

# COVENANT RENEWAL

Genesis 1:26-28

Matthew 28:18-20

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## Covenantal Evil (1)

by Ray Sutton

### (False Transcendence)

, Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman,

### (False Hierarchy)

"indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?"

### (False Ethics)

And the woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, lest you die.'"

### (False Oath)

And the serpent said to the woman, "You surely shall not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

### (False Succession)

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 desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. Then when the eyes of both of them ~~were opened, and they knew that~~ they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings (Genesis 3:1-7).

The Fall, sin, and evil are covenantal. So what? Remember that great scene in the movie, *Patton*, where the general has just defeated Romel. After the smoke of battle has cleared, and as the camera scans to Patton, he yells out something to the effect, "Romel, I beat you because I read your book." In other words, he read about the tactics of Romel, anticipated them, and defeated the "desert fox" of Germany. By correctly understanding the Fall, sin, and evil as they are presented in Genesis, the Church can do the same to Satan. It can meet its old nemesis, the Great Dragon, and emerge the victor.

In order to do this, however, the Church must see Genesis 3 as **covenantal falsification** on the part of Satan in verses 1-7, and **covenantal lawsuit** on the part of God in verses 8-24. In other words, it has to realize that Satan is in the business of counterfeiting the covenant, the very means of entering a relationship with God, to avoid being tricked into giving up its own inheritance.

Then the Church should take a cue from God's response. If it really wants to know how to beat Satan, it

ate the ramifications of this kind of covenantal interpretation in its own warfare against Satan, until it faces the fact that he knows the covenant, fights in terms of the covenant, and oppses the covenant by **uncovenanting** the covenant people. He is a **covenantal** creature who fights his battles in terms of the covenant to destroy the covenant; he understands all too well this strategy. Unfortunately, most of God's people do not! As a result, they get defeated because they don't correctly interpret the details of Genesis 3.

In this issue, I begin at least a two part, and maybe a three part series on the covenant structure of Genesis 3. I have outlined the basic covenant pattern in the Fall narrative. It is fairly straightforward, the passage breaking around the dialogue itself (see above). This month, however, I will mainly concentrate on point one of the covenant, transcendence, because it is the central ploy of Satan.

### False Transcendence

"**Now** the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman" (Genesis 3:1).

Satan uses **speech** to tempt Eve. It is covenantally significant, because his temptation copies the covenantal acts of creation. In the context, God **speaks** His world into existence, saying ten times, "Let there be," which repeats \*covenant pattern **twice**.<sup>1</sup> In a similar manner, Satan uses **speech** as his method of "decreasing" what God had established. He approaches Eve with a **counterfeit** speech. How? He tries to make "gods" out of them by re-interpreting what God had said. He uses speech to outdo and undo God's creation. That's all he uses: speech, a twisted, perverted, kind of logic in the form of simple talk, just talk.

What was Satan really doing with his speech? He applied language to entice man to be something that he could never truly be. He confused Adam and Eve into believing that they could **transcend their being**. In this sense he presented a false transcendence because transforming one's being from humanity into deity is an impossibility. To be precise, however, he deceived the woman into the notion that humanity could be mixed, or confused with deity. This is impossible! Even at the Incarnation, God became man but the fourth Ecumenical Council, the Council of Chalcedon (A. D. 451), was careful to state that Divine and Human natures were not mixed, nor commingled. The early Church Fathers were very determined to sort out and reject such heresy.

1 Ray R. Sutton, *That* (Tyler, Texas: I. C. E., 1987), pp. 124-127. For a fuller discussion of the covenantal nature of creation

The whole point of my observation about the first verse in chapter 3, however, is that Satan used speech to offer something that was against God's design. So what? The fact that he misused what God Himself had implemented meant that **he** was trying to be God! He was asserting himself over God. He was literally **declaring** himself to be God. I have explained it this way in my latest book on a covenantal view of divorce and remarriage, **Second Chance**.

What Satan ultimately sought to accomplish was a covenant with **God**, whereby he was "**Lord**" over God. He could not directly attempt such a thing, so he tried to use Adam as a mediator for him. He approached Adam through Eve. He deceived Eve into luring Adam to eat of the forbidden fruit, thereby drawing them into covenant with him, and thereby making Adam the mediator of **his** covenant. But Satan was undone by the sanctions of God's covenant. If, however, the sanctions of Satan's covenant had proven true, and if he had been successful in getting Adam to mediate a covenant between God and himself, then he would have secured control over God through the marriage of Adam and Eve. He would have been joined to God through Adam, and he would have successfully realigned himself in a position that outmaneuvered God; for the Lord would have been forced to submit to Satan's terms. The devil's plan was nothing less than another version of his initial attempt to be God, for which he had been expelled from heaven (Isaiah 14:12-21).<sup>2</sup>

The opening verse of Genesis 3, therefore, covers the first aspect of the covenant: transcendence.

Because this point is so important and because virtually every Satanic trick has to do with some sort of attempt to become deity, I am going to spend the rest of this article on the subject: analyzing different kinds of false transcendence and examining deeper the reason why the offer of deity is such a temptation.

### The Frame Square

Professor John Frame of Westminster Theological Seminary (West) has provided the best analysis of the difference between Christian and non-Christian views of transcendence and immanence. An interpreter of the great Cornelius Van Til, the best Reformed theological apologist of this century, Frame applies him in a very important discussion about transcendence and immanence.

Frame says that transcendence is **covenant headship** and immanence is **covenant involvement**. He explains,

If God is covenant **head**, then He is exalted above His people; He is transcendent. If He is **covenant** head, then He is deeply involved with them; He is immanent. . . . If transcendence is covenant **headship**, and if immanence is God's involvement with His people, then we are on solid ground. We are using concepts taught in the Scripture, not ones invented by unbelieving philosophers. We are contemplating relations that however mysterious they may be [and they are mysterious] are nevertheless closely analogous to interpersonal relations in everyday life [father-son, ruler-citizen, husband-wife].<sup>3</sup>

And what are these errors of "unbelieving philosophers" that he is trying to avoid?

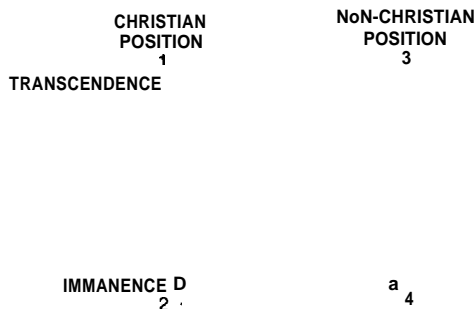
Historically, terrible problems have developed with concepts of transcendence and immanence. The transcendence of God [His exaltation, His mysteriousness] has been understood as God's being infinitely removed from the creation, being so far from us, so different from us, so "wholly other" and "wholly hidden" that we can have no knowledge of Him and can make no true statements about Him. Such a god, therefore, has not revealed – and perhaps cannot reveal – himself to us. He is locked out of human life, so that for practical purposes we become our own gods. God says nothing to us, and we have no responsibilities to Him.

Similarly, the concept of immanence has been distorted in non-Christian thought, even in some would-be Christian theologies. Immanence has been understood to mean that God is virtually indistinguishable from the world, that when God enters the world He becomes so "worldly" that He cannot be found. . . . Thus, in effect, there is no revelation; we have no responsibility before God.

Those false concepts of transcendence and immanence fit together in a peculiar way: both satisfy sinful man's desire to escape God's revelation, to avoid our responsibilities, to excuse our disobedience. Yet at bottom they are inconsistent with one another. How can God be infinitely far removed from us and wholly identical to us at the same time?<sup>4</sup>

Did you get lost in these lengthy quotes? Are you a little confused about the difference between Biblical transcendence/immanence and pagan transcendence/immanence? Hang in there because Frame's brilliance has anticipated our confusion and provided us with his famous **Frame Square** to clarify the differences.

(The square of religious opposition)



The four corners represent four assertions:

1. God is head of the covenant.
2. God is involved as Lord with His creatures.
3. God is infinitely far removed from the creation.
4. God is identical to the creation.

By way of general explanation, Frame offers the following:

Assertions 1 and 2 are biblical assertions, 3 and 4 are unbiblical. The first assertion represents a biblical view of divine transcendence, the second a biblical view of divine immanence. The third assertion represents a nonbiblical view of transcendence, the fourth a nonbiblical view of immanence. So the two sides distinguish a Christian from a non-Christian approach to the questions of God's immanence and transcendence. The upper half of the square deals with the concept of transcendence, the lower half with immanence. The diagonal lines indicate direct contra-

dictions, showing precisely how the two positions differ: 1 asserts that God is distinct from creation as Lord, 4 denies any distinction at all; 2 asserts a meaningful involvement, 3 denies it.<sup>5</sup>

Frame's square is extremely helpful and I would like to make a few of my own observations based on his work. They grow out of additional comments made in his classroom syllabus on the same material.<sup>6</sup> By the way, any infelicities on my part should not be attributed to him.

First, transcendence for the Christian is the God of the Bible. He is Sovereign and controls all things in heaven and earth. The Christian view of immanence is that God is **with** us, deeply involved in all created events. He reveals His law clearly; He works **in** us and **among** us to perfect holiness in His people.

Non-Christians either deny **God** or **deify the creation** to derive their doctrine of transcendence. Any immanence is that the creation or man himself is the final authority. We therefore see that 1 and 4 in the square are radically contradictory. For the Christian, transcendence is **something** that is not created or made. It is God. Whereas, man makes himself the final authority and makes God's transcendence into immanence which is nothing more than a perverted doctrine of transcendence.

Similarly, we see that 2 and 3 are contradictory. God reveals His will to the Christian and is present with Him. For the non-Christian, God's will cannot be known except by leaving the created world and entering the mystical world. Therefore, 3 and 4 are inconsistent and 1 and 2 have harmony.

Second, basic concepts of knowledge differ. Christian **irrationalism** (1 on the diagram) believes that God's knowledge is different from man's. God is the final authority and man should always submit his knowledge to God's. Thus, the word "irrational" means a basic **difference** between God's and man's mind. And, Christian **rationalism** is God's revealed Word. His logic and rationale are found there.

On the other hand, non-Christian **irrationalism** does not mean a difference between the Creator and creation. Instead, **irrationalism** is the **unknowable**, and for the non-Christian, there is no absolute truth. So, the world is basically irrational. But his **irrationalism** is **in** creation. His rationalism is around the **similarities** in the universe and he calls them **natural law**.

Notice how the non-Christian has reversed or inverted the order. Absolute authority is **in** creation. Yet, **man** cannot really know absolutely because the universe is closed. He has to leave the universe to find truth. Here is the explanation to why so many intellectuals are involved in the occult: **irrationalism** resulting from a closed view of the universe. Since their system of knowledge is closed, they must go outside the world to find true ultimate knowledge and a **source** for change. Rejecting God, their only alternative is **magic**, or a false doctrine of mysticism. For the non-Christian, mysticism is that which is comprehensible in the universe. If this is true, then mystery is something that can be manipulated in the form of knowledge, liturgy, experience and so forth. For the Christian, however, the truly mystical is in the incomprehensibility of God, as well as the incomprehensibility of God as it is imaged in man. According to the correct view of mystery, it cannot be manipulated because it cannot fully be understood. (e.g. the Trinity, Incarnation, etc.)

Third, sovereignty and responsibility are uniquely contrasted in the square. Christians believe that sovereignty

is in God, and they believe just as strongly that God's sovereignty in no way cancels out man's responsibility to God. God's sovereignty makes our choices significant, meaningful historical forces.

The non-Christian, however, places sovereignty **in** creation. God is absolutely responsible to **man**. And, man is absolutely responsible to his fellow man. The result: tyranny. Man has to submit absolutely to man without any transcendent checks and balances on the one asking him to submit. Yet, because man is man, he cannot control everything; he cannot cover all of the contingencies. Instead of depending on God, he must depend on man – his power, and ability to manipulate – to maintain his control.

Fourth, objectivity and subjectivity are contrasted in Frame's diagram. The Christian view of objectivity is that moral law does not depend on my response to it, but wholly on God's Word. His doctrine of subjectivity is that God's law is revealed in his inmost being and demands obedience at the most profound level – obedience from the heart.

The non-Christian maintains that good is so far beyond us that it can never be known (3 on the chart). There is no true objectivity in this system. On the other hand, ultimate morality is placed **within** man (4 on the chart). So, his doctrine of subjectivity makes him the absolute authority. Once again, we see that final authority is placed within man either individually or corporately.

Fifth, humility and hope are contrasted. Christian humility (1) is based on the premise that we have no claim on God. As creatures, we **deserve** blessing. But our hope (2) is in God who redeemed us by His sovereign grace. Blessing is assured in Christ.

For the non-Christian (3), there is no redemption, no hope of ever achieving blessing. There is only despair. His hope (4) is nothing more than his own pride. We are left with a system that says we can save ourselves through our own efforts.

To summarize: Christian and non-Christian transcendence/immanence are in contrast at every point. The non-Christian worldview inverts the Christian worldview at every point. Because the Christian system is **covenantal**, the non-Christian system tries to set up a false covenant; it cannot escape the way of the covenant. Satan's actions in the garden are the archetype of all false covenanting.

### The Doctrine of Judicial Transcendence

Before we leave this discussion of transcendence, I do not want to give the impression that God does not offer true transcendence to man. Certainly, I have established that man cannot obtain transcendence through transformation of being; he cannot leave his body by means of astral projection, nor can he change his essence. But does this mean that man cannot have personal transcendence? No, the Psalmist says, "I said, you are **gods**, and all of you are sons of the Most High" (Psalm 82:6; John 10:34). In the words of Athanasius, the early Church Father and great defender of Trinitarianism, "God became man that man might become god."

Thus, Satan was offering a counterfeit of something that the Scriptures later promised. Adam and Eve could have become "gods" in some sense, but certainly not in a capital G sense. Of course, Athanasius' comment almost sounds blasphemous doesn't it? So we have to be careful to allow for the promise of Scriptures in Psalm 82:6, while maintaining at the same time the **Creator/creature** distinction. How?

The legitimate non-change-of-being kind of transcendence is called **judicial dominion**. As the complete Psalm says,

*Ibid.*, p. 15.

God takes His stand in His own congregation; He judges in the midst of the rulers. How long will you judge unjustly, and show partiality to the wicked? Vindicate the weak and fatherless; do justice to the afflicted and destitute. Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them out of the hand of the wicked. They do not know nor do they understand; they walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken. I said, "You are gods, and all of you are sons of the most high. Nevertheless you will die like men, and fall like any one of the princes." Arise, O God, judge the earth! For it is Thou who dost possess all the nations (Psalm 86).

### Sonship Theme

The context of the Psalm is the third section of the Book, which is structured according to the covenant. To refresh our memory: the third segment of the covenant discusses the **ethical cause/effect** relationship. It teaches that there is a direct connection between dominion and obedience to the covenant. Often in this section, however, there is an emphasis on **sonship, because** the true son is the only one who can keep the covenant. In *That You May Prosper*, I said it this way,

The stipulations section of Deuteronomy specifies that only a certain kind of person can fulfill the commandment of God, a true **son** of the covenant. The ethics segment instructs the fathers to be true sons of God themselves by teaching their own sons the commandments (Deut. 6:1-26). The fathers imaged God by training their sons to image them. And when the sons followed their fathers in obedience to God, the second generation also imaged its Heavenly Father. In other words, a faithful son manifests his sonship by being a true image-bearer of his True Father, God (Gen. 5:1ff.). The faithful son in Genesis was to have demonstrated his sonship by carrying out three offices: prophet, priest, and king. . . The kings apply God's law to the land (Deut. 16 & 17). The priests guard the sanctuary and law of God (Deut. 18:1-18). The prophets deliver messages from God's heavenly council (Deut. 18:9-22). Hence, the theme that only the true son can keep the commandments of God consistently surfaces in the ethics part of the covenant, and it comes to ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ, the ultimate Son of the covenant.<sup>7</sup>

Keeping this in mind when we examine the context of Psalm 82, we begin to understand its message. Psalm 80 emphasizes the great **sonship** theme; Israel is portrayed as a vulnerable "son" (Psalm 80:15): Joseph, Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh. ironically, these tribes are the sons and brother of Joseph, all faithful sons (Psalm 80:1-2).

In Scripture, however, the first-born was not irrevocably entitled to the inheritance. He was required to be faithful. If not, the second-born could inherit, and in the Bible he usually does. The contrast between inheritance by obedience and inheritance by birth is consistent. The second-born son ends up with the inheritance because he is more

faithful to the covenant than the first-born, the heir by birth. But Joseph, the sonship name given to Israel, is in trouble in Psalm 80. His wayward heirs are threatening him. He needs help.

The solution to Joseph's problem is explained in the following: Psalms 81 and 82. Psalm 81 teaches that Israel should begin to act like a true **priestly** son to be delivered, and Psalm 82 emphasizes **kingly** judgments (v. 7), underscoring that both offices are functions of true sonship. In particular, Israel is told in Psalm 82 that God is in the midst of them judging their judgments. He is a king-father among the son-princes. If they do not exercise judgments like **sons**, which is a description parallel to **gods** (Psalm 82:6), then they will be judged by their Father.

Now we are prepared to understand the Psalmist's reference to "gods." It has nothing to do with a New Age, chain-of-being, kind of doctrine. Instead, it has to do with **sonship because** when a son images his father, he reflects the father's person and character such that he could be called a "chip off the old block." Man is the son of God in a covenantal sense. He can be called a "god," little g, without taking on Deity. This is not double talk, rather, it is covenantal talk. It is the reality of man's being a human symbol of Deity, a mirror of God. When man rules in the image of God, he then functions in the place of God, much as a prince becomes a king when he acts on behalf of the king.

### Judicial Sonship and the Garden

What does all of this have to do with the temptation of Adam and Eve? The key is the forbidden tree, the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Genesis 2:17). The expression "discerning good and evil" is a statement that is often used to describe a kingly exercise (II Samuel 14:17). it always refers to some kind of judicial rule.

According to the judicial nature of this phrase, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was a symbol of kingly rule. It also symbolized that Adam and Eve were temporarily forbidden to implement kingship; they were under a probation from that kind of rule.<sup>8</sup> They were only allowed to be priests, a function which is a **guarding role; consequently, they were to protect the tree from being eaten**. Knowing about this priestly call, Satan tempted them with something that would have eventually been theirs anyway. He seduced them into ruling when they were supposed to serve. Ironically, to capitulate to Satan, they had to fail to guard the only thing God had given them to protect.

Therefore, this interpretation is consistent with the rest of Scripture. The Bible teaches that man in some sense could be a "god," little g. It does not teach that man can ever change his essence and become a true Deity. On the basis of Psalm 82:6, Adam and Eve could have become "gods" with judicial dominion, if they had been willing to wait. They weren't, however, and they plunged the world into sin and darkness by prematurely seizing the forbidden fruit.

Meredith Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, vol. 1 (Meredith Kline, 1981), p. 158ff. Kline presents this thesis in rough form. But it is more clearly developed in James Jordan's, "Rebellion, Tyranny, and Dominion in the Book of Genesis," *Civilization*, vol. (Tyler, Texas: Geneva Divinity School Press, 1983), pp. 38ff.

7. Ray R. Sutton, *That*

*Prosper*, p. 61.