

Genesis 1:26-28

COVENANT RENEWAL

Matthew 28:18-20

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Covenantal Evil (III)

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God's Counter-Lawsuit

I. *God's call of witnesses (3:8-10).*

And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. Then the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard the sound of Thee in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself."

II. *God's Interrogation of Adam and Eve (3:11-13).*

And He (God) said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" And the man said, "The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" And the woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

III. *God's indictment of the Serpent, Eve and Adam (3:14-19).*

And the Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly shall you go, and dust shall you eat all the days of your life; and I will put enmity between you and the -woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel."

To the woman He said, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth; in pain you shall bring forth children. Yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."

Then to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field; by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

IV. *Pronouncement of Guilt (3:20-21).*

Now the man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living. And the Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.

V. *Condemnation (3:22-24).*

Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever" – therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim, and the flaming sword which turned every direction, to guard the way to the tree of life.

C. S. Lewis¹ understood **hell and all its nuances** perhaps better than anyone else in the Church. Or, at least he was able to **get it down on paper** better than anyone else. In fact, I'm fairly certain that no one in the history of the Church has been able to preserve such penetrating insight about the realm of its greatest nemesis. I know this sounds a little strange to be saying about someone, especially a fine Christian man who has had so much influence on the Christian world, and especially on me. So don't misunderstand. I don't intend my comment to be a criticism.

But, if you think about it, Lewis spent much of his time writing on this subject. He penned many of his fantasies about the influence of diabolical figures, such as the witch who ruled Narnia in **The Chronicles of Narnia**. He described the hellish society of N. I.C. E. in **That Hideous Strength**. He spoke of pain and suffering in unparalleled fashion in the **Problem of Pain**. He told a story of a round-trip bus ride to heaven and back to hell in **The Great Divorce**. And of course, who could ever forget his classic and most significant study of all on hell, **Screwtape Letters**?

Yes, when all is said and done about the great theological contributions of C. S. Lewis, he will be remembered more for his profound insights on this one dastardly subject: hell! Thank God because you don't often find someone who is on God's side of the kingdom who knows so much about the **other** side. I'm not sure if it is because he converted relatively late in life, which meant he spent a significant amount of his time gaining first hand experience from the **other** side. Or, perhaps it is because his reservoir of knowledge about the underworld grew **out** of his familiarity with ancient and medieval literature, **literature** that often devotes a lot of attention to demons, hell, and the like. I suspect it was a little of both. Put these reasons together with his unusual gift of translating ideas to the printed page, and you have a powerful combination for communicating the **truth about hell**.

1. The 20th century converted-later-in-life-Medieval-literature-professor at Oxford.

One of his most remarkable comments (via Screwtape) on the subject is found at the end of **Screwtape Letters**. The scene is in Hell at the annual dinner of the Tempter's Training College for young devils. The principal, Dr. Slubgob, has just proposed the health of the guests. Screwtape, a very experienced devil, who is the guest of honor rises to reply. After a very lengthy address, he says in the second to the last paragraph, "The fine flower of unholiness can grow only in the close neighborhood of the Holy. **Nowhere do we tempt so successfully as on the very steps of the altar.**"²

Much could be said about this one, easily-missed statement at the very end of the book: one of those places the eye quickly skips. I'll only make one observation, however, since it brings us to the final study of **covenantal** evil. I believe that Lewis understood that the greatest attack on the kingdom of God comes **nearest** the throne. Why? The most potent enemies of the Church are always its **former** members.

The Inside Man

Dr. Gary North has developed this point in a chapter called, "The Inside Man."³ He discusses in **Dominion and Common Grace** the concept of common **grace**, particularly, Cornelius Van Til's concept of common **grace**.⁴ Van Til argues that common grace is **restraint on the unbeliever's self-consciousness**. As history progresses, God lifts the **restraints** that the unbeliever becomes more and more antagonistic to the things of God. So far so good. But according to Van Til, the unbeliever becomes more and more formidable in his attacks because he **knows more**. He even becomes so successful that the Church must be removed from history, so that it can be saved and the final Judgment Day can begin. Ah yes, rapture fever has tended to run high even in **some** reformed circles!

Dr. North criticizes Van Til in **Dominion and Common Grace** on several points. Most of all, he differs with Van Til's notion that **common grace disappears in history**. Consequently, neither does Dr. North believe in the defeat of the Church in time, space and history. Why?

He disagrees with Van Til's whole definition of common grace, which in his opinion is **rationalistic**. In other words, he points out that Van Til said common grace is in terms of lack of **knowledge**, so that increased **knowledge** on the part of the unbeliever brings about the demise of Christianity on earth. Yet, North cites that Van Til spent his whole life fighting the Greek rationalistic – God is pure logic – view of the world. Instead, he taught his students to think in **covenantal categories** – covenant-keeper, covenant-breaker – as opposed to rationalistic (Aristotelian logic) ones, and certainly not **irrationalistic** (mystical) ones.

North presses for a **consistent** covenantal interpretation of common grace, such as: **the benefits of the covenant that come to the unbeliever because he lives in the proximity of the covenant**. In this sense, **self-consciousness**, or knowledge, is a benefit. But North maintains that the unbeliever reacts to Christianity not because of knowledge but **covenant**; as has been often said, "Man's problem is moral not intellectual." North also more importantly says that **common grace increases** because **special grace increases**.⁵ It is best summed up in the words of Jeremiah, quoted by Paul in **Hebrews**:

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their minds, and I will write them upon their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall teach everyone his fellow citizen, and everyone his brother, saying "Know the Lord," for all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest of them (Hebrews 8:9-11).

Notice how special knowledge of the Lord expands, meaning general knowledge will also increase. Yes, the unbeliever becomes more self conscious. Yes, he knows more about the covenant and the things of God. Yes, he converts in greater number. And yes, there is a great unsuccessful uprising against the Church at the end of history (Revelation 20).

Attack from Within

But the critical question to this whole discussion is, "Where exactly does the attack come from?" North says,

This raises a major problem: Where does the reprobate learn more about the hated ethical system of Christianity, so that he can rebel against it more effectively by borrowing from it?⁶

He answers the question with a discussion about the "inside man," **the apostate**, former member of the Church. Technically speaking, he is not an unbeliever, because an apostate is not "just" an unbeliever. He is someone who has been "near the throne of God," **covenantally** committed, who rejected the Lord, and who has been cast out. No doubt he was never a "true" believer, but he was "**covenantally**" a believer. He was cast out of the covenant.

The best example of this process is Satan himself. He was the highest of all creation, nearer the throne of God than any other being. He apostatized and was excommunicated to his utter defeat. And, as North points out, the process goes on all through history. The apostates supply the antagonists with members to oppose the Church: Cain, Ham, Esau, Judas, and so on and so on.⁷

In each case, however, **knowledge** is not the issue. It is covenant, specifically covenant breaking. **Yes**, the apostate **knows** more but not because the restraint of common grace has been removed. Rather, the restraint of **special grace** has been taken away. Having had knowledge of special grace, the apostate is more potentially dangerous to the spiritual health of the church than anyone else. Again, it is **covenantal knowledge**. Listen to how much Paul says a person can know and experience in the covenant, and yet, still fall away.

For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame (Hebrews 6:4-6).

Not only is the Bible full of examples of people who had such knowledge, North even shows that this phenomenon of apostasy has haunted the Church in recent centuries. Men such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau began his academic career studying for the priesthood at a Roman Catholic seminary.

Adam Weishaupt, founder of May Day, 1776, of the revolutionary conspiratorial group, the Illuminate, was at the time professor of canon law at the University of Ingolstadt

2. Lewis, *Screwtape* York: Macmillan Company, [1961] 1966), p. 172. Emphasis mine,

3. G. I. ary North, *Dominion and Common* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), pp. 218-235.

4. Van Til was professor of Apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary (East).

5. North, *Common* p. 94,

6. *Ibid.*,

Ibid. pp. 220-222.

in Bavaria. May Day of course is the traditional celebration day of ancient chaos religion, when children march around the phallic May pole. It is also the chief day of celebration for the Soviet Union, the day they parade their tanks and missiles in front of the Politburo's reviewing stand.⁸

Maximilian Robespierre, the "voice of virtue" who beheaded so many during the reign of terror in 1794, had been a prize-winning graduate of the local church school in Arras, France.

Finally, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels had both been fervent Christians in their teens. And so on and so on we could go all through history.

North precisely observes, however, that it is not the removal of restraint on the unbeliever's self consciousness that causes trouble for the Church. It is not the unbeliever at all. Rather, it is the covenant-breaking-apostasy of the **former professing believer**, the "inside man," that results in the worst and final-yet-unsuccessful attacks on the Church. Satan is the first case in point. Why was his attack and why have all subsequent attacks been unsuccessful? The answer lies in the **covenant lawsuit mechanism**, which brings us to the last part of Genesis 3.

God's Covenantal Lawsuit

In "Covenantal Evil II" I noted the work of Julien Harvey in the area of covenant lawsuit.⁹ I said that he had refined my understanding of this covenantal process: he sees a five-fold structure to the covenant, and develops aspects of the structure that help whole sections of Scripture to become clear. He does not comment about Genesis 3, but his work can be easily applied. As I mentioned in the last newsletter, Satan used a **covenantal** approach to tempt Adam and Eve, making the Fall of man a **covenantal event**. After the first sin, God goes through His own covenantal lawsuit. Meredith Kline says,

God had brought Satan to the judgment tree to be damned. To man had been assigned the awesome role of standing as God's viceregent at the place of judgment and consigning the great adversary to perdition, so sharing with Michael and his angels in the cleansing of the heavenly temple by casting Satan out [cf. Rev. 12:7ff.]. Man, however, had utterly failed in his messianic mission. He had declared good to be evil and evil to be good. He had broken his covenant with God and made league with the devil. The Lord God therefore came to the place of judgment in Eden to enter into a **covenant lawsuit** with his offending vassals.¹⁰

So, God brought covenantal lawsuit. Harvey's structure of the covenantal lawsuit explains the organization of God's activity. I will not go through the discussion again but the Scripture at the beginning of this newsletter is organized according to **Harvey's** five-fold model. Satan had actually gone through his own covenant lawsuit against God in the first part of Genesis 3, because he followed a **covenantal** method of temptation. In the last half of the chapter, God begins His own counter-lawsuit.

1. God's call of witnesses (3:8-10).

The Biblical covenant always begins with a declaration of God's transcendence, His **distinctness**, and a statement of His immanence, **nearness**. The translation above, however, leaves much to be desired. It says, "They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool

of the day." It sounds as though **God** were having a casual stroll along Edenic Lane. Meredith Kline clarifies what the Hebrew text really says. He translates "cool of the day" as "Spirit of the day," referring to the **cloud of glory** created by the Spirit of God, e.g. the same cloud that lead Israel by day and appeared as fire by night.

"Spirit" here denotes the theophanic glory, as it does in Genesis 1:2 and elsewhere in Scripture. And "the day" has the connotation it often has in the prophets' forecasts of the great coming judgment. Here in Genesis 3:8 is the original day of the Lord, which served as the **prototypal** mold in which subsequent pictures of other days of the Lord were cast. Such a day is one of divine epiphany. The final such day is preeminently the day of our Lord's **parousia**, the day of his presence as the personal revelation of the Glory with the clouds and angels of heaven. . . . and accordingly, what is depicted there is nothing less than the primal **parousia**. On the original day of the Lord in Eden, God's **parousia-advent** was in the **theophanic** mode of "the Spirit (Presence) of the day (of judgment)."¹¹

This interpretation of "cool of the day" sets up a **covenantal** understanding of the entire passage. The **glory-cloud** often appears whenever a covenant is made (Sinai, Pentecost, etc.); it is one of the key covenant-cutting indicators. It establishes God's transcendence and immanence. But in the context of Genesis 3, it also adds the **judgmental** dimension. God calls Adam and Eve to come to Him, "Where are you?" In lawsuit language, He summoned them to appear as witnesses on His behalf. As Kline indicates above, they were to be witnesses against Satan. The devil was there at the judgment tree to be **judged**. He did not just happen to be there. He was there at God's bidding and permission (Job 1:6-8). As **Biblical witnesses**, **Adam and Eve** were to pass judgment and literally put him to death.

A witness was to carry out God's judgment: "The hand of the witnesses shall be **first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people**" (Deuteronomy 17:6-7). Dr. R. J. Rushdoony has made an interesting observation about the role of the witness. He says,

The meaning of "witness" has been confused, however, because of a post-Biblical development of the Greek word for **witness**. The Hebrew word for witness, ed, **edah**, is given in the Greek New Testament as **martus, marturion**. the Greek word is the proper translation for the Old Testament word, as **Matthew 18:16, Mark 14:63, and many other passages make clear. But the Greek word martus** is the origin of the English word "martyr," and the result is an amazing confusion. The witnesses to Christ were executed by the Roman Empire, and the result was a strange reversal of meaning. In the Bible, the witness is one who works to enforce the law and assist in its execution, even to the enforcement of the death penalty. "Martyr" has now come to mean the exact reverse, i.e., one who is executed rather than an executioner, one who is persecuted rather than one who is central to prosecution.¹²

Instead, Adam and Eve bore false witness, which meant that not only did they **not** execute Satan, but it

8. p.

9. Julien Harvey, *Le Plaidoyer Prophetique Contre Israel 'Apres La De L' Alliance* (Montreal: Les Editions Bellarmin, 1967).

10. Meredith G. Kline, *Prologue*, Vol. I (Copyright Meredith Kline, 1981), pp. 178-179. Emphasis mine,

11. Kline, *Prologue*, pp. 180-181. For a much fuller treatment of the *Glory-Cloud* concept, see Kline's book on the subject, *Images of Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980).

12. R. J. Rushdoony, *Biblical* (Nutley, New Jersey: Crag Press, 1973), p. 573.

meant that they received the penalty that had been intended for God, since they entered into a conspiracy to destroy God and His covenant. A false witness according to Biblical law was to receive the penalty intended for the accused (Deuteronomy 19:16-21).

So God's actions toward Adam and Eve were **covenantal**. His transcendence and immanence were made known, indicating that a covenant process was beginning. He summoned the witnesses, pointing to **covenantal** lawsuit.

II. God's Interrogation of Adam and Eve (3:11-13).

The second part of the covenant establishes hierarchy, more specifically, mediation of the covenant. The covenant Sovereign not only specifies who he is (part 1 of the covenant), but he manifests himself in history through representatives. In this section, often judges or mediators of the covenant are noted. But in Genesis 3, God is the one who mediates because there is no one else who can. Adam and Eve can't and neither can Satan; ironically, they had all previously functioned in some sort of hierarchical fashion. How does God appear as a the hierarchical authority? He interrogates.

Significantly, God asks questions that have to do with **hierarchy**. For example, Adam says they were naked and afraid to come to Him. God immediately says, "**Who** told you that you were naked?" (Genesis 3:1 1). Adam then shifts the authority to Eve by saying, "The woman made me do it." Finally, God goes to the woman and she transfers the authority to Satan. He therefore concentrates almost exclusively on the issue of hierarchy in His interrogation.

The only exception is the question, "Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" (Genesis 3:1 1). Why did God ask this question? Did He ask it because He didn't know? Of course not. God knows all things. Rather, He raised the question to provoke Adam to **confess his sin, which he didn't do because he was still unrepentant: indicated by his willingness to blame the sin on Eve.**

In Vol. 1, No. 11 of *Covenant Renewal*: "Covenantal Worship: Better Than a Hymn Sandwich," I explained that confession of sin and its absolution have to do with the second part of covenantal and liturgical worship. Confession is the appropriate response to God's transcendence immanence; it expresses submission to His **authority**. **1 won't repeat the explanation, but it helps to explain the relationship of God's confessional question to all the other questions** in the interrogational segment, which are clearly hierarchical in orientation.

III. God's *Indictment of the Serpent, Eve and Adam* (3:14-19).

Normally, the Biblical covenant lays down **stipulations** in the third part of the covenant. In a covenant lawsuit, indictments are declared. In this section, the indictments are stated in the form of curses, something that is usually part of the fourth segment of the covenant: blessings and curses (Deuteronomy 27-28). The curses are also mentioned in the stipulations (third) part of the covenant, where they are attached to the commandments (Deuteronomy 11:26-29). Why the difference?

When curses fall in the fourth section of the covenant, the oath or sanctions part, they are conditional because the covenant is only being ratified; they only ceremonially go into effect at that point, and should the covenant mem-

ber break the covenant, they physically go into effect. When they are found in the third or stipulations section, however, they show their inseparable relationship to law: sanction as well as commandment is law. Indeed, the curse is a commandment; e.g. "you shall purge the evil from your midst" (Deuteronomy 17:7), meaning capital punishment was a stipulation.

So, when God indicted the Serpent, Adam, and Eve by means of the sanctions of the covenant, He was expressing **stipulations. He did so because they were already guilty.**

IV. Pronouncement of Guilt (3:20-21).

The fourth segment of the covenant is normally the point where the covenant is received by the taking of an oath. In a covenant lawsuit, therefore, it becomes the official point of passing judgment.

With this in mind, two acts are noted that match the fourth aspect of covenant lawsuit. First, Adam renames the woman. **By an act of ratification**, he renews his marriage covenant. Second, he receives in the animal skins God's sacrifice. This too was a means of ratification.

Both, however, were pronouncements of guilt by God and man. By renaming Eve, he admitted his own failure to be Eve's head; he brought her back into his original covenant arrangement. By accepting the animal skins, he rejected his own **hand-made attempt to cover his sin. He didn't have to take off the foliage. But he did because he was guilty** and he knew it; he made a conscious choice to accept God's atonement. Most important, he recognized God's pronouncement of guilt in the slaughtering of the animals!

V. Condemnation (3:22-24).

The last section of the covenant extended the fourth or sanctions segment. What was sealed at ratification was concretely transferred to the individual and his family: the inheritance was given in the form of blessing. Most of the time this took place in the form of a meal. Regarding covenant lawsuit, however, the final part had to do with **disinheritance**. Due to the nature of what happens in the garden, we see both inheritance and disinheritance.

God condemns Adam and Eve several ways. One, they are mocked in the statement, "Man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil" (3:22). Two, they are driven from the garden, lest they eat of the fruit again and be forever sealed in eternal damnation. Three, they are forbidden to come back; an angel of judgment is placed at the door so that they cannot get back to their inheritance.

Yet, God is a God of grace and mercy. In the midst of this disinheritance, He drives them toward their new, better and final inheritance. He moves them away from the tree that had tempted and been the source of their fall; He places them in a context outside the paradise of judgment. But God never takes away without giving something better in place. He gives them a new paradise, ultimately one that will far surpass the original (Revelation 21-22).

Thus, the lawsuit is complete. God has sued but God has provided the means to avert His own wrath, giving Adam and Eve time to return to the original mandate. Legally speaking, covenantal evil had been sued and put to death. Historically speaking, it was actually brought to death by the **firstfruits** down payment for sin at the Cross. Progressively speaking, it is increasingly removed by the outworking of the Cross. Consummately speaking, it disappears forever at Judgment Day!