

Dr. Meredith Kline, Kingdom Prologue, Lecture 10

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Israel's Covenant: 3 principles

Here are three principles. They are all tied together. You don't have one without the other. If you want to continue the idea of national election on into the New Testament as some will and so they are trying to reconstruct some particular distinctive eschatological futures for Jews as Jews, well then you have to incorporate the whole package. It would be in terms of the works principle that there would be a future for the national election. But that whole thing is unbiblical. So right now then works functions at this second level, at this typological kingdom level of the old covenant. Grace is the substratum and is the foundational layer. Works has to do with the secondary.

Principle of Works

Now, it's this claim that I have made of finding the works principle in the covenant with Adam especially, and then the covenant with Israel that is a challenge on many fronts in our day. We will have to think about together. We want to see some of the biblical evidence for it. So, we could start at either point and, of course, to establish that there is a principle of works operating here would serve right away to show them that God does, at times, use this principle of works in administering his kingdom and that would be a useful place to start.

Let's start here with Adam in the pre-fall situation in the original creational covenant, which we have said was a works arrangement. Now that is being challenged then and last week I did make mention of some names. Let's just for the moment, at least, deal with Dan Fuller who is associated with Fuller Seminary. He writes various books in which his main concern is to deny that at any point God has ever used the principle of works. In fact, he speaks in terms of it being diabolical of us to think that this is something human beings could do. See, what is involved in this idea of works is that man, God's creature, does something whereby he earns the reward. What's in view is the eschatological inheritance of heaven. How do you get there? I have already tried in the previous week to make the point that you have to earn it; you have to merit the thing. Of

course, we fail and Christ does it for us; that is the gospel. He does it for us; but he has to earn it.

Now, the thought that it should be proposed to man that he can do something that would earn the blessing of heaven, people of Fuller and his school would say is diabolical. It's arrogance, man cannot do anything that would be meritorious and that would thus be a way of earning heaven they state. So it is a very fundamental challenge that has been issued and I have tried to deal with it in some of my writings. One of the things I've tried to write was an article that appeared in our church magazine, *New Horizons*, a year or two ago, called "Covenant Theology Under Attack." We have a few copies of it there. Greg says he can, if there is a demand for more than what is available, keep one of those and make some copies for others of you who might like some. So make your desires known to Greg. But I'll make some use of that and then you can pick up these subsequently.

Christ's active and passive obedience

Now I start the article out by emphasizing the importance of the active obedience of Christ. How is it that heaven is earned? The first Adam failed and we cannot earn it anymore by ourselves. But of course, it is precisely the role of our Lord according to Romans 5. It says that the first Adam is a type of Christ. It is precisely then the role of Christ to pick up and to do that which Adam failed to do. Christ then is the one who by his active obedience merits for us heaven. So we distinguish, of course, in our Lord's obedience between his passive obedience, which emphasizes that which he did in order to bear the penalty that was due to us, our sin, to suffer the wrath of God that was due for our fallenness in sin in Adam. The active obedience of Christ, the atonement that achieves for us pardon, cleansing, and forgiveness.

I think as I was saying one of the last few times; that is great and that is the heart of the gospel. But it doesn't take you all of the way because it is only then we are back where Adam was at the beginning still having to earn heaven for himself. The slate is clear, there are no sins laid to his charge, the penalty for the sins isn't there. But the task hasn't been accomplished still, the task that the first Adam was given to do which very

precisely had to do, as I put it last time, to win the battle of Armageddon. Satan comes to the mountain of God, to our Armageddon to challenge God. Adam's task was to be on guard and to stand in the name of God and to resist and to judge and to repudiate Satan and thus to win the battle of Armageddon. There right at the outset. He failed to do it but this is now something that has to be done because this was the stipulated in God's covenant. This was the stipulation, this was the task, this was the way to get the blessing sanction, which was the reward of heaven. The way to earn heaven was to fight God's particular battle. It is something positive to do. That is where the active obedience of Christ comes in. He then dies for our sins, the slate is clear.

But beyond that, he also accomplishes the probationary task. He does it for us, he has earned it, the money can be imputed to us and put in our bank account. We have earned heaven in Christ, because he has earned it for us. Therefore it is not just that we are forgiven and that we are pardoned and justified in that sense. But we have received God's approbation: "Well done good and faithful servant. You have earned heaven because you are identified with Christ who earned it for you." That's the active obedience of Christ. That is marvelous!

This tells us that we are beyond probation. Therefore we are not going to be fussing and fuming about what good works must I now do somehow along with my faith in order to stay on the road to heaven. If you see that you are beyond probation then you will not be concerned about your good works in that sense. You will be doing your good works to the love God for what he has done. But you won't be concerned that this is part of your doing something to earn it. It has been done for you. This is the active obedience of Christ.

Now, you can see that there is room for this idea of active obedience, which is then imputed to others where you have this "one in many" principle. Christ, the one, is representing the many just as Adam, the one, represented the many. You can have that arrangement only if there is something that can be accomplished, that can be imputed to someone else. This is the thing that is very much neglected by Christian theologizing and preaching and so on which is full of such consolation I would think for all of us as

believers and the people to whom we are ministering to be assured of this. It is not just that we are forgiven but that Christ has earned heaven. We don't have to do anything. We are beyond probation. Now this wonderful idea puts a whole new mentality and assurance in you.

Grace and Law/works: contra Fuller and Piper

Now, if you deny that there can be any such thing as meritorious achievement, and that's what Fuller does, you might as well have cut the whole scheme. Although this is what he proceeds to do. He wrote a couple of books. In the first one he was more concerned with attacking the idea of works. Now traditionally then we speak about the law/gospel contrast there is the gospel of the saving faith and grace that Paul preaches. So traditionally we have talked about the contrast between law and gospel. That is the contrast between works and grace. This fellow Fuller repudiated that in a book that he called *Gospel and Law* and then the subtitle was *Contrast or Continuum*. So he talks about this classic problem of theology, gospel and law, which we have thought about completely differently. Grace is one thing and works is the opposite.

Grace, what is grace? Grace is where God blesses you in spite of the fact that you have forfeited his blessings. Grace is not merely God bestowing on you blessings that you have not merited. It is not just unmerited blessings. No, your problem is much worse than that. It is not just that you have not merited the blessing, it's that you have done the opposite, you have de-merited the blessing. That is the only place where grace has any proper meaning. It is as a response to a situation where the blessing has been forfeited by sin and rebellion. That's where grace is. Unmerited blessing does not nearly get to where the biblical idea is going.

The opposite then of that is, of course, works. Where you yourself earn the blessing and if you have forfeited the thing then there is no blessing to you. If you have forfeited the thing then that is distinctively the work of grace. Now that is a sharp contrast. There is a big difference between grace and works. Works, where you have to earn the thing; and grace, where you get the blessing in spite the fact that you have de-merited the thing. There is a big difference between the two and the church has

recognized that difference.

There is, of course in his title *Gospel and Law* in which he asks the question: is there really a contrast the way the church alleges? Or is there a continuum? Is there really a white and a black contrast, or a series of grays in between? He comes down, of course, in favor of a series of grays with no sharp distinction between the two. And, of course, as soon as you do that then everything gets foggy in regards to the gospel of grace. It is not the opposite of works if you had the right idea the approbation beyond probation everything is so clear. On this thing somehow now our works are playing a different role. As this point of view began to develop even in our own ecclesiastical circles then we began to find that those who denied the law/gospel contrast and were trying to suggest that all the covenants were fundamentally the same. They all have demands they all have promises and so on, we were told. So there is sort of a leveling out of all the covenants. The theologians who were doing that were soon bottling up the idea of justification.

So they were telling their students that works function with respect to justification the same way that faith does. In fact, you use the same prepositions to describe what works do and what faith does. Now, I am not so sure of my salvation. If my works are functioning in the same way there is no clear-cut act of faith whereby I have received Christ and all he has done for me and that is it. Now my own works somehow have to feed into the thing and sanctification begins to be confused with justification and the whole gospel is confused.

The people who hold that see that here there was a national election and Israel lost it. There was really no big contrast between what was going on then and now they are saying. So if the Israelites could lose their election and began to be fussy in their ranks. Well then can we also lose our individual election? All these things begin to get blurred as soon as you deny that there is a sharp absolute contrast between grace and works. So that is what's at stake in this whole thing.

Student Question about John MacArthur.

Kline's response: No, not with MacArthur unless he holds some view more identifiable with some of the guys I've worked with. Is he an associate with Fuller or Piper?

Student Response. I don't really know. My impression is: no. I haven't read enough. Initially it seemed like he was blurring what you were warning us about. But in a second book he has come out clarifying things. He was fighting another battle about whether one must accept Christ as Lord and savior rather than just as savior. He's not saying works are meritorious.

Kline's response: In the controversy within our own churches it sometimes was thought to be that the ones that I am criticizing were really just emphasizing the point that James makes that "the faith without works is dead." Then we must emphasize this same theme about Lordship. If that was all there were to it there never would have been this case that went on for 20 or 30 years. That was not really the issue, there was a real denial, and there was this leveling of all covenants. That's actually the way that it was put, that all covenants are the same because all involve demands and all involve promises. Sure, all covenants do involve demands and all covenants do involve promises but that doesn't tell you anything. What role do the works play in this thing? Is it works or is it grace?

Faith and works

Student Response: Often they use the same language without meaning the same thing. Some say law and what they mean is "works" in terms of other obligations. There always has been obligations. The question is whether the obligations merit something or are they obligations that are expected but not meriting anything.

Kline's response: Yeah, at this point it is something that I keep finding too that when you talk about works I very often find that half the student body thinks: well, does this covenant have some commandments in it? So the New Covenant would be a covenant of works. For example, Jesus gives us the commandment of love. We are not using the word "works" in the sense of are there commandments involved. We are using the term "works" in the sense of the principle of inheritance. By what principle do you inherit the blessing? In other words, what function does your obedience to the

commandments of God perform? Does your obedience to the commandments of God perform the function of earning the kingdom of heaven? That's the worst of all. If your obedience to the commandment of God performs the function of validating the confession of your mouth as James puts it, then that's not works principle. That's consistent with the principle of grace. So thanks for those clarifications.

Student Question: Is it possible that the obligation that he is talking about are really what is going on

Kline's response: Do you mean all that is going on is that Israel is required to validate their faith? Yeah. We will come back to that one again. But right away the way to do it is to point to the way that this thing ends. Israel under this works principle--"Do this and you will live"--gets terminated in judgment. So that shows what was operating here was not the principle of sovereign grace. The principle of sovereign grace does not fail; it achieves its purpose. The end of Israel, the desolation in 70 AD, the kingdom was taken from them completely, that whole order fails. That shows that it was not the principle of sovereign grace that was operating. This was not something that the active and passive obedience of Christ bought for Israel. If they should have that land forever, then they would have. This is something that they were to do on their own--"Do this and you will live."

But then also all the exegetical evidence will try to point out where Paul insists on a huge antithesis between his gospel, which was of faith, and what he says was going on there under the law. He, of course, would agree with James.

Just getting back into what Fuller and company would argue in alleging that there could not be any covenant of works with Adam. Let's see if I can read it here, "Fuller's refusal to acknowledge a works/grace contrast between the Mosaic covenant and gospel administrations especially the New Covenant is part of his broader insistence that divine human relationship never entails a works principle. Human merit is an essential ingredient in the concept of works." Fuller denies the very possibility of human merit anywhere in history even before the fall. He repudiates covenant theology not only in its recognition of a works principle in the law but in its identification of God's original

covenant with Adam as a covenant of works. Fuller claims there is a continuum of divine grace—now here is already an abuse of words where he uses the word grace for what is going on there in the original covenant. “Fuller claims there is a continuum of divine grace throughout all of God’s dealings with man pre-fall as well as redemptive.” I see this as an assault on the foundations of the gospel and that is why I wrote this particular article.

Fuller and the pre-Fall Works Covenant

So our focus here will not be on Fuller’s mishandling of the law. We will come back to that afterwards. But right now I want to concentrate on the fallacies of his notion about the pre-fall covenant. His covenant theology recognizes there is a big difference, not a continuum, but a big difference between the pre-fall covenant and the subsequent covenant of grace. In the pre-fall covenant Adam does not receive the kingdom blessings but rather a curse if he forfeits God’s favor by disobedience. Under the gospel, on the contrary, we do receive those blessings in spite of our having forfeited them by sin. Now that is just one total huge antithesis in difference between the two situations.

Now, grace is, of course, the term we use for the principle operative in the gospel. It is the principle that was missing from the pre-fall covenant as I mentioned a few moments ago. Grace then is the bestowing of blessings in spite of the fact that they have been de-merited. That is what grace means. That is what the principle that is operating in the gospel is, that principle of grace. So properly defined grace is not merely the bestowal of unmerited blessings but God’s blessing of man in spite of his de-merits, in spite of his forfeiture of divine blessings.

Clearly we ought not apply this term “grace” to the pre-fall situation for there was no forfeiture of blessings there, of course, until subsequently when Adam broke the covenant. But in terms of the terms of the covenant, clearly we ought not to apply either the bestowal of the blessings of Adam in the very process of creation nor the proposal to grant him additional blessings. None of these things contemplated Adam as in a guilty state of de-merit. God was not about to provide blessings for him if he were disobedient. The whole thing is only in terms of obedience. So the idea of grace simply is not present

there. Simply to offer blessings is not grace if the blessings have to be earned. Grace is only if those blessings have already been de-merited. But here is Adam, he comes from the hand of God. He has not sinned. He has not de-merited anything. When the terms of the covenant are put to him he has not de-merited anything. So those terms do not involve the idea of grace.

Yet, this is what Fuller and company are driven to do as they try to create the illusion of a continuum between the pre-fall and the redemptive covenants. It is only by this double talk, and that is what it is, it is double talk, of using the term grace, obviously in a different sense with the pre-fall covenant. It is only by doing that that one can de-cloud the big plain contrast that actually exists between the two covenants.

So, it is not that there is a continuum of grace everywhere, which he suggests, that there is grace even before the fall. As I go onto suggest, if you are looking for something that is continuous through all of them it is the principle of justice not the principle of grace. Not grace but simple justice was the governing principle in the pre-fall covenant and hence it is traditionally called the “Covenant of Works.” God is just and his justice is present in all that he does.

That is true of the gospel administration too. The foundation of grace, is again justice. It is only by the obedience of the one by the satisfying of justice that there is then the gift of righteousness for the many. It is only as Christ fulfills that eternal covenant that is merited for us by works, that there can be the bestowal of it by grace on us. So what is true in all covenants, what is the characteristic principle in all of God’s covenants, is this principle of justice. Not grace, grace is characteristic only of the gospel order, not for the pre-fall order. But justice was the principle operating before the fall. “Do this and you will live. Do this and you will merit heaven, Adam.” Now, likewise afterwards for us we are told, “Do this and you will live.” We do not do this but our Savior did it for us. He did it for us. So it is by the obedience of the One that there is righteousness for us.

So, if you are looking for an element of continuity running through pre-fall and redemptive covenants without obliterating the contrast between them there it is. Not grace, but justice in keeping the nature of God’s covenant with Adam was one of simple

justice. Covenant theology holds that Adam's obedience in the probation would have been the performing of a meritorious deed by which he earned the covenanted blessings.

Fuller's position

Now, why doesn't Fuller and company want to accept that? So you get some of the arguments for the more complete thing you can read the article which will be made available to you. But it is suggestions like this that insist that man the creature could not do anything meritorious because God is all-glorious beforehand. How can we do anything to add to his glory if he is all-glorious? So that is the end of that. They feel then therefore man could not do anything that would add to God's glory and that could possibly earn anything.

That simply is not the case. One thing that I observe here, of course, is that if that were true that it is because prior to Adam's activity God is already all-glorious you cannot add anything to his glory. Therefore, you cannot do anything meritorious. Now, we come down to Jesus. When Jesus comes down on the scene God was already all-glorious, of course, he is already glorious. So if there were any logic and validity to their argument it would be in respect to Adam, it would apply also to Jesus then. Because if God is already all-glorious, what could Jesus do that would be meritorious. He could not add to the glory of God. That is a fallacy that is operating there that you should be able to see when you apply it to the case of our Lord.

Student Question:

Kline's response: I'd better not get into an attempt to try to reconstruct some particular person's views if I can. This whole subject has been the subject of a whole bunch of doctoral dissertations and so on which have tried to go through the whole history of this dispute. In the last ten or twenty years different students of mine have gotten into that. I won't attempt to be evaluating this one or that one or the other one if I can just stick for the moment with the logic of this thing. Then maybe afterwards we can talk about some others who are familiar with that if that is okay?

Student Question:

Israel's status and tenure

Kline's response: Yeah, okay that is very commonly said for someone like John Murray would have expressed himself that way. Just quickly to answer that question. The way I usually press that is: it was by an act of grace, as you were just putting it, it was through a work of redemption by an act of grace, that God brings this package involving national election and typological kingdom and bestows it on Israel. It is not something that they deserved. It is not because they were bigger or better than the Canaanites as was pointed out in the book of Deuteronomy. It was an act of grace that God set aside Israel to this particular historical status. Okay? That is true.

Now once they are in that status it is a separate question as to what was the principle of tenure? What did their continued possession of this land that had been given to them by grace depend? Here then is where the works principle comes into play.

Now because it was a works principle midway through the thing they go into exile. They had broken the covenant. If it were just a matter of sovereign grace as we said then that covenant could not have been completely ruptured where God comes to them and says, "You are not my people anymore. Away with you." That shows you it is by a works principle.

It is by a second act of grace that God restores them from Babylonian exile and that is why the restoration from the Babylonian exile is often set forth as the second Exodus--the second act of grace. But what they are restored to once again is the law of Moses. So history repeats itself. Now they have killed the prophets and that is why they go into Babylonian exile. Now history repeats itself and they have killed the prophets. Now they also repudiate the Son. So once again the element of truth that you are pointing to is this. It is not something that the Israelites as a nation deserve to have this historical privilege. It was an act of grace. But then the question still remains: what was the principle by which they would hang onto or fail to hang onto it? That is where the principle of works comes in.

Fuller on God's glory and human service

The other next step that Fuller and company take after they say, "Well, God is all-glorious, you cannot do anything meritorious." Let's say for argument's sake that maybe you could do something that had some merit to it. But the next step is to say, "But look at the disproportion between the reward and the service." They say, "man does not have the significance on the scale of being that he could do anything that would merit eternal life. Whatever he could earn, this reward of the eternal kingdom of God is too much that he could have merited it." In other words, they proceed to quantify the value of the service and the reward and they conclude that this was not a matter of simple justice. This was grace that the reward should be so big was grace. Well, again that is abuse of the word grace because it still would not have been a blessing that was bestowed on someone who had forfeited the blessing. So it would not have been grace. They should use some other word for it.

Student Response: Define generosity...

Kline's response: Yes, that is what they end up then doing something like that. But what they do is that they begin to quantify this idea of justice and to measure the justice on the arrangement that God specifies in his covenant. It is the word of God. God is just and the covenant is his word that defines reality. Therefore, the terms of that covenant must be an expression of justice and that should set the thing, that this is justice. But what these people are doing is that they are setting up some standard of measurement above and beyond God. Not in terms of the covenant reality but in terms of some order of nature that they assume underlies or preceded the covenant. In terms of this other measurement, they are supposing that they can judge the justice of God.

Quantifying Justice?

Now, if you do that, if you quantify the justice this way, you are going to get into various kinds of trouble. Let me suggest some of the troubles. If you quantify justice and then you have to ask the question: what was the merit or the value of our Lord's active and passive obedience? Let's take his passive obedience for the moment. What was the value of Jesus' atonement? I think if you ask these people that question they would say,

“Oh, it was sufficient. He had enough value to save everybody.” That would be their answer and yet everyone is not saved. Now what you have done if you quantify the idea of justice and you say the value of Jesus’ atoning blood was sufficient to save everyone and God doesn’t forgive everyone then we have terrible injustice on God’s part. You cannot quantify the thing that way. The terms that God expresses, they themselves define what justice is.

Humans, value and eternal life

Let’s take another thought and then move on. They suggest that Adam, as a human creature, does not have the significance or is not high enough up on the scale of being so that anything positive that he would do would have the value of eternal life--that would deserve eternal life. The corollary of that, of course, is this: that if Adam does not have enough significance, if he is not high enough on the scale of being to do something that would merit eternal life then he hasn’t got the significance of anything by way of disobedience that would merit eternal death. If the consequences of his activity simply do not add up to anything eternal then he did not deserve eternal death. If he did not deserve eternal death and yet God sent his son into the world and suffers eternal death in order to save them and the rest of the elect, God again is guilty of injustice that he would be imposing on Adam more than his rebellion deserved. So there are all kinds of problems that we get into on this approach that would deny the possibility of meritorious and the insistent that everything, therefore, must have a means of grace.

Student Question:

Kline’s response: The sacrificial aspect of the law did bring out, of course, the bottom line. The cross of Christ is coming. In the typology of the kingdom there is along with the typology of the kingdom and the intrusion of judgment and so on. There is the typology of the cult. The sacrificial system, of course, is pointing ahead to the atonement and so on. Not just the sacrificial system but in the word of the prophets. The message of grace is not absent, of course, from the Old Testament. Paul, although he paints the big contrast between the law and the gospel still points back to the law and the prophets with the message of justification by faith. Sure, the message of individual salvation by grace

comes to expression in the total Mosaic revelation. What we are doing is we are isolating an area here of the typological kingdom that was not expressing our control by the principle of grace but involved the “Do this and you will live,” principle.

Refutation of Fuller’s theology: Christ and Adam

We’ll again read this article: “The ultimate refutation of Fuller’s argument is that it undermines the gospel of grace. All the arguments employed by Fuller that Adam could not do anything meritorious would apply equally to the case of Jesus, the second Adam. I spoke about the all-glorious business. They also say that where you have a father-son relationship you must have grace involved. If you must have grace involved you cannot have justice involved and you cannot have anything really meritorious in the case of a child and his parent, the father-son relationship. So they argue that, that again, does not work when you come to Jesus. There you have a father-son relationship. If in a father-son relationship you cannot have anything meritorious then Jesus, as the son, could not have done anything meritorious. So all of their arguments that argue, that would allege, that Adam could not do anything meritorious would simultaneously prove that Jesus could not either.

Of course, then there is that basic thing of the two Adam scheme. If you demonstrate that Christ can do something meritorious than you have demonstrated that Adam could because Adam is the type of Christ precisely with respect to their function in terms of God’s government. Vice-versa if, therefore, you can prove Adam could not do anything meritorious then since he is the type of Christ, Christ could not do anything meritorious. So, this attack on the possibility of meritorious action on Adam’s part is undercutting the gospel right at the heart of it that Jesus could not do anything meritorious. If he couldn’t you and I are still in our sins.