountain to sacrifice his son is not on display, but his obedience to God. We are told that Abraham woke up the next day, made preparations, and set out on his journey. Of course, his faith is on display too when he tells his servants that he and Isaac will return (v. 5) and when he tells Isaac that God will give them a lamb for the offering (v. 8). The interconnection of faith and obedience is clear. But again, it is obedience that is on display. As the knife is about to fall, Abraham hears the angel of the Lord telling him to stop: "Do not lay your

hand on the boy or do anything to him” (v. 12). Then we hear the reason for the intervention and, I believe, the reason for the entire episode: “for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” Abraham passed the test. Then the promises of chapters 12, 15, and 17 are repeated (vv. 16–18). The declaration of Abraham’s righteousness by faith was no empty proclamation (15:6). Abraham’s obedience on Moriah displays his faith and also proves that what God declared is true.

“*That I May Test Them.*” The story of Israel is marked by testing. In the wilderness and in the land, God tests them to see what is in their hearts. He tests them with the manna: “Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not” (Ex. 16:4 ESV). Of course, this is again a test of faith—the Israelites must believe that God will daily provide for them. If they gather more than a day’s manna, they imply that God cannot be trusted. Disobedience flows from a lack of faith. However, the *explicit* emphasis in the text is on obedience, for it is by their actions that their hearts are revealed. Their whole experience in the wilderness is a test: “And you shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, *testing you*, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not” (Deut. 8:2 NASB). Later, after entering the Promised Land and continuing in the disobedience that marked their forty years of wandering, God becomes angry with them and says, “Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers, and has not listened to My voice, I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died, *in order to test Israel* by them, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk in it as their fathers did, or not” (Judg. 2:20–22 NASB). This pattern of testing is well documented in Israel’s history, as is the fact that they failed the majority of the time.<sup>3</sup>

3. Other texts with explicit references to testing are Ex. 20:20; Deut. 8:16; 13:3; 2 Chron. 32:31. There are also references to God’s testing people in general: Ps. 11:4; Jer. 20:12.

“*If You Are the Son of God.*” Outside paradise, in the wilderness, God tested the obedience of his Son, Jesus Christ. It is true that he was tempted by Satan, but Matthew and Luke make it clear that the Devil didn’t prompt the testing: “Then Jesus was *led* up by the Spirit into the wilderness *to be* tempted by the devil” (Matt. 4:1; cf. Luke 4:1–2). Like Israel, Christ’s test takes place in the wilderness. Unlike Adam and Israel, Christ is tested and passes.

The close connection of Jesus with the tests of Adam and Israel is evident in the New Testament. Luke draws the line from Christ back to Adam by ending his genealogy with “Adam, the son of God” (3:37). Then, immediately after the genealogy, with Adam fresh in the readers’ minds, the temptation narrative begins. Matthew begins his gospel by tracing Jesus’ lineage back to Abraham and spends three chapters showing that Jesus is the fulfillment of the promises to Israel. After establishing that Jesus is the Messiah, the one to whom the prophets pointed, the narrative of Jesus’ adult life and ministry begins. He is baptized by John, affirmed by the Father (“this is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased”—3:17), and ushered out to be tested in the wilderness.<sup>4</sup>

Adam was put in the garden with a command placed upon him, and soon after the command was given, Adam’s obedience to that command was tested. This sets a pattern that extends through Scripture: God tests his children to see whether they will obey him. There are tests connected to every major chapter of the history of redemption, culminating with the accepted and beloved Son of God (Matt. 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22). So, the idea behind the concept of *probation* is affirmed, but better explained today with the simple word *test*, or if we want to be a little more exacting, *test period*.

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There is a similar mention of testing obedience in the New Testament as well. Paul tells the Corinthians that he wrote to them so “that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything” (2 Cor. 2:9).

4. Luke bookends his genealogy with the affirmation from heaven (3:22) and the temptation narrative (4:1–13). In this way Jesus’ role as an obedient, acceptable son is emphasized, 3:22 ending with “you are my beloved son” and 3:38 ending with “Adam, the son of God.” As the new Adam, Jesus obeys when tested and thus affirms the acceptance proclaimed by the Father.



*The Question of “What If?”* Talk of a test period often raises a question about the length of time that Adam was to be tested before he officially passed. It is important to address this question before proceeding. The answer to the question “What if Adam had obeyed?” usually goes something like this: he would have been granted that state of perfection due his perfect performance of God’s standard. The idea is that Adam and his descendants would have reached that place of glorification that now will come to those who have faith in Christ.

The “if Adam had obeyed” question is driven by the recognition that a goal is built into creation. It is also a hypothetical question meant to help us think through and understand the implications of the larger biblical teaching in regard to what Christ, the second Adam, accomplished. But however much the inference is a fair one, it is important that we remember that the *real goal* was never for the human race to be perfected in Adam (no plan B!). The question may have some theological benefit, but we have to be careful of the unbiblical implication that if Adam had obeyed, he and his children would have been perfected in and through him—apart from Christ. As far as Scripture goes, the theological hypothetical does not play much of a role in the unfolding of redemption in Christ—except that Adam’s failure to obey sets the necessary scene for the obedience of the one for whom Adam serves as a type (Rom. 5:14). Perhaps the question of Adam’s obedience can be addressed in this way: “He didn’t obey, and that is precisely the point. God’s goal was not in Adam but in another through whom the people of God would truly be perfected and reach their appointed goal.”<sup>5</sup>

### *The Question of Covenant*

There were two parties in the garden—God and man. Of course, the Serpent is there too, but he is not part of the particular relationship between God and Adam. It is not an equal partnership; God is superior and Adam is inferior. God is independent and

5. According to Paul, God’s plan was always Christ (Eph. 1:10).

Adam is dependent. God provides everything that Adam and Eve need for life and happiness, but this is not a relationship without specific stipulations. God, the Creator and provider, establishes rules for maintaining the relationship. Adam is ordered to carry out his work of subduing and ruling the creation over which God has placed him. There is, however, a condition—there is one tree, and one tree only, from which Adam may not eat. The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is forbidden with a warning. God tells Adam that he can eat from all the other trees, but if he eats from the one forbidden tree, “in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:17). Implicit in the warning (and symbolized in the Tree of Life) is the promise that if Adam does not eat from the one tree, he will live. God sets life and death before Adam, as he will later with the Israelites in their covenant context: “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil” (Deut. 30:15). If Adam wants to live in his relationship with God, he must keep God’s command. These words apply to Adam: “Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live” (Deut. 30:19). Here in the garden, before the fall, yet another biblical pattern is established. Later on, this kind of relationship gets a specific name: covenant.

There is much debate over whether the relationship between God and Adam can properly be called a covenant; after all, the word *covenant* does not appear until Genesis 6. Given the number of times the word will appear later, what stopped Moses from using the word here? After all, God tells Noah that he is making a covenant (6:18) and likewise tells Abraham explicitly that he is establishing a covenant (17:7), so why not here? Although it is not much of a stretch to think that the first people to hear and read Genesis, themselves living in a covenant, would have recognized a covenant when they saw one, it is a fair question. Perhaps formal covenants, like the Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, and new covenants, are fitted for a redemptive context. That is, they are specific relationships between God and people, at times established on the basis of or formalized in blood, that aim at reestablishing the relationship broken in Eden. Perhaps it is enough

to say that the relationship between God and Adam foreshadowed what would later be called a covenant. John Murray, for instance, opted for “Adamic Administration,”<sup>6</sup> which ties together the idea that there is indeed a special relationship between God and Adam with the fact that *covenant* does not explicitly appear. In spite of the difficulties, are there good reasons for thinking that God and Adam were in a covenantal relationship? There are at least four reasons that suggest a covenant in Eden.<sup>7</sup>

*Covenants Are Not Just Redemptive.* The absence of the word *covenant* is not necessarily as strong an argument as it appears. True, there is no sacrifice to establish or commemorate the relationship between God and Adam; on the other hand, nothing like that was needed. In the Mosaic and new covenants, blood was required to bring God and man together because humanity stood under God’s wrath due to their sin. Only the blood of a sacrifice, and ultimately only one sacrifice, could fulfill God’s justice. With Abraham, God establishes a covenant in which he makes an oath, symbolized in sacrifices (Gen. 15:9–18), to keep his promise to make Abraham a great nation. These covenants contain sacrifices because they are redemptive, but the fact that they are redemptive *is not what makes them covenants*. They are special types of covenantal relationships between God and man connected to the Bible’s big picture of reestablishing a people set apart for God so that they will be his people and he will be their God.<sup>8</sup> They are, at heart, covenantal relationships because they contain agreements, promises, and warnings between the two

6. John Murray, *The Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. 2 (Carlisle, UK: Banner of Truth, 1977), 47–59.

7. For an insightful and concise discussion of the question of a covenant in Eden, see J. V. Fesko, *Justification: Understanding the Classic Reformed Doctrine* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 112–22.

8. This refrain, or something similar to it, is found in every covenantal era. For instance, in Leviticus the phrase is used as a promise for what will be fulfilled if Israel obeys (26:12); in Jeremiah it is the reality promised in the new covenant (31:33)—and it is taken up as fulfilled by both Paul (2 Cor. 6:16) and the writer to the Hebrews (Heb. 8:10). The last time these words are heard in the Bible is when John sees a vision of the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21:3). The idea in the refrain is implicit everywhere in the Abrahamic covenant, with God promising to be with Abraham and his children and make them into a great nation (Gen. 12:2; 18:18).

parties involved in each relationship. Although God has something greater than Eden in store for humanity, the relationship in Eden is the model for the goal of redemption and the restoration of the relationship between God and humanity.

*Christ the Head of the New Covenant.* Second, the relationship established by and on Christ the second Adam is a covenant. It is the “new covenant in my blood,” as he told his disciples on the night that he was betrayed (Luke 22:20). The apostle Paul presents Christ as a second Adam who stands as the head of God’s people (Rom. 5:12–19; 1 Cor. 15:21–22). As Adam represented humanity, and as the consequence of his actions flowed to his race, so Christ stands as representative for those who believe and are counted righteous as a consequence of his actions. The writer to the Hebrews speaks at length of the new covenant, promised by the prophets (e.g., Jer. 31:33) and mediated by Christ (Heb. 8:13; 9:15; 12:24).

*Hosea 6:7.* In the context of Hosea 6, the prophet is speaking against the sins of Judah and Ephraim. In the midst of it we read these words: “But like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me” (Hos. 6:7). Readers of the ESV, NASB, and NIV might wonder why there is a question about this text since it says plainly, “like Adam” (*ke’adam*). The issue is how to translate the Hebrew behind “like Adam.” The Septuagint translator of Hosea chose the Greek for “as man” (*hws anthropos*), which is followed in English by the KJV and the NKJV.<sup>9</sup> There is also the possibility, which some Old Testament scholars prefer, that the word refers to the geographical location mentioned in Joshua 3:16. When the feet of the priests carrying the ark touched the Jordan River, its waters “stood and rose up in a heap very far away, at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan.”

Taking “Adam” to be the place mentioned in Joshua 3:16 is not impossible, although we then have to assume that there was a well-known, serious breach of the covenant there not recorded in the Old Testament. That fact in itself does not rule out this

9. The Septuagint, sometimes abbreviated LXX, is a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament.

interpretation—it is not hard to imagine that there were significant acts of rebellion on Israel’s part that are not mentioned in the Bible. It also fits with the inclusion of the word *sham* (“there”) in the text. It is worth noting, however, that in the *one text* where this place is named (Josh. 3:16), the focus is all about God’s faithfulness in bringing Israel to the Promised Land and his miraculous work of dividing the Jordan, not about Israel’s covenant breaking.<sup>10</sup>

Reading it as “like man” or “mankind” is also possible.<sup>11</sup> The problem with this interpretation, however, is that it makes the word “there” difficult to understand. “Like man (or mankind) they transgressed the covenant; *there* they dealt faithlessly with me.” The questions that remain unanswered in this interpretation are, Where is *there*? and How does *there* fit the context? The KJV and NKJV take it this way, but it is vague, to say the least.

Taking this verse to refer to Adam best fits the context of Hosea. True, this interpretation is not without problems, and it is certainly not accepted by everyone, but it does have the advantage of (1) referring to a known entity in the Bible, and (2) fitting the context of Hosea. There is still a problem with the word “there” referring back to a person, but it is not a great leap to infer that after mentioning the person Adam, Hosea refers to Eden. Second, the context of Hosea is all about Israel’s unfaithfulness to the covenant in spite the “abundant generosity of God, who had loaded Israel down with all manner of good things.”<sup>12</sup> Like Adam, God gave Israel everything they needed for life and well-being, including his own presence; yet, also like Adam, they chose their own way over God’s good gifts and thereby transgressed the covenant.<sup>13</sup>

10. Another thing often brought up against the view that Hosea refers to the place mentioned in Joshua 3:16 is that the Hebrew preposition *ke* rarely means “at.” This is not a very strong argument, however, because as long as it is possible for it to mean “at” (and it is possible), then the fact that it is rare is only suggestive and certainly not decisive.

11. Calvin, notably, read it this way. See, *Hosea*, Calvin Translation Society 13 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 235. Cited in Fesko, *Justification*, 117n21.

12. C. John Collins, “Adam and Eve in the Old Testament,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 15, 1 (Spring 2011): 16. Collins cites the following texts in Hosea as some examples of Israel’s covenant breaking: 2:8–13; 7:15; 11:1–4; 13:4–6.

13. Choosing one’s own way over against the way God provides and commands is also known as “works righteousness.” More of that in later chapters, but like so many other biblical themes, works righteousness begins in Eden.

*Covenantal Testing.* The testing of Adam is the fourth thing that suggests a covenant in Eden. There is no need to repeat the discussion above, but like Abraham the covenant man, Israel the covenant nation, and Christ the covenant head, Adam's loyalty to God and his willingness to honor the relationship God established with him were tested.

The relationship established in Eden was covenantal. The evidence for it spans the Bible. At the very least the relationship between God and Adam in Eden suggests a covenant. In my view there is more than a suggestion—there is a sound biblical-theological conclusion. No doubt some people will remain unconvinced that an actual covenant is found here in Genesis because the word does not appear. Some Bible readers will continue to think that the idea of a covenant with Adam is a result of dedication to a larger theological system. And others will insist that covenants do not appear until after the fall when the biblical pattern of redemption unfolds—but I hope most will agree that the relationship between God and Adam in Eden sets the pattern for the relationships that will soon be called covenants in the Bible.

### **“You Can Be Like God”: The First and Greatest Temptation**

There is a classic rock song by Fleetwood Mac called “Go Your Own Way.” That could have been the theme song of the first temptation in Eden.<sup>14</sup> God held nothing back from Adam and Eve. Everything, including one another, was theirs to enjoy. There was one thing, however, that they could never have nor could ever be, and that is exactly what Satan dangled in front of them. The Serpent is introduced as “more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made” (Gen. 3:1), and he knew exactly how to tempt the first couple in ways they could not resist.

God's role as Creator, and the Serpent as both evil and a part of creation (a creation Adam was meant to rule over, not submit to), is emphasized as the temptation narrative begins.

14. For some, “My Way,” made famous by Frank Sinatra, might be a better analogy.

The rebellion against God originates with a created being before Adam and Eve ate the fruit. What follows is a thinly veiled attack on God as the Serpent implicitly calls God a liar, “you will not surely die” (3:4); a deceiver, “God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened” (v. 5); and an equal rather than their Creator, “you will be like God” (v. 5). The created Serpent tells the created woman that she and her created husband can be just like God. The tempter succeeds. Addled by the temptation, Eve skews God’s revealed word and extends the prohibition against eating to include touching. The pace of the narrative hurtles toward the climactic moment that sets the future of the human race in motion: “When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate” (v. 6). It takes only six verses to tell the story of the fall and just two verses to interpret what took place.

First, their eyes are opened, but not in the way that the Serpent had promised: “Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves” (v. 7, NIV). Then they find that rather than being God’s equal, they are not even in the position granted to them in the original creation. Rather than enjoying the presence of their Creator, they hide from him when they hear him coming. Everything changes in the biblical narrative from this point.

### *Questions and Incriminations*

“Where are you?” God calls to Adam. This is one of the most tragic lines in the biblical narrative. It is not tragic because God somehow cannot find them or does not know where they are; it is tragic because they must hide in guilt and shame. Well before the dialogue begins, Adam and Eve’s position before God is evident. God knows what they have done, and when confronted with it (v. 11), the first blame game begins. The last time we heard from

Adam about Eve, he was singing her praises and declaring her as his one and only (2:23), but now he turns on her: “She gave it to me.” Even worse, Adam not only blames Eve, he first implicates God and by doing so reveals the true depths of his newfound rebellion. He points his finger at God to try to shift blame to the one who is eternally blameless: “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate” (3:12). Of course, Eve too shifts the blame: “the serpent deceived me, and I ate” (v. 13). No one takes responsibility; no one is righteous. Hatred of God and neighbor begins.

Evil has a foothold in the world, man is in rebellion against God, and by rights the story could end here. “In the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” was the word from God about the punishment for eating the forbidden fruit. Adam and Eve, however, do not die, not immediately at least. God has a plan to make them and their children right again.

## The End and the Beginning

The pastoral scene in Eden is destroyed by disobedience. Because of Adam’s failure, he and his descendants will bear the curse of 2:17. God first curses the Serpent, and the curse includes an enigmatic promise to both the Serpent and to Eve’s children. The defeat of the Serpent will come through the line of Eve (3:15). From this point on, curse and promise will flow together until, through a curse, the promise of God is fulfilled (Gal. 3:13–14).

### *Grace in the Curse*

Genesis 3 introduces a central biblical theme that, like the word “covenant,” is not stated explicitly. That theme is grace. Many have argued that the grace of God is implicit from Genesis 1:1. After all, God did not *have* to create the world; he did not *have* to create humanity and provide for them—it was all done by his grace. There is a general way that we can speak of creation as an act of grace. This is especially so if we view creation as ultimately



inseparable from salvation, although typically when people refer to creation as an act of grace, I doubt that they have the whole complex of creation-fall-redemption-consummation in mind. We often use the word *grace* to signify what is sometimes called “common grace,” that is, the general grace of God that sustains the human race apart from their belief in him and in spite of their ongoing rebellion against him. But not even the idea of “common grace”—connected as it typically is to God’s general grace to humanity *after the fall*—really fits when applied to Genesis 1 and 2. “Grace” in the Bible, when applied particularly in the context of God’s acts of salvation, is more than God’s gift to neutral humanity. Christians often speak of “unmerited” or “unearned” favor to describe God’s grace, and put that way it can be applied to God’s act of creation. In the Bible, however, grace as it connects to salvation is not just *unmerited* but *de-merited* favor.

When the apostle Paul says we are “justified by his grace as a gift” (Rom. 3:24), he is not talking about the justification of the morally neutral who simply had done nothing to deserve God’s favor. To the contrary, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (v. 23). In Romans 6:14, “grace” is contrasted with “sin.” In Ephesians 2:5, it is those who were “dead in our trespasses” who were made “alive together with Christ.” In Titus 3, those who “were foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures” are the ones “justified by his grace” (vv. 3, 7). There are plenty of times in the Bible, particularly in the New Testament, when the word “grace” is used in general ways, but in the context of God’s saving acts it is applied to those who are morally broken, undeserving to receive God’s favor because of their rebellion against him. Paul sums it up best when he says “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8), and goes on to describe us as at one time the enemies of God (v. 10). The backdrop for this is the “grace” in which those justified by grace stand (v. 2).

Grace as God’s gift to morally corrupt humanity fits the context of Genesis 3. The seed of the woman will continue on and ultimately be the cause of the Serpent’s destruction. Although it

is only through the woman's pain, the human race will still multiply. Although imbalanced and at odds, man and woman will stay together. Although only by sweating in thorn-laden fields, the human race will still be sustained (3:17–19). Life goes on, although enveloped by a shadow, “till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (v. 19). Even their banishment from the garden is for their ultimate benefit. God sends Adam and Eve out of the garden to prevent their eating of the Tree of Life, presumably to keep them from living forever in a fallen state (v. 22). God has a plan for providing eternal life. Through disobedience the last enemy, death, enters the world. As the story unfolds, it becomes gradually clearer that only through obedience and death will death itself be destroyed and life restored.

### *Out of Eden: The Setting for the Rest of the Story*

The opening chapters of Genesis set the scene for the rest of Scripture. Salvation, and consequently justification, cannot fully be understood apart from this. In three short chapters the story of the human race unfolds from bliss to destruction. In an act that may foreshadow sacrifice for covering man's sin, God clothes Adam and Eve. The curse is complete as God throws them out of Eden. The presence of God is now hidden from man, guarded, not for the last time, by angelic figures.<sup>15</sup> The first man and woman become the first exiles wandering the wilderness without God and without hope in the world.

*Bridge to the Bible.* There are two central figures in the Bible. Adam is one of them. Although other men receive far more attention (Abraham, Moses, and David, for example), none of them plays a role near that of Adam's. The figure of Adam stands over all of them; he is, one might say, the problem that will not go away. He explains why the human race plummets downward after him. He is the explanation for why people do not obey God when they are told explicitly what he wants them to do—after all, if Adam did

15. Think of the carved seraphim overshadowing the ark of the covenant.

not obey in his innocence, what is going to happen to people living under his curse when they are given commands from God? Adam explains sin and death—through his disobedience both come to the human race (Rom. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:21–22). His act of disobedience determines the relationship of his children before God. We are, all of us, born outside Eden. There is, however, another figure, larger than Adam and yet also Adam. A second and last Adam. Adam is called “the son of God” (Luke 3:38), and this one is also called God’s Son. But this one is a “beloved” Son who pleases his Father in every way and is accepted by him. As Adam’s disobedience alienated his children from God, so will the second Adam’s obedience be the way that will right that relationship. Through the first Adam we were made sinners; through the second we are made righteous. The next chapter follows that trajectory.

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The doctrine of justification as an alien, imputed righteousness has been under attack for several years. This biblical theology of justification traces how the doctrine unfolds in Scripture and how, in Christ, God provides everything needed for sinners to be made right with him. Whether we are struggling with legalism, lawlessness, pride, or despair, a biblical view of justification will lead us away from ourselves to the God who accepts us fully in Christ.

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—A. ANDREW DAS, Elmhurst College

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