

□ Justification

IN THE BEGINNING

Most are familiar with the basic plot line of Genesis 1–2: God created the heavens and earth and crowned the creation with man, who was made in his image. God told man not to eat of the tree of knowledge, but man disobeyed the command and plunged the world into sin, death, and the oppressive rule of Satan. What many may not realize, however, is that even in the opening chapters of the Bible we find the doctrine of justification.

When God first created man, male and female, he passed a judgment over his work. God created and then declared that everything was “good.” In fact, when he created man, the only creature who bore his image, God declared that man was “very good” (Gen. 1:31). God’s declaration that he made man “very good” was a judicial declaration. If we recall the conversation between the rich young ruler and Jesus, the Lord asked the young man why he called him “good,” as only God was good (Mark 10:18 // Luke 18:19). In the Proverbs, for example, we read: “So you will walk in the way of the good and keep to the paths of the righteous” (2:20). In this verse, the author uses a synonymous parallelism (a Hebraic poetic structure), stating the same truth in two different ways, which tells us that goodness and righteousness are synonymous. So, when God said that man was “very good,” he had essentially declared man to be righteous. At the same time, we should note that while man was righteous, his righteousness was unproven; it was untested.

God made a covenant, an agreement, with Adam. This covenant, like other covenants in the Bible, set forth requirements for obedience. In this covenant Adam had two primary responsibilities. First, God required that Adam refrain from eating from the tree of knowledge. The tree of knowledge, in this regard, was a visual symbol of God’s command, a visual

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symbol of his law. Second, God commanded Adam to fill the earth with the image of God, which Adam would have done with the assistance of the woman through procreation. Adam and the woman would have produced offspring that would have borne the image of God and would have in this way filled the earth with God's glory. Adam was also supposed to subdue the earth. In other words, he was supposed to extend the garden-order of God's dwelling place to the ends of the earth. This was the work that God placed before Adam as well as the test of obedience. Upon the conclusion of his test and labors, God would have declared him righteous. Adam's righteousness would no longer be untested, unproven. Rather, it would be conclusively confirmed that Adam was faithful and obedient to the commands of his heavenly Father. If, on the other hand, Adam was disobedient, God told him quite clearly that he would suffer death (Gen. 2:17). Reformed theologians have historically called the relationship between Adam and God the *covenant of works*, or covenant of life. The Westminster Confession of Faith states: "The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience" (7:2).

Sadly, we all know what happened. Adam and the woman sinned, listening to the voice of the serpent rather than heeding God's command. But God, rather than give the couple the just deserts of their disobedience, was instead merciful. Adam and the woman indeed had to suffer the consequences of their sin. They were cast from the dwelling place of God in the garden. They suffered spiritual and physical death. They were now both incapable of offering God the obedience he required and therefore were doomed to live separated from the benevolent presence of the Lord. God, however, showed the couple mercy and promised them that the seed of the woman

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would conquer the seed of the serpent. In his curse on the serpent, God said, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). In other words, not only would God send someone to reverse the disastrous and tragic consequences of the fall, but this person would also render to God the obedience that he required from the beginning. In fact, for this reason theologians have historically called Genesis 3:15 the first promise of the gospel. God was no longer dealing with Adam and the woman on the basis of the covenant of works, but now there was an entirely new principle at work. God was dealing with the couple on the basis of grace. Historically, Reformed theologians have called this relationship the *covenant of grace*.

Once again the Westminster divines (a seventeenth-century word for *theologians*) state:

Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the Covenant of Grace, whereby He freely offers unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved; and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life His Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe. (7:3)

That Adam took shelter in the covenant of grace and God's first promise of the gospel is evident in his response. Adam gave his wife a new name; she was no longer called *woman*, but now she was called *Eve*, which means giver of life (Gen. 3:20). In other words, Adam placed his faith in the promise that the seed of the woman would deliver them. Adam looked to Christ by faith. Adam knew, perhaps not in every

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detail, that it was the work of the seed of the woman that would both free them from the bonds of Satan, sin, and death and restore man's place in God's presence.

Adam's faith was not introspective—he did not look to himself to remedy his sin-fallen predicament. Rather, his faith was *extraspersive*—he looked to another, he looked to the seed of the woman. We even see hints in the Genesis narrative that man's sin would be cured, but not simply by restoring him to his position in the garden. Adam and Eve's salvation would be far greater. They would be restored to dwell forever in God's presence, and their nakedness, their shame, would be covered through the shed blood of another. We see suggestions of this in that both Adam and Eve were clothed in animal skins that were provided by God himself (Gen. 3:21). The blood of another had to be shed to allow man to return to the presence of God. Man would never again be naked but would be clothed, clothed in the robe of another, robed in the righteousness of the seed of the woman.

IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Noah and the Flood

Moving beyond the creation and fall narrative, we find that God's good creation quickly degenerated (Gen. 6:5). God therefore purposed to judge the creation and start over with one righteous man and his family, Noah (Gen. 6:7–8). God instructed Noah to build an ark so that the creation, including Noah's family, might be saved. God returned the creation to its Genesis 1:2 state through the flood—waters covered the earth as they had before. Noah and his family emerged from the ark in the re-created earth, but things quickly unraveled. In events eerily evocative of the fall of