

High Gospel Spirituality

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel,
for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.*

Romans 1:16

Gospel Centered:

The Biblical Theology: The Covenantal Orientation in R/H.

Luke 24:27 *And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself....* **44** *Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."*

A Covenantal Orientation:

The covenantal orientation or "salvation by divine law" views salvation most essentially as a "legal or forensic" transaction satisfied on our behalf by Christ such as to preserve the grace centeredness of our sacred romance between God and humanity. This in turn will emphasize a declarative praxis in spirituality. The covenant orientation is shown to regulate our romance such as to preserve the gracious nature of our union with Christ by means of the objective basis of redemption that is executed by a covenant forming the basis of our safety and acceptance with God. In other words, without the objectifying grace of covenant, it will be shown how redemption itself cannot be gracious in so far as we are left to our subjective experience and performance as a basis for human flourishing and hope

Starting then with Genesis and ending in Christ's ascension, we will discern two trajectories that are *distinct and never separate* as being fulfilled in Christ. They are as two mutually dependent orientations.

The dual trajectory through redemptive history is nicely summed up by Meredith Kline for instance as established in the beginning at Eden wherein the holy garden is described as both a "Kingdom Prologue" and a "Glory-Temple" relative to covenant and temple respectively. The one establishes a legal-declarative paradigm for presence even if the other establishes an effectual-participationist power in divine presence. Together, Eden is portrayed as what we are here describing as the "total church" as it were. Here is the way Kline described the "Kingdom sanctuary" for instance:

As the overshadowing Glory was present at the beginning of the first creation, so it was again present at epochal beginnings in the history of re-creation in both old and new covenants – at Sinai, at the incarnation, baptism, and transfiguration of the Son of God, and at Pentecost. And because the Spirit's presence in redemptive re-creation is once more both as power and as paradigm, the consummation of redemptive history witnesses the appearing of the eternal cosmic-human temple of God.¹

Legal-Declarative Paradigm: The Covenantal Orientation of Salvation

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Relative then to the old covenant context, the Hebrew word for "covenant" (berith) is used at least 289 times. So for instance, the Hebrew word covenant is explicitly used to summarize the whole of the Genesis history in Exodus 2:24 and the Old Covenant "Bible" itself was called the "book of the covenant" in Exodus 24:7. As related then to a covenant renewal event in worship, it is said how the, "book of the covenant" was first read and then explained in the hearing of the people wherein it was

¹ Meredith Kline, *Kingdom Prologue, Genesis Foundations For A Covenantal Worldview*. Meredith Kline/Two Age Press, 1989/2000.

reported how they said, “all that the LORD has spoken we will do” wherein the Hebrew word “do” conjoins both the idea of “believing” and “acting on that belief.”

That the covenant orientation in spirituality is universally inherent to redemptive history is evidenced by its transcending trajectory both through the Old and New Testament narrative as culminating in Christ—thus the words “old” and “new” as assigned to “covenant” that is consistent throughout. So for instance, the prophet Jeremiah in the old covenant context anticipates the coming of a “new covenant” (Jer.31: 31. c.f Malachi 3:1) even as Paul in the new covenant context references the “veil” of the old covenant that was lifted by Christ in the new covenant (c.f. 2Cor 3:14).

NT Gospels:

Matthew most especially applied the fulfillment motif relative to the Old Covenant expectations as Christ fulfilling the law-covenant. For instance, it narrates Christ’s saying, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.” (Matthew 5:17-18) Here again, Christ is shown throughout his ministry to fulfill the law-covenant in relation to the “law” of love. Our point is how we often don’t see the two together in praxis contra redemptive history (Dt. 6:5, 13:3 and Matt. 22:29-32).

NT Epistles:

Paul, for instance, will speak of the “veil” that remained “unlifted” in “the old covenant” until Christ was able to take it away (2Cor.3:14). Christ is later described as the “mediator of the new covenant” (Heb 9:15, 12:15) even by his own atoning “blood of the new covenant” that is then specifically related to the meaning and practice of the Eucharistic meal in the new covenant church (Luke 22:20, 1Cor.11:25). But like in the Old Covenant context and the gospel, beyond even the explicit references to “covenant” in the New Testament, we discern as well the use of “law” (nomos) as again synonymous with “covenant” throughout. Likewise, the “book of the law,” as often used by the prophets in reference to the “book of the covenant” (Josh 24:26, Neh. 8:8, 18, etc) is perfectly aligned with Paul’s use of the same in reference to the old covenant (Rom. 7:22, 25, 1Cor.9: 21).

The Covenant of Grace: A Story of Romance?

The genius of the Bible is its narrative. The Bible is less a systematic theology or a collection of wisdom sayings than the story of redemptive history beginning at creation and culminating with the consummation of the new heavens and new earth. And to be sure, one way to tell the story is to focus on the history of covenant between God and humanity as beginning with creation and culminating with Christ.

More specifically, The story we want to follow is one of a sacred romance. It will begin in Genesis 2, but will not get fully consummated until Revelations 21. This way of telling the story will pay special attention to the “legal” and “justifying” images such as the bride being clothed in a great wedding gown “made white with the blood of the Lamb. (Rev. 7:14)” What a curious if not grotesque image, one that can be understood by reading Genesis 2 first. For what does it mean that the beauty of the bride in Revelations is somehow related to her ‘ own sacrifice? In what sense is the marriage success being guaranteed by her husband such as to bless her with an irrevocable and secure standing within the marriage itself. Indeed, this way of telling the story will want to focus on the divine-human romance made secure by divine law” as through “the word of the covenant” (Rev.12:11). And in direct ways, this is related to the transition from an eternal typifying “law-covenant” in Adam’s marriage to the real deal in relation to Christ and the Church wherein the dogma IS the drama per an amazing and objectifying grace relative to an ultimate marriage. (c.f. Romans

7:1ff, Eph. 5, Rev. 20, etc)

Not by serendipitous chance, the first recorded covenant “oath” is located in the marriage of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2:23ff. That is, when Adam made his solemn affirmation, “this is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh,” it was more than some inane observation as if God needed to be informed concerning Eve’s origins. It’s true that according to the Genesis narrative “she was taken out of man” (vs.23) even as this was referenced by Paul to establish the principle of solidarity in Ephesians 5:28 (“He who loves his wife loves himself.”) And yet there is more to it .

These words constituted a solemn oath of covenant faithfulness based upon the union of covenant solidarity-- an abbreviated way of saying something like, “may this woman be to me as my own body so that I will assume the burden of ‘one flesh’ as with the sanctioned bones and flesh being wrenched out of my body upon covenant infidelity.” The sense of its meaning related to a standard covenantal oath in the ancient near eastern context is demonstrated by the use of the exact same phrase “bone of my bones” in other oath taking ceremonies such as in Genesis 29:14. (See also the use of this formula in Judges 9:2, 2 Samuel 19:12-13). And we have already noted how Adam’s marriage with Eve is explicitly related to the human-divine “marriage covenant” evidenced by Paul’s use of Genesis 2:23 in Eph. 5:31 saying *this is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church* (vs. 32).

Especially, observe *who* exactly assumes the oath and therefore the burden of the covenant. For we notice the conspicuous absence of an oath taken by Eve! In and of itself, we would probably not want to make a big deal about it. And yet set within the context of redemptive history, it becomes a very big deal in so far as Adam’s covenant “headship” is expressed in successive generations of covenant making as related to God’s covenant headship in the divine-human marriage culminating in Christ. Now by “headship” here, I am merely referencing the one who assumes ultimate responsibility for the covenant or the guarantor of the covenant. The one who assumes the oath is the one who assumes the responsibility of fulfilling the covenant. Again, why is it that Adam is only remembered as assuming the oath of the first marriage covenant? The answer is reflected in the ancient covenant treaty that is here being assumed in marriage.

Entering then the New Covenant context, the grace transaction as typified by Adam and fulfilled by the “seed of a woman” is again perfectly illustrated in Paul’s application of all that we just reviewed in terms of it being a “type” or “picture” of Christ and the church. For instance, it is not by coincidence that Paul specifically quotes the first marriage ceremony and then relates it directly to Christ and the church in Ephesians 5. He even compares the intended sacrificial nature of a husband’s love for his wife per Adam’s “oath consigned” as fulfilled as “Christ loved the church and gave himself for her” (Eph. 5:25). And the restoration of the “naked and not ashamed” nature of the covenant oath is again explicitly related to the “bone of my bones” idea as fulfilled in Christ’s substitutionary atonement “having cleansed her (the church-bride) by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:26-27). This is of course the language of covenantal justification in the forensic sense, even as it refers to a radical and objectifying grace as a basis for Christ’s sacred marriage to the church (vs. 32).

Paul will as well relate the story of Adam and Even to Christ and the Church, albeit less overtly. To begin, notice that in Romans 7 Paul wants to talk about marriage in relation to “the law.” He says:

Or do you not know... speaking to those who know the law... that a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from

the law of marriage... Likewise, you have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may be married to another. Rom 7:1ff

Clearly, Paul's point here is that we are bound to covenant fidelity to a spouse as long as he/she is alive, but if he/she dies, the law itself then annuls the first covenant such as to make room for another—that is, to be married to another spouse! Now, this would make sense if it were not for Romans 5. Within the context of Romans, the whole argument rests on what Paul means in Romans 1: 16 that the “righteousness of God is revealed unto salvation.” What exactly does this mean? Romans 3:22-26, -

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the works of the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe... and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith... It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

That is, the gospel! By a legal transaction framed in the context of a marriage covenant, Christ becomes what Adam wasn't as the first husband of humanity so to speak, and fulfilled the oath of Adam in a way to insure the romance between God and humanity. Such a notion of covenant is what preserves the gospel and is the basis of a gospel centered spirituality.

The Covenant's Objectifying Grace

The covenantal orientation or “salvation by divine law” views salvation most essentially as a “legal or forensic” transaction satisfied on our behalf by Christ such as to preserve the grace centeredness of our sacred romance between God and humanity. This in turn will emphasize a declarative praxis in spirituality. The covenant orientation is shown to preserve the gracious nature of our union with Christ by means of the objectifying grace of redemption that is executed by an objective transaction (transacted apart from us if for us) such as to become the grounds for our safety and acceptance with God. In other words, without the objectifying grace of covenant, it will be shown how redemption itself cannot be gracious in so far as we are left to our subjective experience and performance as a basis for human flourishing and hope.

The Confessional Theology:

Justification:

- WCF

11.3. Christ, by his obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are thus justified, and did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to his Father's justice in their behalf. Yet, inasmuch as he was given by the Father for them; and his obedience and satisfaction accepted in their stead; and both, freely, not for anything in them; their justification is only of free grace; that both the exact justice and rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners.

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Q. 33. *What is justification?*

A. Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.

Saving Faith:

WCF 11.2. Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification: yet is it not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love

Assurance:

Gospel Spirituality:

Just as in Christology, Christology applied means that the Covenant and Temple—though distinct, are never separated... even inter-dependent upon the other

- *If the covenant constitutes and regulates the temple*
- *The temple executed and participated in the covenant*

- *If “Covenant” is divine law unto salvation*
- *Temple is divine presence unto salvation*

- *If covenant is the basis of assurance by grace through faith alone in Christ our covenant executor*
- *The temple is the means by which that grace is mediated or “fleshed out” into the common vernacular of the socio-cultural flesh of the nations...*

- *If Covenant is objectifying/personal grace—the basis of our assurance*
- *Temple is subjectifying/communal grace—the basis for our participation in that assurance...*

- *Neither “save” us—but are the means through which GOD saves us, as to bring his salvation into our existence on earth as it is in heaven the power of the Holy Spirit.*

- *It could be said that the covenant justifies us*
- *It could be said that the temple converts/sanctifies as regulated by the covenant*

1) Gospel-Centered(Covenant Grace)

We believe that the Gospel is not only the ABC's but the A to Z's of the Christian life in at least two ways. First, it is not only our ticket to heaven based on grace through faith, it is the way God sets us free to live the more transformed life. Second, the Gospel is not just about the “inward” person concerning our spiritual needs, but also the “outward” person concerned with our emotional, physical, vocational, etc. needs. The Gospel therefore is a holistic commitment to empowerment aimed at spiritual conversion and discipleship in reliance upon Christ together with micro-enterprise ventures and family/personal Christian counseling. ([Rom.1:17](#), [Eph 2:1-10](#))!

What to look for:

- The experience of Christian assurance of God's favor based on God's grace in Christ.
- People who are identity oriented as adopted sons/daughters vs. performance oriented as slaves/workers.
- Transparency in willingness to confess *real* sins.
- A different approach to suffering and trials as related to God's training vs. God's punishment.
- A new motivation for service that is internal and gratitude based vs. external and duty based.
- More and more set free from self-promotion, self-defending, self-justifying, blame-shifting approach to life.
- Law loving as it is the basis for personal and communal flourishing now that we are no longer law relying as the basis of being accepted by God.

- Sabbath enjoying in trustful contentment upon God's gracious provisions in Christ.

Challenges:

- 1) Law and Grace Confusions—c.f. PPT “The Gospel Relation of Law and Grace”
- 2) Ministry Philosophy—“First things First or....”

Gospel centered philosophy of ministry will be diligent to make the gospel first. That is, our first aim is not to make a Christian nation or culture, but to make Christians. We therefore set our focus on Christian conversions, knowing that the result will be the “re-conversion” of such divine institutions as the sanctify of life, sacredness of covenant based (vs. consumer based) marriage, multi-cultural equality (if not sameness), etc.

There is a very important order to salvation in scripture wherein justification proceeds sanctification.” It’s an order that is beautifully illustrated by Christ’s interaction with the women caught in adultery.

Jesus said... Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more. (John 8:11)

The order is likewise noted by John in his epistle wherein he observed how

Perfect love cast out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. We love because he first loved us. (1 Jn 4:18-19).

The fact of the matter is that it is impossible to be sanctified without first being justified, since all good works done out of fear are not works of love but self-interest. The gospel therefore starts with the problem of “Sin” (capital “S”) and the need to be reconciled to God, not to the exclusion of dealing with “sins” (small “s”), but dealing with “sins” in so far as there is the restoration of true faith, hope and love in Christ.

Another way to say this is that we need to preach and teach the whole counsel of God, but also in Godly proportions. What then is the overall focus of divine revelation in Scripture? Paul summarizes it as “Christ and him crucified.” No, Paul doesn’t preach and teach nothing but the cross, but he preaches and teaches everything as it must pass through the cross.

What does this imply about the topics we preach each Sunday, or the first order of conversation that we have with our non-Christian friends, or even how we would talk about such topics as sanctify of life and marriage? We are left with the privilege of framing everything in order to fit into the good news of the gospel. How would this change our conversations on the topic of marriage, for instance, as covenant based in order to preserve grace based marriage after the pattern of Christ and the church?

Conclusion:

Let’s keep our focus. Let’s trust in the “ordinary means of grace” that God has given us wherein his presence is mediated through gospel centered and missional prayer, sacraments, preaching and one-anothering in the life of his body, the church. Keep asking and bringing people.

Summary: The Gospel “in Christ” Explained:

We see that our whole salvation and all its parts are comprehended in Christ. We should therefore take care not to derive the least portion of it from anywhere else. If we seek salvation, we are taught by the very name of Jesus that it is “of him.” If we seek any other gifts of the Spirit, they will be found in his anointing. If we seek strength, it lies in his dominion; if purity, in his conception; if gentleness, it appears in his birth. For by his birth he was made like us in all respects that he might learn to feel our pain. If we seek redemption, it lies in his passion; if acquittal, in his condemnation; if remission of the curse, in his

cross; if satisfaction, in his sacrifice; if purification, in his blood; if reconciliation, in his descent into hell; if mortification of the flesh, in his tomb; if newness of life, in his resurrection; if immortality, in the same; if inheritance of all blessings, in his Kingdom; if untroubled expectation of judgment, in the power given to him to judge. In short, since rich store of every kind of good abounds in him, let us drink our fill from this fountain, and from no other. (John Calvin, Institutes 2.16.19. c.f. 2nd article of Apostles Creed)