

COVENANT RENEWAL

Genesis 1:26-28

Matthew 28:18-20

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COVENANTAL SUFFERING

The Covenant Structure of Job¹

Suffering has not been a major emphasis within Christian Reconstruction literature. It's hardly been discussed at all. Does this point to an inherent flaw? Does this mean the writers of the literature don't believe in suffering, or that they don't think it ever happens in the Christian life, or that they are insensitive to those who hurt and are hurting now? Of course not. There's a reasonable explanation why the subject hasn't been developed.

First, Christian Reconstructionism's original concerns were not directly related. It started as a small movement within Reformed theology, initially attempting to counter the effect of liberalism on specific areas such as economics, politics and ethics. To offset modernism and relativism, it went to the historic creeds and the Ten Commandments to establish a fixed Biblical standard in all of the above categories.

As time went on, however, Christian Reconstructionism began to speak to more and more issues until it became a Christian **worldview** movement, offering a world and life view of life reconstructed around the Word of God, consistent with the historic and reformational Church. It became known for its use of the whole Bible, especially the Old Testament. It revived the postmillennial eschatological position. And now, I have tried to develop a Biblical structure for building a covenant theology. Christian Reconstructionism has simply not been forced to discuss suffering much.

Second, as an expression of Protestant thought, Christian Reconstructionism has not written much on the subject because Augustinian Protestantism as a whole has not been a theology of suffering. Although there are a few exceptions where someone like Kierkegaard has tried to build such a system, Protestant thought has generally stayed away from the suffering-as-the-key-to-everything approach. Why? Augustinianism has built on a judicial model, where man is made right with God through the work of Christ: objective righteousness. And beyond justification, it has not generally taught a "trail of thorns" view of the Christian life because if Christ has paid it all, even suffering and defeat are in the context of the greater victory of the Death and Resurrection; Christ has paid it all as the hymn goes. Certainly Augustinianism has recognized the place of trial, temptation and suffering, but because of the finished work of Christ, and I do mean to emphasize **FINISHED**, there is nothing left for

man to do other than live out the already accomplished victory of Christ on the Cross for his sanctification. At best, the work of the Church is a mopping up exercise, cleaning up after the defeat of the enemy.

Protestantism has rejected the Romish sense of extending the Incarnation. It does not believe the life of Christ is fully repeatable. He and He alone is the God/Man who was born of a virgin, died on the Cross for the sins of the world, raised from the dead and ascended into heaven, events impossible to duplicate beyond Christ, which even some Roman Catholic scholars are now willing to concede.² Granted, the Book of Acts has examples of duplications of Christ's activities. But each case is critically different, showing the similarity yet dissimilarity. There is an extension of the Trinitarian distinction that members of the Trinity are the same yet different. In an analogous way, the Church is like Christ and can even be called the Body of Christ, yet it is different.

For example, Stephen was stoned to death. In the last moment he said of his executioners, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (Acts 7:60). Like Christ, he was executed for blasphemy. Like Christ, he asked for the forgiveness of his enemies. We are to be reminded that Christ still lives in and through the Church. Yet, unlike Christ, Stephen was a sinner. Unlike Christ, he did not have the power to atone for their sins. Unlike Christ, he could not say, "Forgive them for they know not what they do."

There were critical differences, hinging primarily on the fact that Christ was the only one who could be born, live, and die sinless. The Church is born, lives and dies sinful, even though saved by grace. It cannot be an incarnation in the same sense as Christ. It is a Spiritual Incarnation, being indwelt by Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. True, the Church is called the Body of Christ. It is not the actual sinless flesh and blood of Christ, however. It cannot be. It is the Body of Christ in the same way an image in a mirror is the body being reflected. It is a real image, nevertheless an image.

Applied to suffering, the historic Western Church has understood these distinctions. Christ suffered and the Church suffers with a kind of Trinitarian distinction of similar yet dissimilar. How should we then interpret such statements as, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body (which is the church) in filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions" (Colossians 1:24)? William Hendriksen, a reformed commentator has put it well:

"Of course this does not mean that there was anything lacking in the atoning value of Christ's sacrifice. It does not mean that good works, the suffering in purga-

1. I express my appreciation to my longstanding friend and co-laborer in the Gospel, the Rev. Kemper Crabbe, deacon at Christchurch, a newly established Reformed Episcopal Church in Houston, Texas as part of Convocation of Texas in the same denomination and a sister church to the parish where I am Rector in Tyler. He asked me to consider the covenant in Job in one of my *Covenant Renewals*. If he hadn't, I probably would not have done this study and certainly would not have been provoked to see many of the conclusions included. Yet, my good friend is not to be held responsible for any errors on my part. Thanks Kemper for provoking me to love and I hope good deeds!

2. Louis Bouyer, *Liturgical Piety* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), 201ff.

tory, faithful attendance at mass, the purchase of indulgences, or any other so-called merits can be or need be added to the merits of our Lord. . But we have no right, in the interest of Protestantism in its struggle with Roman Catholicism, to change the clear grammatical and contextual meaning of a passage. We should bear in mind that although Christ by means of the afflictions which he endured rendered complete satisfaction to God, so that Paul is able to glory in nothing but the cross (Galatians 6:14), the enemies of Christ were not satisfied ! They hated Jesus with insatiable hatred, and wanted to add to his afflictions. But since he is no longer physically present on earth, their arrows, which are meant especially for him, strike his followers. It is in that sense that all true believers are in his stead supplying what, as the enemies see it, is lacking in the afflictions which Jesus endured. Christ's afflictions overflow toward us."³

The point is not that the sacrifice of Christ was deficient, but the suffering. And specifically, it is the suffering of warfare, for that is the only kind of suffering the Church continues to have in common with Christ. Acts makes this point time and again, even down to Paul's enduring a three-fold trial just as Christ. Only, Paul's suffering was not to atone for the sins of the world, it was to extend the war against Satan; through his suffering, the Gospel was pushed into new areas for the Kingdom. So in a sense, Hendriksen is understanding Paul to be saying that the warfare continues through our suffering of opposition.

Here is where we find an interesting turn of events. Christian Reconstruction writings have not spoken much about suffering because this subject was not part of its original concerns and because as a development of Protestantism it broke from a Medieval system that warranted suffering for the accomplishment of salvation. But given Hendriksen's interpretation, there is good reason to discuss suffering as an aspect of Christian warfare. This fits very well within one of the major emphases of Christian Reconstruction.

Time to Deal with the Issue

Yet it is high time to deal with the issue of suffering for another reason. Modern orthodox Christendom has emphasized the Crucifixion almost to the exclusion of the Resurrection and hardly ever says anything about the doctrine of the Ascension. It has become a Church preoccupied with defeat and failure, explaining the bizarre openness to eschatologies of rapture. As a result, the Church has become so other worldly and mystical that it has easily been secularized by humanism. It has understandably lost all sense of power.

One Roman Catholic scholar has expressed well what happens when the Crucifixion and the suffering side of life are emphasized to the point of excluding the other part of Christ's work. He says,

For a long time I had been buffeted by two classical ways of speaking. Theologically, there had been a tendency doubly to isolate Jesus' death from his life, which preceded it and which made it partially intelligible, as well as from the Resurrection, which followed it and gave it meaning. In this way, there came about a tendency to preach on the merit of the blood that had been shed and to make of Christ's death a kind of saving act of magic. Existentially, in everyday life, the same mistake was extended by isolating the death and the suffering of human persons, conferring on them meaning in themselves.⁴

3. William Hendriksen, *Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1965] 1973), p. 87.

4. Xavier Leon-Dufour, *Life* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986), pp. xviii-xix.

Dufour correctly says that the Crucifixion alone did not bring salvation. The Crucifixion combined with the rest of His obedience before, and His Resurrection and Ascension afterwards, accomplished redemption. He believes salvation is misunderstood if the Crucifixion is isolated, even calling this a magical view of the Crucifixion. He follows up by extending the argument to the personal side of life. He cautions against isolating suffering in life because it does not have power by itself. He does not say it, but if his assessment of a magical view of the Cross applies, a magical view would also be the result viewing suffering as having power in and of itself. In the history of the Church it has been called mysticism.

Thus, Dufour is actually calling for suffering to be put into the perspective of the rest of the Life of Christ, as well as life in general, when speaking of personal suffering. To be more Biblically precise, suffering needs to be understood in a covenantal framework, as it was intended. Like all the subjects concerning man's relationship with God, they are cast in terms of the covenant. Outside of this context, they become distorted. I can think of no better place to see suffering in covenantal context than the Book of Job.

Someone might argue that the covenant is not a comprehensive Biblical paradigm because there is no place for the subject of suffering. As a matter of fact, there is. I mentioned this subject in the Ethics section of, *That*

my introductory book on the covenant. I called the section, "Job: A Fly in the Ointment." I raised the issue of Job in the ethics section because I had presented the Biblical thesis of ethical cause and effect. Scripture teaches cause/effect relationship between faithfulness/unfaithfulness and blessing/cursing. It presents an ethical view of the world as opposed to a mechanistic, impersonal cause/effect, or magical cause/effect perspectives. So the question of Job comes to mind.

Did Job prove the ethical thesis of Moses to be wrong? Many who attack the Bible have said, "Yes." They maintain something else is at work. Job was faithful and he wasn't blessed, apparently proving that the curse/blessings of Deuteronomy did not apply in Job's life. If so, some interpreters would argue on this basis that neither should the Deuteronomic sanctions be pulled into the New Testament.

I argued against these false interpretations. First, I said that Job was indeed faithful to the Lord and that yes he was temporarily cursed in the face of obedience. But second, I added that this was a test for Job and emphasized the temporary nature of his suffering. Third, I concluded where Job concludes in contrast to where so many modern, liberal and evangelical, overly pietistic and pessimistic scholars fail to conclude: Job was doubly blessed according to the blessing sanctions of Deuteronomy at the end of the story (Job 42). And the rewards do not come at the end of his life. He lives many years after the double blessing. Job does not disprove ethical cause/effect. Moreover, he proves the point by remaining steadfast in his convictions. He certainly has shortcomings pointed out, which by the way point to one who comes later in history who suffers more than Job. But because of perseverance through difficult tests, he is rewarded for obedience in this life as well as the one to come.

Jesus Christ pulled the same Job principle over into discipleship in the New Testament when He said,

Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, but that he shall receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come eternal life (Mark 10:29-30).

Testing is an ethical principle, part of the very nature of the requirement of faithfulness. This is true in the Old Testament, where the greatest illustration of the principle is found in the Book of Job, as so many of the detractors to the ethical cause/effect overlook. And, this is true in the New Testament as well. Testing was and is a vital part of the Christian life. But it's not all. The Church is not tested all the time, nor does it suffer constantly. The same is true in the individual personal lives of believers. Looking closely at Jesus' statement above, persecution is listed with the blessings but persecution is not all there is to the Christian walk. It is part of a larger covenantal structure. When suffering becomes an end in and of itself, or when it is isolated to the exclusion of the rest of the covenant, it becomes a magical and mechanical way of spirituality. It avoids true faithfulness in the name of super spirituality.

Nowhere does the covenantal nature of suffering become more apparent than the Book of Job. The book is structured according to the Deuteronomic and Pentateuchal pattern.

The Covenantal Structure of Job

Transcendence (Job 1:1-5)

The first section identifies the Lord of the covenant. In Deuteronomy, Moses begins with a comment about the source of his commandments: the covenant-keeping Lord (Deuteronomy 1:3). Job opens with a comment about the vassal, Job himself, "There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job, and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God, and turning away from evil" (Job 1:1). It then goes on to list all of his possessions. Does this introduction point to God as the Suzerain? If so, how?

The name "Job" means Where is my father?, meaning Job was fatherless. The text is trying to point to someone else as Job's father. Normally an orphan would be poor. Yet Job had a tremendous inheritance of land, family, animals and servants. He also had an exceptional relationship with God; he was "blameless and upright." The reader is driven to conclude that this man has been adopted by God. The Lord is his father. God has given him his possessions and inheritance for He is the one responsible for everything that Job owns. So in a unique way, the text points to the greatness of Job's God. This is a dramatic way of pointing to the transcendence and immanence of God.

In an age of humanism when the Bible is psychologized to make it say any number of man-centered, twisted lies, the modern Christian often forgets that the Bible is not primarily a book about man. Scripture is about God even when it talks about men. One writer has put it this way,

The Bible is one great story. The story may appear to be about Moses or David or Elijah, but in reality it is about one person all the while – God.

In the Bible God tells us what has happened to Him in His dealings with man. A good subtitle would be "God's History with Mankind."

God tells His story in His own way. He knows He can only reach us by telling us our own history, that is, man's history with God. Hence, the Bible shows us the essence of God's work in our midst: God stands in our place. He comes to us and takes our side. He tells us His story as our story.⁵

The Book of Job actually calls attention to God more by Job's name and the possessions he has. The only explanation can be Elohim, the name used for God in the first section.

The introduction of Job provides insight into the theme

of the book: Job is conscientious about offering whole burnt sacrifices between the appointed times of offering. In other words, he made sacrifices when he was not required. Whole burnt offerings appear in two places in Job: at the beginning and the end. It is the key theme to the book.

A whole burnt offering was an offering for consecrating oneself to God. The person would bring an animal, chop it into pieces and offer up every part of the animal to symbolize dedication of his whole life to God. Deuteronomy taught obedience to the sacrifices as part of the requirement for blessing. Job had obeyed and given himself up to God, and the text begins by emphasizing the blessings as a result. Job appears as a man who offers every part of his life to God. He is really a poor man because God owns everything that he has. Or, does He? A whole burnt sacrifice is just a ritual. The question is, "Does Job really believe what the ceremony teaches?" Job is a book about a series of tests to determine whether Job had really given all that he had to the Lord.

Hierarchy (Job 1:5-2:13)

The second part of the covenant describes the representatives of the suzerain, often listing possessions and responsibilities. It explains the hierarchy of Israel, the royal priesthood, and then presents the agony and the ecstasy of the wilderness wanderings in terms of obedience or disobedience to God's representatives (Deuteronomy 1:9-4:49). The second section even summarizes challenges to the representatives, especially assaults on Moses as a redemptive deliverer.

The second part of Job clearly parallels the second segment of Deuteronomy, shifting from a general description to a specific scene before the throne of God (Job 1:5-2:13). The scene is unquestionably hierarchical in emphasis. The sons of God present themselves before their King, the Lord. Whether the "presentation" is for worship, which is the most likely explanation, or for some other purpose, the word (*yasab*) implies obeisance and submission to the Lord. In an assembly context, the word usually indicates some kind of special commissioning. Moses is commanded to "present yourself before Pharaoh" (Exodus 8:20; 9:13). God tells Moses and Joshua to "present themselves" at the tent of meeting that the former might commission the latter, that is, install him (Deuteronomy 31:14). Given the correct understanding of the Hebrew word for "present" or "install," considerable light is shed on the scene.

God was about to install and/or commission members of His court, perhaps to do something for or deliver something to Job. For example, the "spirits" in Zechariah are sent out to all the earth to carry out God's commission (Zechariah 6:5; the same Hebrew word *yasab* is used.). Whatever the case, the scene is clear. In the midst of some sort of installation where God was establishing some kind of representation, Satan enters, apparently in a disruptive fashion.

The assumption from the text seems to be that Satan was "roaming around the earth" looking for a worthy opponent. The Hebrew for "roaming" is used in the context of census taking before armed conflict (II Samuel 24:8). Not having found anyone, Satan approaches the throne of God at an opportune moment. No legitimate representative existed on earth. Perhaps Satan was approaching to reclaim a place of authority. In any case, he was definitely indicating his disbelief in God's hierarchy.

When God calls Job to Satan's attention, Lucifer shrugs off the Lord's servant. He thinks Job serves God because he has it so good. He doubts Job's true commitment to the meaning of the whole burnt offering. Two tests are allowed. In both cases, Job demonstrates that he indeed understands and believes what the offerings imply. He says af-

ter the first test, “The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away, Blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1 :21). He adds at the end of the second test where he has lost everything, even his health, when his wife challenges his perseverance, “Shall we accept good from God and not accept adversity”? (Job 2:10). Job had not just sacrificed ceremonially, he had given everything to the Lord in reality!

Ethics (Job 3:1-31 :40)

The third segment of the Deuteronomic covenant stipulates the terms of the treaty arrangement (Deuteronomy 5-26). Moses establishes the ethical relationship between cause/effect by expounding the ten commandments in chapters 6-26, by far most of the book.

Moses begins the segment with a much more fundamental concept: law is based on sacrifice. In the introductory part of the ethics section He says, “Oh that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me, and keep all My commandments always, that it may be well with them and with their sons forever” (Deuteronomy 5:29). Then in the next chapter, Moses makes the famous statement, “Hear O Israel The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (6:4-5). This is whole burnt offering language. The whole burnt offering implied the dedication of the whole person to the Lord. Moses uses the same language in reference to the law, repeating the word all numerous times and adding the need to put the law on the hands and forehead (6:8). His comments point to the whole burnt offering sacrifice, meaning law is based on the dedication of the total person through sacrifice. Without it, the law will not be fulfilled.

The third segment of Job teaches the same in a negative way. Definitely, ethics is the main theme of the section for the friends of Job use ethical cause/effect as their main argument in prosecuting Job. The segment consists of three cycles of conversations with these three friends: Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar; Job closes the segment with some final comments (Job 29-31). The thrust of their arguments is a superficial understanding of cause/effect to the neglect of the law-based-on-sacrifice principle. They reason: calamity has befallen Job so he must have broken God's law; bad effects mean bad causes. Correct? Many times the answer would be “yes,” but this time it is wrong. Job hasn't done anything wrong! He persists in his insistence that he has done nothing wrong, even in the face of the most gripping arguments of guilt.

Bildad, for example, implies that Job's children have died because of sin in his life and his father's life (Job 8:1-22). What parent would not immediately cave in from the deep guilt plowed up by such a suggestion? Yet Job doesn't. Job is an orphan as has been noted by his name. But this could complicate matters for there could be something wrong in an antecedent generation about which he didn't know. Still, Job does not collapse under the great pressure of his friends, who pursue him at length: almost **thirty** chapters of the book to be exact! Job doesn't know the exact cause of what has happened. He argues time and again that he has done nothing wrong. He is even willing to sacrifice his friends if it means admitting to something that he hasn't done wrong.

Here is the point of it all. The friends can't figure out Job's problem because they never conclude that God is

testing Job, asking him to **sacrifice** all that he has: the basis of the law to begin with, as a rich young ruler later learned from the instruction of the Lord (Luke 18:22). Their failure to convict Job on the basis of ethical cause/effect and the fact that Job exhausts himself into despair because even he does not come to the proper sacrificial conclusion, underscores the whole burnt offering basis of the law. Either way, however, ethics is the theme of this section.

Oath (Job 32:1-42:9)

The fourth part of the Deuteronomic covenant is the ratification of the covenant (Deuteronomy 27-30). Keep in mind the context. Israel had broken the first covenant made at Sinai and Moses had broken the tablet of the treaty at the foot of the mountain. Deuteronomy is a renewal of a second issue of the covenant. The fourth section of Deuteronomy tells how it was done. Moses was sent as a covenant witness to prepare Israel for the Lord. He rehearses the curses and blessings and then calls for Israel to meet God and ratify their covenant anew before Him.

The oath section of Job divides into two parts. The first is a series of five speeches by **Elihu** (32:6-37:24). He is a mediator, a covenant witness sent to speak to Job and prosecute his friends for their bad counsel (Job 33:6, 23). His messages defend God. He prepares the way for Job's meeting with Elohim.

The second part of the oath segment is a meeting between God and Job (Job 38:1-42:6). God alone creates and controls the world. He guarantees that His purposes will come to pass because of who He is. He demands complete loyalty and dependence because He is Sovereign. Job responds by renewing his covenant with God, making a solemn oath to His Suzerain (Job 42:1-6). On the basis of these two meetings, Job resolves to renew his loyalty to God and to wait for the Lord to finish His task.

Yet, God had not finished with His instructions. He approached the three friends and applied sanctions to them. He told them to offer whole burnt sacrifices through Job, implying that he was the priest (Melchizedekkal: Genesis 14). God had apparently applied the curse/sanctions to them. As a result of the sacrifice, the Lord “Lifted up their faces,” implying they were laid low in the dust, probably referring to the curse of Genesis where the ground was sanctioned (Genesis 3:17).

As a result of Job's encounter with God, his renewal of the covenant, and the sacrifices averting God's wrath on the three friends, a shift from wrath to grace takes place. The blessings can begin to flow!

Succession (Job 42:7-17)

The final part of the Deuteronomic covenant describes a transfer of inheritance from Moses to Joshua. The faithful warrior, Joshua, receives the blessing and commission to enter the Promised Land, the inheritance (Deuteronomy 31 -34).

In the final section of Job, the Lord restores the “fortunes of Job,” giving him twofold. Job is the firstborn son, having received a double inheritance. He is made God's heir. He receives children (seed), land and the capital to sustain his gifts. All of this points to the restoration of the promises of the covenant to Job, being given more at the end than at the beginning.