

“Christ and the Covenant of Works” Genesis 2:4-17 Shane Hatfield 9/19/21

The Scripture reading is in your handout if you have it. I didn't include Genesis 1, I want to read a short bit in Genesis 1, and then we're going to read a bigger chunk in Genesis 2, but like I said earlier, what we're studying is Christ and the covenants throughout the Old Testament. What we saw last week is that the whole Bible is about Jesus from beginning to end. Jesus is the way to understand the Bible, and He's the way to understand life. He's the way to understand how to live in relation to each other and to God. So now, what we're going to do is we're going to go back through the Old Testament and look at the covenants and ask ourselves, 'How do these covenants point us to the grace that we find in Jesus?' This morning we're going to look at the covenant that God makes with Adam in Genesis 1 and 2. We're going to read 1:27-28 and then we'll skip over to Genesis 2. Hear the word of the Lord:

“<sup>27</sup> So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. <sup>28</sup> And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.””

Now Genesis 2, starting in verse 4.

“<sup>4</sup> These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.

<sup>5</sup> When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, <sup>6</sup> and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground—<sup>7</sup> then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. <sup>8</sup> And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. <sup>9</sup> And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

<sup>10</sup> A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. <sup>11</sup> The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. <sup>12</sup> And the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. <sup>13</sup> The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush. <sup>14</sup> And the name of the third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

<sup>15</sup> The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. <sup>16</sup> And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, <sup>17</sup> but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.””

Now that I'm forty, I know more than ever that all men are like grass and their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of the Lord stands forever. Let's listen to it.

A few weeks ago, I started a new coaching program with some pastors from our denomination and as a part of that coaching program I started working with a new coach and what typically happens with every new coach is they want you to take personality tests! And so, I had to take a personality test to meet with this coach. I've taken personality tests before so I assumed I knew what the results were going to be and that it was not going to be surprising. So, I took the test the first time and the results came back, and I was like, 'Huh. This doesn't look right. This is not what I would have guessed. This is not my personality type.' This test was different. The questions were kind of challenging, kind of hard, and so I asked my family, I said, 'Can you help me answer some of these questions? I think my results were wrong!' So, they helped me take the test a second time. I took it, and the results came back the same. Again. I was like, 'Huh, okay. That doesn't make any sense.'

So, the day before my meeting with this coach, I took the test again! I thought, 'You know, maybe something has changed. I'll try to change my answers a little bit.' Maybe I just answered incorrectly. So, I took the test again. Same results. I got frustrated. I was like, 'No, this couldn't be right!' I took this test again. Same results. Then I realized I was taking the free version, so I thought, 'Aha! I'm going to pay for the test!' So, I paid for the test. I got the results. The same again! I looked up the results that time and it said again, 'The Performance-Oriented person.' I said, 'No! That's not me. I'm the coach. I'm the counselor. This isn't right.' I took the test again. This is the sixth time I'd taken this test. The results were the same. So, the next day I go to meet with my coach, and he said, 'Well, let's look at your personality profile and let's look at that and talk about that.' And he pulls it up, and I say, 'You know, I don't really like this test. I don't think it's accurate. I took this test six times and every time it came back this, but I think it's wrong.' He said, 'Shane, what kind of person takes the personality test six times hoping for different results? You are a performance-oriented person.' Boom. Mind blown. In the end, over the days and weeks as I started processing this with friends and family, all these puzzle pieces came into place and I thought, 'Oh. I am a deeply performance-oriented, results-oriented person.' And it pervades everything that I do.

Now, as I've thought about this passage and the covenant of works, what I have realized, what I have learned over this week is that all of us, no matter what our enneagram number is, no matter what our DISC profile says, no matter what our Meyers-Briggs is, whatever test you want, right? All of us, in some ways, are deeply performance-oriented people because we were born under the covenant of works, so that puts a performance-oriented bent deep into our hearts. It is inescapable. The covenant of works says, 'Do this and you shall live.' No matter what our 'this' is, all of us are living under that law. The only way that we can *not* live under that law is to be adopted into the covenant of grace through Jesus. So, that's what we're going to see this morning as we look at this passage. We're going to see that Jesus fulfills the covenant of works so that we can be adopted into the covenant of grace, and so we can live by grace each and every day and not by our own performance. So, we're going to look at three things this morning, we're going to look at the context of the covenant, the content of the covenant, and the fulfillment of the

covenant. The context, the content, and the fulfillment. Kids, three things for you to listen for: a blessing, a tree, and a little boy.

First, let's look at the context of this covenant. So, if you look at Genesis 1, this is why I had to go back there and read it, if you look at it, you see that the context of this covenant comes in the context of incredible blessings. If you've read Genesis 1 before, you know that there are several refrains, but one of the refrains in Genesis 1 is this: it says, the Lord God made plants according to their kind, trees according to their kinds, sea creatures according to their kinds, birds according to their kinds, living creatures according to their kinds. But when it comes to man, does it say, 'And God created man according to their kinds'? No. It says that God made man in His *own* image, that God created man special! He has a special relationship with man that He does not have with the rest of creation.

So, right away, we see that God's relationship with man is different. The structure of this relationship is what we call a covenant. That's not a word that we use very often in our culture, but a covenant is a bond. The most common covenants that we have in our culture are the marriage covenant, the covenant between parents and their kids, and the covenant that happens at adoption! Those are three great pictures of the Biblical idea of a covenant. Now, what most people think is that a covenant is like a contract. Well, it has some similar features, but a contract is there because a relationship does not exist. A contract is there to protect the people. A covenant comes because there is a relationship. There is a relationship being established. A covenant is more personal and more intimate than a contract. A contract can merely be an exchange of goods. A covenant is not just an exchange of goods. In this covenant, we see that the infinite, eternal, unchangeable God, who is perfect in His wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth, enters into a relationship with finite beings that He has created. He has condescended Himself to come down and enter into relationship with us. It is a gracious relationship from the beginning. God didn't have to do this! God didn't need us! He wanted us. He wanted a relationship with us.

Now, the word for covenant is not used in Genesis 1 or 2, you might notice that. We'll get that word when we get to the covenant that God makes with Noah. But the concept is still here, okay? Covenants have parties, they have terms, they have blessings, and they have curses, and you see all of these here even though the word covenant isn't used. In Isaiah 6:7 though, it actually refers to this as a covenant with Adam. It said that Israel had been unfaithful to the covenant, like Adam. So therefore, we look at this and we say, this is a covenant. So, this covenant has terms, and it has blessings and curses. Now, if you notice in 1:28 it says that God blessed them, so there's a blessing. And what does it say right after that? He blesses them and He says, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth, subdue it, and have dominion over it." God's blessing here came here in the form of a commandment. That's actually something we see several times throughout the covenants as we look at them. God's commandments can come in the form of blessings. God's commandments are blessings, and God's blessings come in the form of commandments. Now, why would He give us commands? He gives us commands because we're created in the image of God and so, this is how we image God. It's what God did! He is fruitful and He multiplies. He filled the earth. He subdued it. He has dominion over it, and so now, as His image bearers, that's what He wants us to do.

So, Genesis 1 takes this big picture focus of how God created the whole cosmos, but Genesis 2 focuses on the special relationship between God and man in the garden of Eden. It says that God created man and placed him in the garden. Now, there are lots of descriptions about this garden, and we don't know exactly what everything means, but we do know this, this garden was *good*. This garden was beautiful. This garden had everything that Adam needed for life and godliness. IT was filled with water and food and minerals and animals that he could take care of, and eventually God even created a woman so that he could be with her and they could be fruitful and multiply together so that they could have unity. They could have friends and family. He got everything he needed in this garden to be fruitful and multiply and God said, 'I want you to work this garden and keep it.' I want you to see the incredible blessings that God showered on Adam in the context of this covenant, because when we look around at our lives, we see that all of God's commands to us come in the context of His blessings. God has blessed us beyond what we could deserve. He has given us a good home. He has given us a good place to live. He has given us identities. He has given us families. He has blessed us tremendously! And that shows us that this relationship that we can have with God is not a transaction, it's not a contract. This isn't a quid pro quo, right? God is not saying, 'If you do x, y and, then I'll love you.' God is saying, 'Look, I have done x, y, and z for you! And I've created you this way, and so, now love me! Keep these commandments. Enjoy this relationship that you have with me!' And so, as we go through the whole Bible, it's incredibly important especially as we look at the covenant with Abraham and Moses, that you see that God's commands are blessings and His blessings come in the context of His commandments.

Now, I want to do a special application for kids. Kids, listen! Your parents love you! The commands that they give you come in the context of incredible blessings. Remember that the next time that they tell you to clean your room or go to bed or eat your veggies! They're doing it because they love you. Those commands come in the context of blessings, and hopefully, we will keep that in mind as we study God's word and as we relate to our heavenly Father in our lives as well. So, the first thing we see is that the context of the covenant is blessings.

The second thing we see is the content of the covenant. Look back at 2:16. "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden," again notice, He leads with blessings. You've got all these trees! You've got everything I created for you! And then He gives the terms, He gives the command. He says, "but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." There are the terms. You can eat from all of these other trees and obey me and live or eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil and die. Do this and live or do this and die. There are the terms of the covenant. Now, we don't know anything about this tree, right? You read this and go, 'What's up with this tree?' We don't know anything other than what lies beyond the tree and what lies beyond the tree is the knowledge of good and evil. One commentator described it like this, and I think it's appropriate. Imagine that you've got a door in front of you and that door says the knowledge of good and evil. The Bible doesn't tell us anything about the properties of the door, right? It doesn't tell us anything about the properties of the tree, but it tells us what lies beyond that door. When you open that door, you're going to walk into the experience of good and evil. Beyond that door is the opportunity to be self-made people, to experience the world on our own terms, to set our own values, our own practices, and our own knowledge. This door, as its prohibited, is an opportunity for discipleship. We can say, 'Yes Lord. You're our Father, You

are our Creator, and we will do what You say, we will experience this world the way You intend us to experience it,' or we can reject it and go through the door and live life on our own. We know, or you probably know, that in Genesis 3 Adam fails the test. Adam ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and we're going to talk about that passage next week. Because Adam ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he dies spiritually. His relationship to God, his relationship to himself, his relationship to others, all began to disintegrate right there in front of his very eyes. He died spiritually. He didn't die physically immediately, but it was certain that he was going to die. He was like a tree that has been cut down and is sitting on the side of the street. You see all these leaves. You see it's green! But it's cut off. It's eventually going to die. Eventually, Adam died, and then because he represented mankind, all of mankind died after him, and you see that in Genesis 4-6. His sin and misery followed through his generations.

Now, this is getting a little technical, but what I want you to try to see is because we are all born in Adam, we are all born into that same covenant. Because we all descend from Adam, we are all born into the covenant of works. Even though his test came to an end, the obligation still was maintained for him, and the obligation is still maintained for us. It's implied in Genesis 3 and we see it explicitly in Galatians 3, and I want to read a little bit of Galatians 3. If you've got a Bible, and you want to flip there and read it with me you can. I think this will be clearer if we look at it. Galatians 3 says, "For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law and do them. Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith."<sup>12</sup> But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them."" So, it's there in Galatians 3 and it's several other places, and this principle of the covenant works is 'Do this and you shall live.' That's where we get this performance-oriented heart of ours. It's from being born into that covenant. Do this and you shall live is something that is at work in our hearts. Now, if we could perfectly and personally keep all of the words of the law, we could save ourselves. But the problem is we can't. Because we're born in Adam, we're born with a sin nature. We inherited his lack of original righteousness. We inherited his sin nature and so, that which we want to do and should do, we can't do. It doesn't matter if you're religious or irreligious or even if you're a Christian, as long as you can remember all of the struggle with this tendency.

Let's say that you're a religious person, you're a spiritual person, you think, 'You know what, I'm not a bad guy. I'm honest. I'm hard-working. I pay my taxes. I treat people well. I'm not perfect, but I'm not a bad guy, and I'm certainly not as bad as *those* people.' Well, let me ask you this, Francis Schaeffer came up with this illustration, he said imagine that you had a recorder hanging around your neck and every time you told somebody else that you shouldn't do this, that recorder came on. Every time you did what you told them that they shouldn't do, that recorder came on and it recorded it. Now you get to judgement day and God takes off that recorder and all he does is hit play and you get to hear all the things that you told everybody else what they should do, and all the times that you didn't do it. Let me ask you, have you perfectly and personally kept the law? No! Could you stand up to that judgment? No! None of us can.

Let's say you're an irreligious person! You say, 'I don't believe this. God is just some figment of our imagination. It's just something that we've made up so we can survive in the

world. I don't believe all this stuff.' Let me ask you, do you tell people what they should do and what they shouldn't do? If God had a microphone around your neck and it recorded you and then He took it off and played it for you, would you stand up to your own test? Do you actually perfectly and continually keep the law that you tell others they should keep? If not, then you are caught up in a self-made, performance-oriented system that you yourself cannot keep! So, whether you're religious or you're irreligious, we're all caught up under the covenant of works with this principle of 'Do this and live.' The only way we can be saved, the only way we can be rescued, the only way we can experience God's grace, is if somebody keeps the law for us, if somebody fulfills it for us, and that's what Jesus did! He fulfilled the law. Through that, we're adopted into the covenant of grace, out of the covenant of works.

That's the last thing we're going to see, the fulfillment of this covenant. This is Galatians 3. So, we read verses 10-12, this is 3:13-14: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. For it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree' so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised spirit through faith.' Because Jesus was born as a man, and born from Mary, He was born under the law. He was born under the covenant of works that God gave Adam. But because He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, He had a divine nature. He was God! He was God in the flesh. He was God incarnate! Because of that, He could perfectly and perpetually keep God's law. He's the only one that could look at the law, and it says, 'Do this and you shall live,' and Jesus said, 'I did that. I kept it. Every thought of my heart, every word of my tongue, every action, every deed that I did, everything kept God's law perfectly.' There was no sense in which He would look at His life and say, 'I should,' and He didn't. Yet, despite His perfect obedience, He suffered death on the cross. He took the curse of the covenant on Himself. Paul says, 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree,' Jesus was hung on a tree. He hung on the cross, and there on the cross, the only person who ever kept the law that said, 'Do this and you shall live,' died. He died in our place to pay for every 'should' that we did not do, so that when we receive Him and rest in Him for salvation, we can hear 'It is done. It is finished.' When you receive Jesus and you rest in Him for salvation, you are adopted into God's family and you are brought out from under the covenant of works and you are brought into the covenant of grace. Adoption is a great example of the salvation that Jesus gives us.

There's a pastor who used to be a PCA minister in this area, his name is Bob Peterson, and Bob was adopted! When Bob tells us his adoption story, he says it like this, his father killed his mother when he was about two, and so he was placed in foster care and bounced around from foster care home to foster care home to foster care home and he was abused and that left him deeply scarred and hurt. His case worker from the foster care system just said, 'You know, this boy is never going to be able to have a normal life. He's never going to be able to attach to anyone. He just needs to go into an orphanage and live there.' So, that's where he went, to the orphanage. There was a couple who y didn't want to have kids. And then later on in life as they got older, they decided they wanted to have kids, but because they were so old, they wouldn't allow them to adopt a baby, they had to adopt somebody who was older. So, they went to this orphanage and they flipped through the book of five hundred pictures and they picked out one child to adopt and that child was Bob. Now, the husband did not want to adopt, the wife did. The husband was a craftsman, he said, 'Look, I don't want to adopt, but we'll take this boy out and I'll listen to him and I've created this little boat and I'm going to keep this boat with me, and if at

any point while we're with this boy, I give him the boat, then that's your sign that I want to adopt the child.' So, they go to the orphanage, they pick up Bob and they go to the bowling alley. Now, Bob has never bowled before. By this time, he's growing up, and he's never bowled before, but he really wants to impress these people because he really wants to be adopted. So, he goes to bowl and he throws the bowling ball as high and as hard as he can and the bowling ball comes crashing down into another lane and goes in the gutter, and he is incredibly embarrassed, and he falls down and he just starts crying hysterically. They're like, 'It's okay, it's okay, it's alright Bob. We'll just get out of here. We'll leave.'

And so, they leave, and they take Bob to an Asian restaurant. Bob has never been to an Asian restaurant before. They give him chopsticks. He's never used chopsticks before, so he doesn't know how to use them, and they bring out this bowl of soup. Bob takes his chopsticks and immediately plunges his chopsticks into the bowl of soup, and he flips it up into the air. The soup flies all over the place, all over the man. And Bob just puts his head down and starts to cry. Through the mist of his tears, he sees the man take out the boat, put it on the table and slide it across to him. He says, 'Bob, I'd like for you to be our son. Would you like to come home with me and be in our family?' And that day they adopted Bob. Not because of anything he had done, not because of his performance, his grades, his intelligence, his beauty, or anything else, but because of their graciousness and their kindness.

That's what happens when God adopts us into his family. When He brings us into the covenant of grace it's not because of anything that we've done, it's not because of our intelligence, our beauty, our good works, or anything else. In fact, it's despite all those things. He adopts us into His family. He gives us a new relationship, a new name, a new identity. He says, 'You are my child in whom I am well pleased.' We become daughters and sons of God with all of the rights and privileges of being His. Through Jesus' death He fulfilled the covenant of works so that we could come into the covenant of grace and then He is resurrected so we can experience true life. That's what the covenant offers. It offers life! So, by placing your faith in Jesus Christ, you experience life. If you're here this morning and you've been living on your own performance, your own works, your own deeds, you compare yourself to your neighbors and say, 'I'm better than them!' Jesus invites you to stop trying to save yourself, stop trying to compare yourself to everyone else around you, receive Him and rest in Him. That's how you go from being religious to being a Christian. You quit coming to God and saying, "Look what I've done!" And you come to God and you say, "Look at what Jesus has done." You say, "He did this so I could be His. Please forgive me."

If you're here and your irreligious and you've been rejecting God your entire life, if you saw that tree of the knowledge of good and evil and you said, "I am running straight for it. I am running out that door and I want to be as far from you as possible," God invites you now to stop trying to save yourself. Stop creating new laws and new rules about diet and fitness and politics and everything else. Stop trying to save yourself! Come to Jesus and live. Find true life in Him.

Maybe you're here and you're a gospel believing Christian and you've been trying to follow Jesus for as long as you can remember, but day after day you continue to slip back into that performance-oriented heart that Adam gave you. Hear these words: In Jesus, you are God's child, and He is pleased with you. Jesus says, "Come to Me all you who are weary and heavy

laden, and I will give you rest.” Jesus gives you rest. His law is not burdensome. It is light! It is kind. It comes in the context of incredible blessings. Receive that and rest in it! Moment by moment, day after day, year after year, until you get to Revelation and guess what you see there? The tree of life. You get to eat it! Taste and see that it is good. Let’s pray together.