

Creation Covenant: God's Pursuit, Human's Response

Text: Genesis 1:26-31, 2:15-17

Thesis: God's grace abounds; his overflowing steadfast love pursues His people despite their unfaithfulness. Indeed, that is why we call it His Amazing Grace.

Introduction:

Why do people tend to commit things that are told not to do so? Example: "do not touch the pot, it's hot"—then, we still touch it and say, "oo nga, mainit." Or my mom would say to me before, "do come home late at night," so I would follow her, I go home after midnight around 2am or 3am. Another one, in the Philippines, there is a sign that says, "do not cross, use the footbridge." Yet, people still cross and do jaywalk.

Why talk about this? Because this attitude is not only true today but also during the time of Adam and Eve. Let us dive deeper into God's covenantal pursuit and humanity's response.

Background:

Other bible scholars argue that there is no covenant of creation since the certain Hebrew word "berit" is absent in Genesis 1 to 3. But personally, after comprehensively studying Genesis 1 to 3 and other passages related to it, I contend to the interpretation of the presence of a covenant in these chapters. So, again, as I always tell you all, let us explore God's Word today.

God established a covenantal relationship with humanity—of course, with Adam and Eve as the image of God. Take note of this, the mere fact that *imago Dei* signifies "likeness" or in Ancient Near East understanding— "sonship," points that humanity can relate to God. Indeed, God communicates to humanity, he relates with them, appoints them, calls them, and established promises and stipulations with them. In fact, God created them to join Him in the grand narrative of His creation.

This covenantal relationship is both vertical and horizontal. Vertical, our relationship with God (1:27); horizontal, our relationship with the whole creation (1:26, 28). Before proceeding to the specifics of our sermon today, I want to let you know that part of the covenantal relationship are the ordinances of Sabbath (rest, 2:2-3), marriage (2:21-25), and labor (1:28). These topics will have each sermon after the covenant sermon series. In those sermons, we will dive deeper into the importance of Rest, the covenant of marriage, and the theology of work.

Main Idea:

But today, let us focus on the abounding grace of God through His covenant with Adam and Eve. As preached last Sunday, a covenant entails a relationship. Adam and Eve have a relationship with God as the image of God. A covenant also is somewhat an agreement, a stipulation, between two parties. But it is the stronger party that initiates a covenant. Hence, our subtitle God's Pursuit, Man's response.

To this though also, as usually debated, and sadly often causing a division, is the false dichotomy of the sovereignty of God and man's freewill. Let me reiterate a term that is biblically sound and theology accurate. The term is "antinomy" meaning two things that seem to contradict but are inseparable and reasonable. In a basic explanation, it is like a coin; it has two sides, but just one coin. Hence, two sides of the same coin.

Furthermore, let me quote some ministers. First, J. I. Packer said, "God's sovereignty and man's responsibility are taught to us side by side in the same Bible.... God's sovereignty is a reality, and man's responsibility is a reality too." Second, when Charles H. Spurgeon was asked if he could reconcile these two truths, he said: "I would not try, I never reconcile friends." Indeed, they are not enemies; they are friends, and they work together. This thought is also shared by Timothy George of Beeson Divinity of Samford University.

Why tell these truths? Because in our next passage, crystalizing our point a while ago that this covenant initiated by the sovereign Creator also asked and permits humanity to have their own wills to express and be tested accordingly.

Let us check chapter 2 verses 15-17:

¹⁵ The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

Verse 15, **covenant purpose** is to labor in God's creation with Him for His glory. We talked about this a while ago in chapter 1 verses 26 and 28—to rule over, to be fruitful, and subdue the earth.

¹⁶ And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden;

Verse 16 is the **covenant provision**, Adam and Eve are provided with all their needs to live and enjoy God's creation. This is in fact important to note that they could have treasured this benefit from God instead of taking it for granted.

¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,

BUT!!! In verse 17, this is a **covenant condition/ stipulation**. Meaning, they are to enjoy everything, to live and worship God by keeping His commandment, following the covenant purpose to subdue earth and rule over it, to enjoy their lives as husband and wife. But they should not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Again, God is sovereign, yet He permits His creation to express their love. Remember that there is no genuine love in coercion. You cannot force someone to love you, if then, it is out of fear and untrue.

for when you eat from it you will certainly die."

So, what happens, if they eat it? The next phrase in verse 17 states the **covenant consequence or curse**. We already know the story, in chapter 3, Eve then Adam ate the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

This is not about the fruit being intrinsically bad nor about the serpent tempting them. It is about their response to rebel against God and chose to become independent or apart from God.

So what did they do after they ate the fruit? They covered themselves (3:7), they hid from God (8), Adam blamed Eve and God (12), and Eve blamed the serpent (13). These are still true today, when we commit sin, either we try to hide it, cover it, or blame others and even blame God.

These show the wretchedness of our hearts. We want to live separately from God. We try to run away from God, hide our most cherished sins, and cover them with fake spirituality. But at the end of the day, no secrets can be hidden from God. There is a saying, “even you try to cover a spoiled thing with gold, it will still smell rotten.”

God’s Amazing Grace: His Pursuit

Despite man’s corruption, rejection, and rebellion against God, God’s grace abounds, and His steadfast love endures forever. Right after Adam and Eve sinned—covered their sin, hid it, and blamed others even God—God has already prepared and established a plan to redeem His creation.

In Genesis 3:14-15, God tells that in His covenant, He will still fulfill it and be faithful to His words. He even showed compassion to them by making garments for them and God, himself, clothed them (3:21). He was one step ahead with His creation; indeed, He is the author of this grand narrative. Wherein, the fulfillment of this Gen 3:15, the seed of the woman who will crush the head of the serpent is embodied in Christ.

Let me share one last thing before I conclude. In doing biblical theology and biblical interpretation, we have a term called “typology.” This Adamic covenant alludes to Christ as the last Adam. Meaning, Adam is a “type” of Christ. Remember, in 1 Cor 15:45, *“So it is written: ‘The first man Adam became a living being’ (Gen. 2:7); the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.”*

Another, when Adam was with Eve, they were both tempted by the serpent, they took and ate it. But when Christ, at the pinnacle of His fasting—was hungry, then the devil came and tempted Christ to turn a stone into bread. Christ answered, Matt 4:4, *“Jesus answered, ‘It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”* Christ had overcome such temptation because He is righteous, perfect, and holy. This is of course the very opposite of what Adam did.

But there will always be a question that what if they did not commit that mistake? Remember that in a covenant, there is a curse and a blessing. You will receive a consequence if you fail to keep the covenant, but you will receive the **covenant blessing** if you have kept the covenant. In chapter 3:22, they could have lived forever in the Garden of Eden with God.

Providentially, it is not too late for us, remember Christ as the last Adam, He is also the only way towards these promises: flourishing life, a promise of eternal life, and a being with His new creation—no more pain, cry—just pure joy and love.

Conclusion:

After learning about the creation covenant and God's amazing grace, we indeed know that both relationships are important—vertical and horizontal. To that, let us also balance these relationships that we have. First, a vertical relationship with God, our very priority in our life. He deserves our number one service, faithfulness, and love—worshipping Him and dedicating our lives to Him. Second, our horizontal relationship with our family, church, friends, and neighbors. Exemplify Christ's love to these people and show them God's grace.

If I will be asked, “pastor, what is the symbol of love?” Many would say, it is a “heart” sign, like “Oppa-love.” Right? But for me, and I hope for all of us, it will be the cross. The vertical and horizontal signs of God's love in Christ. Why?

Because there will be a time when our hearts will stop beating, but the man who died on the cross will never—again, I repeat—will never ever stop loving us. That is why it is called, grace. God faithfully pursuing His people out of His love.

Ptr. John Paul Arceno

UCBC New Jersey

May 23, 2021