

Chapter 3 Fesko's Theological Analysis and His Defense on the Covenant of Works

In this section, we will refer to Fesko's works on the covenant of works to examine his understanding of the covenant and the law, law and grace, and federal headship. The purpose is to compare with McGowan's covenant theology and critically analyze McGowan's headship theology.

3.1 The Covenant and the Law

3.1.1 *Definition of the Covenant and the Law*

a. Definition of the Covenant

In the section on the covenant of works in *Last Things First*, Fesko starts with the generic definition of the Hebrew word that denotes covenant בְּרִית (bĕrît)——'treaty, alliance, or agreement.'²⁸⁸ Fesko refers to McConville's article on בְּרִית in NIDOTTE and lists out six typical elements in Hittite-vassal treaties:²⁸⁹ introduction of treaty participants (suzerain and vassal), historical prologue, stipulation to the treaty, a clause for treaty's regular reading and preservation in a temple, blessings and curses for keeping or breaking the treaty, the witnesses of the treaty. Apart from the six elements above, Fesko quotes an excerpt from the Hittite:

These are the words of the Sun Suppiluliumas, the great king, the king of the Hatti land, the valiant, the favourite of the Storm-god. I the Sun, made you my vassal. And if you, Aziras, "protect" the king of the Hatti land, your master, the king of the Hatti land, your master, will "protect" you the same way.²⁹⁰

From there, he states that while the biblical covenant is unique, some similarities (though not identical) between the Hittite vassal-treaty and the covenant in the book of

²⁸⁸ J. V. Fesko, *Last Things First: Unlocking Genesis 1-3 with the Christ of Eschatology* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2007), 78 quoted from Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 136.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 78 cited from

Gordon J. McConville, ' בְּרִית ' in NIDOTTE, vol. 1, 747.

²⁹⁰ Ibid. quoted from ANE 2, 42.

Deuteronomy are apparent.²⁹¹ These similarities are most apparent in Deuteronomy 29. Fesko agrees with McConville's conclusion that the analogy of the treaties demonstrates the suzerain and vassal relationship of the LORD with His people and that this covenantal relationship requires commitment from the people for preservation.²⁹² Fesko then argues that while God as the more powerful party, who sovereignly administers a covenant with His people, the covenant can be unilateral or bilateral depending on whether a response of commitment is required.²⁹³ From Fesko's perspective, the bilateral nature of the covenant is nevertheless by no means a form of synergism or cold contract but a demand of human response to the sovereignly administered covenant, which is similar to Kline's perspective as discussed earlier.²⁹⁴

The discussion above summarizes Fesko's definition of the divine covenant as a treaty between God (the Suzerain-Lord) and man (the vice-regent or vice-regent) that God sovereignly administers.

b. Definition of the Law and Its Relationship with Covenant

In Fesko's works, it can be perceived that he treats WCF XIX.i as the definition of the law:

God gave to Adam a Law, as a Covenant of Works, by which he bound him, and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience, promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it, and endued him with power and ability to keep it.²⁹⁵

From WCF XIX.i the law is covenantal binding; it is the detail of what God requires us to fulfill in His sovereignly established covenant. WCF XIX.i also implies

²⁹¹ Ibid., 78-79.

²⁹² Ibid., 79.

²⁹³ Ibid., 80-81, from Fesko's explanation of Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic covenants, and Davidic, the covenant is considered bilateral if responses are needed

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 80, footnote 6.

²⁹⁵ J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2021), 174.

that though the law and covenant are distinguishable, they are inseparable.²⁹⁶ Based on several Reformed confessional documents, Fesko claims that:

Reformed theologians contend that God does not administrate His law apart from a covenant, though they may distinguish but not separate law and covenant. Conversely, the administration of God's law is covenantally binding.²⁹⁷

According to Fesko, 'there is no biblical narrative where God administers His law apart from an explicitly stated covenant.'²⁹⁸ One clear example that God administered the law in the covenantal context is the Sinai law, where God referred to His covenantal name when giving the Ten Commandments. Nevertheless, Fesko's understanding of the law is not limited to Sinai law but traces it back to the law God gave to Adam. Though the law is given in the Mosaic covenant, the term 'law' is not used in Genesis 1-3; Fesko claims that Genesis 1-3 is to be read in the context of the Pentateuch. He perceives the inclusion of Genesis 1-3 and Deuteronomy 29-34 in the Pentateuch and states that 'Genesis 1-3 was composed in such a manner as to anticipate Mosaic covenant'.²⁹⁹

Fesko distinguished the function of the law on Adam and the believers according to WCF XIX.vi:

Although true Believers be not under the Law as a Covenant of Works, so to be thereby justified, or condemned, yet, it is of great use to them, as well as to others; in that, as a Rule of life informing them of the will of God, and their duty, it directs, and binds them to walk accordingly; discovering also the sinful pollutions of their nature, hearts, and lives; so as examining themselves thereby, they may come to a further conviction of, humiliation for, and hatred against sin; together with a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ, and the perfection of his obedience³⁰⁰

From WCF XIX. vi, Adam and his posterity are under the covenant of works; the believers are not under the covenant of works but under the covenant of grace. Fesko states that for those under the covenant of works, the law serves as a covenant that

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, III.1.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 174 based on (Irish Articles, C21; Savoy Declaration, VII.ii; Second London Confession, XIX.i.)

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 285.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 191-197.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 177.

'demands personal, perpetual, and perfect obedience in order for one to secure justification and eternal life.'³⁰¹ On the other hand, for believers, the law serves as a *rule*, 'a guide for the Christian life that shows what conduct is pleasing to God as well as the misconduct that is displeasing to Him.'³⁰² It does not mean that the law is detached from the covenant for the believers as they are in the covenant of grace, and Christ has fulfilled the covenant of works for them.

In short, the law is what God (the Suzarain-Lord) demands man (the vassal king) a personal, perpetual, and perfect obedience to fulfill in His sovereignly established covenant in order to secure justification and eternal life.

3.1.2 *Adam, the Covenant and the Law*

a. Adam, created in the image and the likeness of God

Man is created in the image and the likeness of God means man is created to be God's vice-regent over the world and to reflect God.³⁰³ Fesko claims the below as the holistic definition of being the image and the likeness of God:

One finds the image of God primarily in man's role as God's vice-regent over the creation, and secondarily in his mental and spiritual faculties, his ability to relate to God, and ability to create like God.³⁰⁴

Here it can be perceived that Fesko understands the *Imago Dei* in a substantive, relationship, and functional way.³⁰⁵ His understanding of *Imago Dei* with an eschatological/telos framework where Adam is related to God as His vice-regent and possess the gift bestowed to perform the mandate and to reach the eschatological

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*

³⁰² *Ibid.*

³⁰³ J. V. Fesko, *Last Things First: Unlocking Genesis 1-3 with the Christ of Eschatology* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2007), 45-48

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.* quotes from Luther, *Genesis*, 47.

³⁰⁵ Billy Kristanto, *Human Being - Being Human: A Theological Anthropology in Biblical, Historical and Ecumenical Perspective* (Berlin: Peter Lang GmbH Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2020), 117-126

goal.³⁰⁶ 'Human being is an eschatological being', Kristanto in *Human Being Being*

Human writes:

To be human is to be able to already participate in the renewal of divine knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, yet at the same time still hoping for its eschatological fulfillment.³⁰⁷

God's proclamation of *very good* after everything has been created (Gen. 1:31) does not mean that Adam is to remain static. This is because *very good* also implies the potential God has bestowed on Adam to live a dynamic God-centered life to reach the eschatological goal that is, the attainment of eternal life.

Since Adam was created in the image and the likeness of God and was to serve as God's vice regent, he needed to have the law to rule according to God's will. Fesko understands Adam as being created with the inscription of the law and created to receive the law verbally/formally from the Lord. He regards this as the natural and covenantal aspect of the law.

b. The Natural Aspect of the Law (Inscription of the Law as the Image Bearer)

The distinction between the natural and the covenantal aspect does not mean that the natural aspect is detached from the covenant. It is a distinction that shows that Adam, as the image-bearer of God, is created with law inscribed naturally and created to receive the covenantal-abiding law formally/verbally from the Lord.

Fesko quotes WSC q.12:

When God had created man, He entered into a covenant of life with him, upon condition of perfect obedience; forbidding him to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, upon pain of death.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁶ J. V. Fesko, *Last Things First: Unlocking Genesis 1-3 with the Christ of Eschatology* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2007), 45 quotes from Luther, *Genesis*, 47.

³⁰⁷ Billy Kristanto, *Human Being - Being Human: A Theological Anthropology in Biblical, Historical and Ecumenical Perspective* (Berlin: Peter Lang GmbH Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2020), 234, 123

³⁰⁸ J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2021), 322

Fesko sees a 'twofold aspect' in a covenantal relationship between God and man, the natural and covenantal wherein the inscription of the law in the heart and the verbal commandment take place respectively.³⁰⁹ When God created Adam, He entered into the covenant with Adam since Adam was created in His image and likeness, to be His vice-regent. The law is inseparable from the covenant. It was what bound Adam in the covenant. In other words, it is what is required of Adam as the vice-regent to represent God to have dominion and to stay loyal to the covenant. Fesko quotes WCF IV.ii:

God created Adam and Eve after His own image, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfill it, and dominion over the creatures, yet subject to fall.³¹⁰

The possession of the law is the virtue of being an image-bearer.³¹¹ Since Adam is the bearer of the image of God and serves as a vice-regent to rule the world, he knows what was required of him, though he has yet to receive the specific prohibition and mandate from the LORD.³¹²

c. The Covenantal Aspect of the Law

From the works of Vos, he notices that 'God's revelation follows the word-act-word pattern', where God first speaks, acts, and then declares.³¹³ Hence just as God created light can declare it good, He created Adam in His image and gave him commands.³¹⁴ Adam was created *in covenant* and *for covenant*, he is to receive the law as the obligation of the covenant.³¹⁵

The very first commandment from God to Adam follows right after a blessing is the dominion mandate in Genesis 1:28:

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 323

³¹¹ *Ibid.*

³¹² *Ibid.*, 323-324

³¹³ J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works.*, (Great Britain: Mentor, 2021), 326

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 326 refers to

Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 221-24

And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'³¹⁶

This dominion mandate is what Fesko claims as a 'chief element of what it means to be an image-bearer.'³¹⁷ Fesko sees this mandate as not a permanent mandate. It has an eschatological terminus. This is because the Sabbath rest from God's creation work, and the presence of the tree of life hint at the reward of eternal life.³¹⁸

The prohibition was also revealed to Adam in Genesis 2:16-17:

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.'

Fesko agrees with Kline that the prohibition and curse are a counterbalance of God's blessing through the administration of the dominion mandate.³¹⁹ He also notices that this prohibition has the same form of God's covenantal law recorded in the Decalogue:³²⁰ (1) the similar form of the prohibition 'you shall not eat' with the prohibition in the Decalogue, (2) 'you shall not murder' and the parallel of the motive clause 'For in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die' with Exodus 20:5,7,11. According to Fesko, the notion of obedience-blessing and transgression-curse is 'within the conceptual orbit of the covenant'; it is prevalent in the Book of Covenant, the Pentateuch, and readministered in the Mosaic covenant before Israel entered the promised land (Deut. 11:26-29).³²¹

³¹⁶ Although the term 'command' is not present, the statement is in imperative form and can be treated as a commandment from the LORD.

³¹⁷ J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2021), 186.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 188.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 188-189.

3.1.3 *The Covenant of Works*

a. Definition of the Covenant of Works

Fesko quotes from WCF VII.ii and regards it as a historical definition:

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.³²²

Fesko notices that the terms 'works' were objected to even by some theologians who agreed on the Adamic covenant.³²³ Regardless of these observations, he still prefers the term 'works' for two reasons:³²⁴

(1) Scripture labels Adam's obedience as works, and it is the opposite of faith

Fesko notices Paul's juxtaposition of works versus faith from Romans 4:4-5. This perspective is similar to Kline's stark contrast of law in the covenant of works and faith in the covenant of grace.

(2) Works is what God gave Adam to do; the cycle of six-day works and rest on the seventh day is a foretaste of the eternal Sabbath.

b. Promise and Penalty in the Covenant of Works

Fesko argues that when God commanded Adam not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the threatened curse of death implies that life was the reward of obedience.³²⁵ While this argument is unconvincing, Fesko further says that as long as Adam restrained himself from eating the forbidden fruit, he would have eaten from the tree of life at some point.³²⁶ The tree of knowledge and the tree of life are signs of the covenant of works. Eating from the tree of knowledge means claiming self-

³²² *Ibid.*, 318 quoted from WCF.VII.ii

³²³ J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2021), 318.

' Westminster Shorter Catechism, for example, designates the Adamic covenant as a *covenant of life* (q. 12)' see also. O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1980), 55.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 318.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 327.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

autonomy, to decide good and evil apart from God's law, which is an act of infidelity that will result in death.³²⁷ On the other hand, restraining eating from the tree of knowledge means a continuation of listening to God's words and a dependence on God, particularly in knowing what is good and what is evil.³²⁸ This loyalty to God means continuing an intimate relationship.³²⁹ If Adam had passed the covenantal probation, he would have entered a confirmed state of eternal life.³³⁰ This eternal life is different from Adam's original life. Fesko states that Adam's righteousness is untested and mutable in Adam's original life.³³¹ After entering the confirmed state of eternal life, his righteousness will be immutable.³³² This is similar to Augustine's statement regarding the state of pre-fall man and the glorified man, (1) able to sin, able not to sin (*posse peccare, posse non peccare*); and (2) unable to sin (*non posse peccare*). The principle of obedience leads to life, and transgression results in death is repeated in the Scripture. Fesko quotes Deuteronomy 30:19 and claims that Adam's options anticipate Israel's later similar covenantal choice:

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live.

Fesko's also states that life in Romans 7:10, 'The very commandment that promised life', means eternal life, not temporal life.

Besides the tree of life, the Sabbath rest also hints at the reward for Adam. Adam did receive not only the prohibition from the LORD but also the dominion mandate. He was also put into the garden of Eden to work and to keep it. Fesko states that 'as God

³²⁷ See section 3.1.2 Adam, the Covenant, and the Law (esp. sub-section c)

³²⁸ *Ibid.*

³²⁹ J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2021), 327.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 327.

³³¹ *Ibid.*

³³² *Ibid.*

worked and then entered His rest, so Adam was supposed to labor and then enjoy a weekly foretaste of his eternal rest to come each Sabbath.³³³

The penalty for the transgression is clear, which is death. Fesko states that Adam and Eve died on the very first day they took the forbidden fruit.³³⁴ Fesko states that spiritual death means that they were now guilty of sins, became the children of wrath (Eph. 2:1-3), and were exiled from the presence and the rest of God.³³⁵ Just as obedience leads to eternal life and rest, transgression leads to death and restlessness.

Adam transgressed the covenant as the federal head of humanity, and the penalty was laid upon all his posterity. The good news is that Christ has fulfilled the covenant of works and redeemed His people through His vicarious death on the cross. By His works, He has secured the reward of eternal life and rest for His people. Adam failed to attain the promised reward, but now we can find our promise in Christ. Through Christ, we enter eternal life and eternal rest. The tree of life and the eternal rest appear once again in Revelation:

The tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. (Rev. 22:2b)

'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Blessed indeed,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!' (Rev. 14:13)³³⁶

The sign of eternal life and rest in Genesis and Revelation shows that God's promise for his people remained unchanged.

c. Covenant of Works and Adam as the Vice-Regent of God

Whether the relationship of God with Adam is covenantal has brought up many debates since the term covenant does not appear in Genesis 1-3. This subsection shows part of Fesko's argument that God's dealing with Adam is covenantal.

³³³ *Ibid.*, 318-319.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, 331.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*

³³⁶ In contrast to Rev. 14:11 that those who worship the beast will have no rest.

According to Fesko, the creation narrative is covenantal.³³⁷ He argues that even though there is no explicit evidence that the creation is a covenantal act of God, Jeremiah 33:20-21 does indicate that the creation of day and night is covenantal:

If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night will not come at their appointed time, then also my covenant with David my servant may be broken, so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne, and my covenant with the Levitical priests my ministers. (Jeremiah 33:20-21)³³⁸

Williamson, however, argues that 'nothing is said in this context of a divine covenant with creation'; it may be only a permanent allusion to the fixed order of created nature.³³⁹ Nevertheless, from Genesis 9:9-11, it is evident that God does not only establish a covenant with Noah but with the entire creation. Noah is a vice-regent through whom God establishes His covenant with the creation.³⁴⁰ Noah was given the land to have dominion, similar to the practice of the Hittite treaty where the suzerain could offer the vassal a land to rule.³⁴¹ Considering also the reappearance of the dominion mandate in the Noahic covenant, Block asserts that the verse, 'I will establish my covenant with you' can be interpreted as 'I will establish my covenant [with the cosmos] with you.'³⁴² Therefore, Jeremiah 33:20-21 does not serve as an allusion to permanence, but the divine covenant with creation itself is eternal, wherein man is God's vice-regent.

³³⁷ J. V. Fesko, *Last Things First: Unlocking Genesis 1-3 with the Christ of Eschatology* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2007), 82-85, for similar view, see also:

Daniel I. Block, *Covenant: The Framework of God's Grand Plan of Redemption* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2021), 13.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 82

³³⁹ P. R. Williamson, "Covenant," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 141.

³⁴⁰ Daniel I. Block, *Covenant: The Framework of God's Grand Plan of Redemption* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2021), 16, 43

³⁴¹ The suzerain could also offer land to his vassal to rule, a breach of the covenant would cost the land to be cursed (e.g. Gen. 3, Deut. 29) see:

Daniel I. Block, *Covenant: The Framework of God's Grand Plan of Redemption* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2021), 91.

Scott Hahn, "Covenant," in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

³⁴² Daniel I. Block, *Covenant: The Framework of God's Grand Plan of Redemption* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2021), 16.

Fesko also notices that the Scripture applies the covenantal name LORD God in the creation of man and woman. He cites Spykman's *Reformation Theology* in agreement that Genesis 1, 2 contains the preamble with its prologue, an introduction of 'the Sovereign in His relationship to the second party'.³⁴³ From here, Fesko even claims that:

The Israelite in covenant with God at Sinai, the time during which Genesis was compiled and written, would hear the familiar echo of Genesis 1 in Exodus 20:2.³⁴⁴

In Genesis 2, the title LORD God is first used in the Scripture, in a zoom-in narrative of the creation of man and woman before giving them the abundancy and commandment (mandate and prohibition); whereas in Exodus 20, God also refers to Himself as 'the LORD your God' in relation to His work of deliverance before giving His people the Ten Commandments. Sidney Greidanus writes:

Ten times Genesis 1 repeats the phrase: "God said; God said; God said." Ten is the number of fullness. The Israelites would have been reminded of God's ten words on Mount Sinai, the Ten Commandments. In ten words, Exodus 20 sets forth God's law for Israel. In ten words Genesis 1 sets forth God's law word for his creation.³⁴⁵

Objections might be raised against this claim because although both these two passages mention the Sovereign's relationship with His people, there are two huge differences:

- (1) Genesis 1, 2 presents the relationship narratively, whereas Exodus 20:2 is a proclamation.
- (2) Genesis 1, 2 presents the original God-man relationship, whereas Exodus 20:2 is a relationship focused on redemption.

Still, the element of both blessing and curses from the commandment that follows this prologue, with the trees serving as the sign, 'visual reminders of God's stated blessing

³⁴³ J. V. Fesko, *Last Things First: Unlocking Genesis 1-3 with the Christ of Eschatology* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2007), 86. cites from Gordon J. Spykman, *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 260.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

³⁴⁵ Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis: Foundations for Expository Sermons* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 480.

and curse',³⁴⁶ shows more clearly the overall parallel of these two passages (Gen. 2:16-17 and Exod. 20:2-27).³⁴⁷

We have discussed in section 3.1.3 that the biblical divine covenant, especially in Deuteronomy, contains blessings and curses, demonstrating similarity to the Hittite treaty; likewise, such resemblance can be perceived in the command issued by God to Adam in Genesis 2:16-17.³⁴⁸ Therefore, it is very likely that Israelites read Genesis written in the context of the Mosaic epoch as covenantal writing.³⁴⁹ On this matter, Fesko even quotes some Jewish literature as proof.³⁵⁰

And the Lord, coming into paradise, set His throne, and called with a dreadful voice, saying, Adam, where are you and why are you hidden from my face? Shall the house be hidden from Him that built it? And He says, Since you have forsaken my covenant, I have brought upon your body seventy strokes. (*ANF*, vol. 8, p. 565)

The Lord created human beings out of earth...He bestowed knowledge upon them, and allotted to them the law of life. He established with them an eternal covenant, and revealed to them His decrees (*Sir. 17:1, 11-12*)

In Fesko's overview of the covenant of works in Genesis, we can see the formulation comes from the internal evidence of the Scripture (Jer.33:20-21, and the parallel of Gen. 1-2 and Exod. 20) with external evidence (Hittite treaty, Jewish's understanding of Gen. 1-2). The narrative of the Adamic covenant was about God establishing an eternal covenant with Adam as His vice-regent. The law with the promise/warning of blessing/curses upon Adam's obedience or disobedience was given in the context of covenant, where Adam is bound to fulfill the mandate of God and not to transgress His law. However, Adam fell, and curses were laid upon him and his posterity.

³⁴⁶ J. V. Fesko, *Last Things First: Unlocking Genesis 1-3 with the Christ of Eschatology* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2007), 85.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 84.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 86-87

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 87.

3.1.4 *The Covenant of Works and the the Liabilities (Exegetical Proof)*

While most Christians agree that we all sin and are worth God's judgment, some would not say God demands us to fulfill His law to attain life since it is impossible to fulfill it in the post-fall epoch. Nevertheless, it is still a demand, and the liability of the covenant of works is still applicable, though it is unattainable. In this section, we will review Fesko's examination of other passages to show the binding effect of the covenant of works and our transgression.

a. The Binding Demand: Do This and Live (Lev. 18:5)

'You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD.' (Lev. 18:5) Fesko claims that this verse is the most commonly appealed in support of the covenant of works but is the least understood in the contemporary period.³⁵¹

Fesko points out that some Reformed theologians regard this verse as evangelical rather than legal obedience, just as Murray contended that this verse is not referring to life attained from legalistic obedience but a 'blessing attendant upon obedience in a redemptive and covenant relationship to God.'³⁵² Fesko also points out that Murray believes the principle 'do this and live' only applies under 'Adamic Administration' but has no place in the post-fall epoch; instead, it is a normative use of the law.³⁵³

Murray argues that God's declaration 'I am the LORD your God' sets us in the context of grace; hence, normative use of the law is to be in view.³⁵⁴ On the other hand, Fesko argues that it is simply an indication of the divine source of the law where they

³⁵¹ J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2021), 199.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, 200.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, 201.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 202.

are bound to keep the law under the covenant Lord.³⁵⁵ On this point, Murray's argument seems more convincing since, in Exodus 20, God related His covenantal name to the deliverance from slavery in Egypt, which corresponds to Christians who are enslaved to sin are now set free to live a life according to God's will.³⁵⁶ Nevertheless, from Fesko's argument below, we will see that his point is equally biblical sound.

First, Fesko refers to the parallel between the context of Leviticus and Genesis and argues that while God establishes a relationship with Israel, in which they are to keep the law, fail, and was cast out from land, it serves as a reminiscent to the scenario Adam was cast out of the Eden.³⁵⁷ Nevertheless, one can also argue from the perspective of apostasy. This is because the immediate context of Leviticus 18 is sexual immorality. In Leviticus, God warned of vomiting out the unclean people due to sexual immorality; likewise, in 1 Corinthians 5, Paul urged the Corinthian church to purge the sexually immoral person (evil person). The expulsion is necessary because continual sexual immorality is an act of covenant-breaking; these people is also like leaven that will affect the church, which is a set-apart covenantal people of God.³⁵⁸ Following Murray's argument, the church is under the covenant of grace, and the law is the normative principle of Christian living. Continual deliberate sinning is a sign of covenant-breaking (that person is never in Christ), what is more for the sin of sexual immorality, which the Scripture heavily condemns. Up to this point, it seems that Murray's argument to regard Leviticus 18:5 as the normative use of the law is more convincing than Fesko's argument that Leviticus 18:5 serves as a legal binding for all.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁶ John M. Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord: An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006), 317–318.

³⁵⁷ J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2021), 202.

³⁵⁸ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 197.

Nevertheless, as elaborated below, Fesko's second argument shows that Leviticus 18:5 could legally bind Jews and Gentiles.

Second, Fesko argues that the shift from the 2nd to the 3rd person singular verb indicates that both Jews and Gentiles are bound by 'if a person does them, he shall live by them'.³⁵⁹ He quotes verse 26 as support: 'But you shall keep my statutes and my rules and do none of these abominations, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you'.³⁶⁰ Fesko argues that if Leviticus 18 is to be interpreted as the normative use of the law for the Israelites, as Murray contended, then it is unexplainable why the sojourners who are Gentiles are also bound to this law.³⁶¹ Therefore 'do this and live' refers to the obligation in the covenant of works with the faithfulness-blessing structure in which both Jews and Gentiles are bound to.

'Do this and live' is not an isolated principle; it resurfaces in Ezekiel 20 and several NT passages.³⁶² Fesko highlights that in Ezekiel 20, the context is no longer sexual immorality but rebellion against the LORD by rejecting God's statutes, resulting in God's wrath upon them.³⁶³ Ezekiel 20:23 says: 'moreover, I gave them statutes that were not good and rules by which they could not have life'. It is surprising to see the prophet would say God's statutes were 'not good', and Fesko comments that it is an intentional contrast to 'do good and live'; the contrast is even to the extent that the prophet put the 'defect' on the statutes but not on the people.³⁶⁴ We are to read Ezekiel 20:23, which says the 'law is not good' in the light of the overall Scripture says the law and the statutes of the LORD are good. From this method of reading, we can deduce

³⁵⁹ J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2021), 202.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 203.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, 204-214

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, 204.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 205-206

that people can no longer attain life by keeping the good law; in this sense, the law is not good.

Fesko argues that even in NT, the utmost obedience to the law is required to attain eternal life. Fesko quotes Luke 10:25-28 and Matthew 19:17 and claims that even Jesus affirms the principle of 'do this and live'.³⁶⁵ According to Fesko, Jesus, by posing a question 'what is written in the Law' to the lawyer questioned the deed to gain eternal life, affirms the legal way of gaining eternal life via keeping the law, though it is now unattainable.

From Fesko's, we can see that God still demands us to do law and live even in this post-fall epoch. Fesko puts it this way:

The path to performing the law to secure one's justification may be obstructed by sin which renders it impossible for fallen human beings, but this does not negate the fact that the path still exists.³⁶⁶

However, we can no longer attain eternal life by our obedience since we all transgress the law and the covenant.

b. The Transgression: They Broke the Everlasting Covenant (Isa. 24:5, Hos. 6:7)

Isaiah 24:5 goes, 'the earth lies defiled under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant.' Here we see Isaiah puts law, statutes, and the covenant together. Young notes that the transgression of the law is expressed in terms of violation of statutes and covenants.³⁶⁷ This further confirms our thesis based on Fesko's exegesis on intra-canonical passages that the law acts as a binding rule in the covenant. According to Fesko's surveys, even though not all theologians, including Calvin, would agree that Isaiah is referring to the

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 208-209. Similar explanation can be applied to Luke 18:18-20.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 211.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 218 cites

Edward Young, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 19–39*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1969), 156. See Calvin, *Isaiah*,

Adamic Covenant, most still refer to Adam's transgression.³⁶⁸ Fesko quotes from Calvin and comments:

But even though Calvin thinks the Mosaic covenant stands front and center, he nevertheless casts a line back to the creation and the fall of Adam: 'We know that the earth was cursed on account of the transgression of our first parent, so that it brought forth thorns and thistles instead of fruits.' (Gen. 3:17-18)³⁶⁹

Fesko argues that the immediate context itself (Isa. 13-23) 'sets the stage for the prophet's condemnation of the Gentiles nations' and the impending judgment is democratized (Isa. 24:2).³⁷⁰ This shows that all people transgressed the covenant and lived in the cursed world that is reminiscent of Genesis 3.

Right after Fesko explains the exegesis on Isaiah 24:5, he moves on to Hosea 6:7: 'But like Adam they transgressed the covenant, there they dealt faithlessly with me'. It is worth noting that these two passages explicitly show that all men transgress not only the law but the covenant.

Fesko firmly believes that Hosea 6:7 is referring to Adam based on three strong reasons:³⁷¹ (1) the other occurrence of אָדָם (like Adam) lexeme, (2) Hosea's numerous echoes and allusions to the creation narrative, and (3) the apostle Paul's comparison of Adam and Israel.

(1) The other occurrence of אָדָם (like Adam) lexeme:

There are only 3 occurrences of אָדָם lexeme in the Bible (Job 31:33, Ps. 82:7 and Hos. 6:7). Boston cited both Job 31:33 and Psalm 82:7 in defense of the covenant of works

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 218-226

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 225. See also: John Calvin and William Pringle, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 171.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 227.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 250-259.

Fesko observes and does a brief analysis on the 3 categories of interpretation: (1) Like Adam, (2) Like Men, (3) At Adam. Fesko opts for both the interpretation of (1) Like Adam and (3) At Adam. For our thesis purpose in tracing the connectivity of the relationship of law, covenant and federalism, we will just focus on his interpretation on (1) Like Adam.

from Hosea 6:7.³⁷² Here Fesko's analysis is very much based on Boston's.³⁷³ The ESV translation for Job 31:33 goes, 'if I have concealed my transgressions *as others* (כְּאֲדָם) do by hiding my iniquity in my heart'.³⁷⁴ Nevertheless, Fesko cites Boston in agreement that כְּאֲדָם should be translated as (like Adam, not as others),³⁷⁵ as it is reminiscent of Adam's effort in covering up with fig leaves.³⁷⁶ As for Psalm 82:7, 'nevertheless, *like men others* (כְּאֲדָם) you shall die, and fall like any prince', Fesko argues that 'Adam' is a more suitable translation to provide a more powerful contrast between Adam and princes.³⁷⁷ One might argue that the greater contrast is mere man and princes, which serves as a 'merism' to imply that all human beings, high or low, are mortal.³⁷⁸ However, Fesko argues that, the contrast of Adam and the princes is more powerful as the term נָפַל (*npl, fall*) is employed in OT for the sudden death of human leaders, and 'this verse aptly describes Adam's kingly fall'.³⁷⁹ Although we cannot conclude the covenant of works solely from Psalm 82:7, it gives us a glimpse into the relationship between the federal head and the covenant. As Adam fell and died as the federal head of the covenant of works, we sin and die like him.

³⁷² Thomas Boston, *The Complete Works of Thomas Boston Vol 1-12* (Lafayette, IN: Sovereign Grace Pub, 2001), Vol. 11, A View of the Covenant of Works, Part I & Part II Boston's explanation of Job 31:33 and Psalm 82:7 in defense of the covenant of works are not cited by McGowan in *The federal theology of Thomas Boston*.

³⁷³ J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2021), 253-254

³⁷⁴ The literal meaning of אָדָם ('*ādām* ') is Adam but it can be translated as men depending on the context. Most English Bibles do not translate it as Adam c NASB, the King James Bible, the New King James Bible, Tanakh: the Holy Scripture, GOD'S WORDS Translation, American Standard Version, 1980 Darby Bible, Young's Literal Translation. Nevertheless, in Hos. 6:7 אָדָם is without a definite article, this grammatical structure is applied normally to a proper name. see:

J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2021), 245 cites À Brakel, *Christian's Reasonable Service*, I:365-66

³⁷⁵ J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2021), 253.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, (See footnote 37 in *Adam and the Covenant of Works* for Fesko's other references that support the translation 'as Adam'.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 254.

³⁷⁸ Willem A. VanGemeren, "Psalms," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Psalms (Revised Edition)*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 626.

³⁷⁹ J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2021), 254.

(2) Hosea's numerous echoes and allusions to the creation narrative

Fesko observes that more scholars have presented evidence of the link between Hosea and Genesis in recent years.³⁸⁰ Below is the most standout evidence in highlighting the vice-regent role of Adam and the fall of Adam:³⁸¹

- a. Hosea 2:18 states: 'And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground.'
- b. Hosea 4:1b-3 refers to the transgression of all men and the consequences on the earth that echo the curse in Genesis 3. 'Therefore the land mourns, and all who dwell in it languish, and also the beasts of the field and the birds of the heavens, and even the fish of the sea are taken away.' (see also: Hosea 10:8)

These few verses demonstrate Israel's state 'in terms of Adam's fall, and the redemption in terms of (new) creation' where the vice-regent role of humanity will be restored.

(3) the apostle Paul's comparison of Adam and Israel

Fesko argues that the term 'transgression' is the very same term Paul uses to characterize Adam's transgression in Romans 5:14.³⁸²

For as by the one man's disobedience the many were constituted sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be constituted righteous (Fesko's translation)

Just as Hosea compares Adam's and Israel's covenantal state, apostle Paul 'nestles Israel between Adam and Christ'.³⁸³

c. The Two Principles to Attaining Eternal Life: Doing Versus Believing

While the binding effect of 'do this and live' in the covenant of works is still valid, sinners cannot attain life via law-keeping after Adam's fall. In the incident, a man

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 255-256

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 255.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 257.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*

approached Christ and asked for the good deed for entering eternal life (Matt. 19:16-17); Fesko observes that Christ pointed to keeping the commandments.³⁸⁴ The work principle pointed out by Jesus is a comparison to the previous verses (Matt. 19:10-15) whereby a person should come by a child-like faith to Christ to enter the kingdom of heaven.³⁸⁵ Fesko also refers to Galatians 3:10-12 and claims that 'Paul sets two principles in opposition to one another, doing versus believing.'³⁸⁶ Hence, 'there are two mutually exclusive paths to justification, one by perfect obedience and the other by faith in Christ alone'; the latter is the only way in the post-fall epoch.³⁸⁷

3.1.5 Summary

Our study so far gives us an opening picture of the relationship of law and federalism in covenant from the suzerain-vassal relationship; law-keeping is an act of life-long loyalty from the vice-regent (Adam) to the covenant established by the suzerain (the LORD). From the above study, we could also see that transgression of law would mean breaching a covenant since law-keeping is the act of commitment to the covenant. Blessing follows with law-keeping, and transgression of the commandment will lead to eternal damnation.

3.2 The Law and Grace in the Covenant

Some see the covenant of works to oppose grace since Adam had to work to attain the reward of eternal life. Chapter 3.2 will demonstrate that the work-principle in the covenant of works can be retained without falling into legalism.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 209.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 209.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 210.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 265.

3.2.1 *The Benevolent Lord and the Vice-regent in the Covenant*

Fesko differentiates benevolence from grace. According to Fesko, grace is used for God's redemptive favor upon sinful men, and benevolence is God's general goodness to Adam.³⁸⁸ The benevolence to Adam includes divine image and the covenant of works.³⁸⁹

How does the covenant of works that includes a commandment to keep is a manifestation of God's love and benevolence? To answer this, Fesko explains it in 3 ways: (1) that the fact we are created in His image, declared as 'very good' and given creation as a gift is already a great benevolence upon us; it is a 'formal meeting place in the covenant that God made with Adam.'³⁹⁰ (2) It was not Adam who could labour to earn eternal life, but it was about God showing benevolence to him by giving him the ability to keep the commandment. Therefore, even if Adam were to succeed, Adam could claim no merit since it is the benevolence of God. (3) Not only that, the value of the reward (eternal life) lies not in the 'intrinsic value of Adam's obedience' but in God's unwavering promise and in the 'extravagance' graciousness of God.³⁹¹

The suzerain-vassal relationship is very much emphasized in Fesko's covenant of works. The covenant is sovereignly established in the suzerain-vassal relationship, and humans have no right to bargain; the same applies to the reward promised. The reward is a sovereign gift of God. Though Adam can hold on to the promise of the Suzerain Lord, he, as the vassal, will have no right to exchange his obedience for the reward. Bavinck described:

A creature cannot bring along or possess any rights before God. That is implicitly—in the nature of the case—impossible. A creature as such owes its very existence, all that it is and has, to God; it cannot make any claims before God, and it cannot boast of anything; it has no rights and can make no demands of any kind. There is no such thing

³⁸⁸ Ibid., 378

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 398

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 385-391

³⁹¹ Ibid., 391-408

as merit in the existence of a creature before God, nor can there be since the relation between the Creator and a creature radically and once-and-for-all eliminates any notion of merit. This is true after the fall but no less before the fall. Then too, human beings were creatures, without entitlements, without rights, without merit. When we have done everything we have been instructed to do, we are still unworthy servants (*douloi achreioi*, Luke 17:10). Now, however, the religion of Holy Scripture is such that in it human beings can nevertheless, as it were, assert certain rights before God. For they have the freedom to come to him with prayer and thanksgiving, to address him as "Father," to take refuge in him in all circumstances of distress and death, to desire all good things from him, even to expect salvation and eternal life from him. All this is possible solely because God in his condescending goodness gives rights to his creature.³⁹²

Turretin said a similar statement that God is a debtor to no man; Adam can expect reward from God on the ground of his obedience only by God's 'pact and the liberal promise of God'.³⁹³

The unmerited love and demerited grace might help us to understand the differentiation between benevolence and grace. Fesko says:

Rather than grace, a better way forward is to say that God poured out unmerited love by giving Adam the gifts of creation, existence, the divine image, and the covenant of works, the arena in which Adam was supposed to love God and his fellow human beings. But rather than love Him, Adam spurned God's gifts and idolatrously loved himself. In a stunning response, even though God had every right to condemn His covenant servant, He responded with grace – His demerited favor. In other words, in spite of Adam's demerit, his sin, God gave him a deeper manifestation of His love – His grace and mercy.³⁹⁴

In other words, Adam in the pre-fall epoch receives every goodness from God; after fall, humanity is in an *in-debt* state, yet God bestows a more profound manifestation of His love – His grace and mercy to His people.³⁹⁵ Therefore, the differentiation between benevolence and grace will lead us to appreciate God's grace better.

³⁹² Herman Bavinck, John Bolt, and John Vriend, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 570.

³⁹³ J. V. Fesko, *The Covenant of Works: Origins, Development, and Reception of the Doctrine* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020), 129. Turretin, *Institutes*, VIII.iii.16.

³⁹⁴ J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2021), 378.

³⁹⁵ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, "Debt," *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 605. 'In the Bible, righteous conduct is something one "owes" to God; hence, in theology, sin is described figuratively as being "in debt."'

3.2.2 *The Law and Love in the Covenant of Works*

Another remarkable aspect that Fesko points out is love as the essence of loyalty from the vassal to the Suzerain. As Adam is created *in covenant* and *for covenant*, he is created in love (God's benevolence) and commanded to love.

Fesko sees that love and keeping the law come together. He highlights that 'the themes of covenant, law, and love coalesce' in Deuteronomy, Israel's covenantal charter.³⁹⁶ God commands His covenantal people to love Him and keep His law.³⁹⁷ In light of the examination of the relationship of law and covenant, it is worth noting that Jesus quotes the two greatest commandments (i.e., to love God and man) from Deuteronomy 6:4-6.³⁹⁸ Fesko brings to our attention that love can be commanded, contrary to the contemporary understanding of love being predominated by emotion and feeling.³⁹⁹ Having said so, he, however, does not mean love is without affection, but 'its primary characteristic is action, not feeling.'⁴⁰⁰ We categorize Fesko's illustration of command and affection of love to *the servant's* and *bride's love*.

a. The Servant's Love

Fesko says, 'When God issues commands, He does so as a king, as Lord of His covenantally binding Word, where in every command, there is a tacit covenantal obligation,'⁴⁰¹ which also includes the command to love. This command is not a brutal command to love, but a natural command to Adam; as Adam was created *in covenant*

³⁹⁶ J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2021), 391.

Deuteronomy is a 'Book of Instruction' (Torah), the book in the OT that deals the most thoroughly with the covenant. See:

Daniel I. Block, *The NIV Application Commentary: Deuteronomy*, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 39.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 392, John 14:15

³⁹⁸ J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2021), 392.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 187.

and *for covenant*,⁴⁰² he was created in love, created and commanded to love. Being human is to love God, the more we love God, the more we live out our humanity since we are bearers of the image of God.⁴⁰³ Moreover, the commandment to love is rooted in God's love; Fesko puts it this way:

God manifests His love to Adam both by giving him the gift of creation and by entering into a covenant with him, a covenant in which Adam is clearly the inferior party. God first loved Adam so that Adam could then love God by obeying His commands.⁴⁰⁴

Hence, to love in a covenant is not a transaction but a response to the love of God, and keeping the law is a demonstration of covenantal love.⁴⁰⁵ Since the commandment is sum up to love God and love men, it is not only by our duty that we ought to keep the commandment and do the will of God; we must do it out of love. His command is not coercive, as man is created with the nature to love willingly. Bavinck wrote:

He wants human beings to be free and to serve him in love, freely and willingly (Ps. 100:3f.). Religion is freedom; it is love that does not permit itself to be coerced. For that reason it must by its very nature take the shape of a covenant in which God acts, not coercively, but with counsel, admonition, warning, invitation, petition, and in which humans serve God, not under duress or violence, but willingly, by their own free consent, moved by love to love in return. At bottom religion is a duty but also a privilege. It is not work by which we bring advantage to God, make a contribution to him, and have a right to reward. It is grace for us to be allowed to serve him. God is never indebted to us, but we are always indebted to him for the good works we do (Belgic Confession, art. 24).⁴⁰⁶

It is biblical to say God will reward our faithful service to him out of love.⁴⁰⁷ Nevertheless, it is absurd to think that we can exchange the reward from God. Because this is the love for the suzerain Lord and the reward of obedience is a sovereign gift from God, not what we can ask for. God, whom we are obliged to render our loyal love,

⁴⁰² See section 3.1.2

⁴⁰³ Billy Kristanto, *Human Being - Being Human: A Theological Anthropology in Biblical, Historical and Ecumenical Perspective* (Berlin: Peter Lang GmbH Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2020), 237

⁴⁰⁴ J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2021), 393.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁶ Herman Bavinck, John Bolt, and John Vriend, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation.*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 571.

⁴⁰⁷ I.e. Matt. 5:46, Matt. 6:1

is not only an intimate person but is our suzerain King.⁴⁰⁸ According to Fesko, God has set the terms and stipulated that He will reward a finite work of obedience with an infinite reward.⁴⁰⁹ Furthermore, love is no longer love if we hope to exchange it for a reward. Fesko quotes rabbi Rashi saying to explain the nature of service to God:

In this vein medieval rabbi Rashi (1040-1105) explains the nature of service to God that is relevant to the Adamic context: 'You should not say, "I will carry out the commandments of my Creator so that He will supply me with all my needs," but, instead, serve out of love....The selfless disregard of reward brings the greatest reward. There is room for reward and punishment within a structure of covenantal love, but there is no room for genuine covenantal love, but there is no room for genuine covenantal love premised on reward and punishment alone.'⁴¹⁰

Fesko concludes, 'covenant and love set the context for obedience and reward.'⁴¹¹

b. The Bride's Love

Servant love emphasizes the notion of the loyal love of Adam, the vassal to the suzerain King; the bride's love, on the other hand, emphasizes Adam's desire, and 'one of the chief places that speak of love and desire is the Song of Songs.'⁴¹² Fesko claims that 'there are intra-canonical connections between Genesis 1–3 and the Song that provide an inter-textual explanation of Adam's relationship to God in the pre-fall context.'⁴¹³ The Song points to the restored relationship between God and His people through Christ.⁴¹⁴ He cites two Scriptural explanations for his claim:⁴¹⁵ (1) the term *desire* in 'I am my beloved's and his desire is for me' (Songs 7:10) echoes Eve's distorted desire for Adam, and here the distorted desire is restored. (2) Repetition of the phrase

⁴⁰⁸ Markus Zehnder, "Building on Stone? Deuteronomy and Esarhaddon's Loyalty Oaths (Part 2): Some Additional Observations," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 19, no. 1–4 (2009): 513. 'in several document ranging from the 18th to the 7th centuries B.C., "love" is used to describe the loyalty and friendship uniting either independent kings or sovereign and vassal or king and subjects'

⁴⁰⁹ J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2021), 399-400

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 393-394 quotes from

Jon D. Levenson, *The Love of God: Divine Gift, Human Gratitude, and Manual Faithfulness in Judaism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 13-14

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, 394

⁴¹² *Ibid.*

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 395.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 395-396.

'whom my soul loves' in Song of Songs chapters 1 and 3 echoes the *love Shema* 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and *with all your soul* and with all your might' (Deut. 6:5) which should be Adam's love for God.

3.2.3 *The Republication of the Covenant of Works as a Part of the Covenant of Grace*

Some, like Muray and McGowan, view the Mosaic covenant as a gracious covenant from the Abrahamic covenant. They regarded the republication of the covenant of works as confusing the gracious notion of the Mosaic covenant.⁴¹⁶ Some even contend against the attempt to identify the Mosaic covenant with the republication of the covenant of works.⁴¹⁷

According to Fesko, the covenant of works reappeared in the Mosaic covenant.⁴¹⁸ This reappearance is commonly regarded as a republication of the covenant of works. Fesko opts for the term 'reappearance' rather than 'republication' to avoid being misunderstood as a re-establishment of the covenant of works.⁴¹⁹ Fesko raises a few important points for the republication of the covenant of works:⁴²⁰

(1) The Mosaic covenant is part of the covenant of grace

Fesko says that after the pronouncement of the *protoevangelion* in Gen. 3:15, God's dealings with His people have been on the basis of grace.

⁴¹⁶ A. T. B. McGowan, *Adam, Christ and Covenant: Exploring Headship Theology* (London: Apollos, imprint of Inter-Varsity Press, 2016), 73.

Richard Gamble, "A Summary Analysis Of The Orthodox Presbyterian Church's Report On Republication," *Reformed Presbyterian Theological Journal Volume 4* 4, no. 2 (2017): 60.

⁴¹⁷ A. T. B. McGowan, *Adam, Christ and Covenant: Exploring Headship Theology* (London: Apollos, imprint of Inter-Varsity Press, 2016), 63.

Ben C. Dunson, "'The Law Evidently Is Not Contrary to Faith': Galatians and the Republication of the Covenant of Works," *The Westminster Theological Journal* 79, no. 2 (2017): 243.

⁴¹⁸ J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2021), 339-356.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 340.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*

- (2) The fallen humans are incapable of obtaining eternal life by means of the covenant of works
- (3) The reappearance of the covenant is not a re-administration of the covenant of works in the sense of giving human being one more shot for eternal life.
- (4) The purpose of the reappearance of the covenant of works is to:
 - Remind sinners of their liability for the broken covenant of works
 - Show Israel that they are incapable of perfect obedience to the law
 - Point to the one like Adam, Christ, who will come and fulfill the abandoned covenant of works.

We have seen in the previous sections how Fesko deals with the 'do this and live' principle in Leviticus 18:5 and subsequent passages to show the liability and our transgression of the covenant of works. Those passages are indeed the reappearance of the covenant of works since they show the blessing-sanction stipulated in the law.

Apart from the passages we have discussed, Fesko also applies Charles Hodge's exegesis on 2 Corinthians 3:1-11 to prove the republication of the covenant of works.

Paul compares the two covenants in the following manner:⁴²¹

Verses	Old Covenant	New Covenant
vv. 7-8	Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone	will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory.
v. 9	For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation,	the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory.
v. 11	For if what was being brought to an end came with glory,	much more will what is permanent have glory.

⁴²¹ Table is taken directly from J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2021), 343.

Fesko refers the 'ministry of death' as a negative characterization of the Mosaic covenant, as it highlights the element that deals with condemnation.⁴²² Fesko sees the extent of condemnation to the point of making a daring statement:

Paul's statement about the 'ministry of death' cannot be reduced to the pedagogical use of the law...There is more in view than the law's pedagogical function to drive sinners to Christ; instead, Paul highlights elements that deal with condemnation – something beyond the three uses of the law.⁴²³

He notices that though Hodge believed that the plan of salvation has been the same from the OT, he pointed to our attention that the apostle Paul often speaks of the Mosaic law as a covenant of works.⁴²⁴ According to Fesko, Hodge's statements were based on how he viewed the Mosaic covenant as God's dealing with individuals and Israel as a whole.⁴²⁵ Hodge regarded the Mosaic covenant as part of the covenant of grace and a national covenant; the national promise would be granted upon national obedience.⁴²⁶ Fesko comments that the exile of Israel as a whole that echoes Adam's casting away proves Hodge's statement.⁴²⁷ It is more reasonable to explain the blessing-sanction passages like Deuteronomy 28 in the Mosaic covenant with the republication of the covenant of works since Israel as a whole was bound to fail like Adam at the very beginning. Man in his sinful state cannot fulfill the law in the covenant of works. Fesko comments that it is better to use a typological relationship to understand the Mosaic covenant rather than 'the national covenant' as described by Hodge.⁴²⁸ This is because the republication of the covenant of works is not putting Israel into the probation test,

⁴²² *Ibid.*, 343-344.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, 343.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*, 344.

Quotes from Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*. (New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1891), 56–57. 'Every reader of the New Testament must be struck with the fact that the apostle often speaks of the Mosaic law as he does of the moral law considered as a covenant of works; that is, presenting the promise of life on the condition of perfect obedience.'

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, 345-346.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*, 345. Quotes from Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*. (New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1891), 58.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.* Quotes from Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*. (New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1891), 58.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*, 345.

just like how Adam experienced but instead points us to Christ. The purpose of the republication of the covenant of works is to show the covenant's liability and our transgression and then to lead us to Christ. According to Hodge, the Mosaic covenant also reveals the gospel.⁴²⁹ That was why ceremonial laws and sacrifices are found in the Mosaic economy, which Hodge regarded as the shadows and the types of Christ.⁴³⁰

Fesko, in his conclusion, offers a broad definition of the republication thesis:

The covenant of works reappears in the Mosaic covenant in order to demonstrate humanity's inability to merit eternal life, to remind Israelite sinners that they stand under the condemnation of the broken covenant of works, and to foreshadow the active obedience of Christ.⁴³¹

3.2.4 Summary

The covenant of works reflects the benevolence of God to Adam. Adam was created in God's image and likeness to keep the law of the covenant. He was even given the promise of an extravagantly greater reward than his obedience's intrinsic value. Adam failed, and the curse was laid upon him and his posterity. Nevertheless, God shows a more significant measure of His demerited favor, His grace, and mercy to Adam and all humanity, that whoever believes in Him will be under the covenant of grace. In the administration of the covenant of grace, the covenant of works reappeared in the Mosaic covenant to remind us of our liability, sin, and inability to keep the law and point us to Christ, the Last Adam. Adam failed to keep the covenant of works, but Christ fulfilled it. In section 3.3, we will look at the federal headship of Adam and Christ.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.* quotes from Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*. (New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1891), 58.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, 345-346.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, 355.

see also: J. V. Fesko, 'The Republication of the Covenant of Works (with Response by Cornelis P. Venema)', *The Confessional Presbyterian*, vol. 8 (2012): 212.

3.3 Adam and Christ as the Federal Head

We have seen in section 3.1 that Adam is created as the image and likeness of God, which means that he is the vice-regent of God and must keep the law and do the will of God to achieve the eschatological goal, namely eternal life. The first Adam fails in keeping the law of the covenant of works, but the second Adam, Christ succeeds, and Fesko puts it this way:

The last Adam takes up the failed work of the first, and His own obedience to the Father helps us to understand what Adam's obedience was supposed to be: 'As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love' (John 15:9-10)⁴³²

According to Fesko, just as law and covenant are inseparable, the federal head and the covenant are inseparable.

3.3.1 *Federal Headship and Covenant*

a. 1 Corinthians 15:20-28, 35-49

Fesko claims that 1 Corinthians 15, particularly v.20-28 and v.35-39 finds its roots in protology, Genesis 1-3.⁴³³ 'For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive' (1 Cor. 15:21-22). Fesko states that these verses clearly show 'the parallel between death brought by the first Adam and the resurrection from death brought by the second Adam.'⁴³⁴ Christ did not just come to deal with sin and death, but He came to fulfill the intended goal of humanity, which is the dominion mandate.⁴³⁵ Fesko notices that Paul draws upon the dominion mandate of Genesis 1:26-27 by quoting Psalm 8:6, 'all things are put in subjection'.⁴³⁶ He further states that God intended goal

⁴³² *Ibid.*, 393

⁴³³ J. V. Fesko, *Last Things First: Unlocking Genesis 1-3 with the Christ of Eschatology* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2007), 163.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, 163-164.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*

for the creation has not changed, 'God placed all things under Adam's feet, yet man abandoned his divine vocation', and the Last Adam took up the abandoned work of the first Adam.⁴³⁷ The resurrection of the rest of the harvest does not merely mean that Christ's people will be freed from death and judgment. According to Fesko, it implies that the new humanity who bears the image of the Last Adam will be resurrected, and the image of God will be spread unto the end of the earth, thus fulfilling the mandate of filling the earth.⁴³⁸

Similarly, for v.35-49, Fesko asserts that the key to understanding these verses lies in protology, Genesis 1-2.⁴³⁹ He argues that being natural is not sinful; it was the natural state God had bestowed Adam and Eve to have the desire and the capacity for the beatific vision.⁴⁴⁰ Adam fell and distorted the image of God, and Christ came so that we would bear His image. Not only the Last Adam restores His people, but He will also bring about a new creation. This is seen in verses 36-41 (seeds and plants, man and creatures, and astral bodies) that allude to the creation week.⁴⁴¹

It is worth noting that as Fesko emphasizes the true humanity of Christ, he does also mention the divinity of Christ being the life-giving Spirit. Fesko quotes James Dunn:

Christ is last Adam, prototype of God's new human creation, in accord with the original blueprint. On the other, he is on the side of God, co-regent with God, co-lifegiver with the Spirit. And in between he is God's Son, whose sonship is shared with those who believe in him, the elder brother of a new family, firstborn from the dead. Yet he is also Son of God in power. And he is Lord, whose lordship both completes the intended dominion of Adam and exercises divine prerogatives.⁴⁴²

See also:

Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, "1 Corinthians," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), 745.

⁴³⁷ Ibid., 164.

⁴³⁸ Ibid., 165.

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁰ J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2021).

⁴⁴¹ J. V. Fesko, *Last Things First: Unlocking Genesis 1-3 with the Christ of Eschatology* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2007), 165.

⁴⁴² Ibid., 166. Quotes from

James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2003), 265.

While it is true that in this context, the Last Adam became the 'life-giving spirit' only after His resurrection, He can never give life apart from His divine nature. Even though Adam fulfilled the covenant of works, he cannot give an eschatos life since he himself received the breath of life from God. It is God who will reward Adam and his posterity with eternal life should he succeed in keeping the covenant.

b. Romans 5:12-21

Like McGowan, Fesko observes that Romans 5:12-21 is commonly appealed to by Reformed theologians in supporting the covenant of works. It is a passage that places Adam and Christ in parallel in which sin and death came through Adam, whereas the effect is undone through the life of Christ, His death, and resurrection.⁴⁴³ However, in Fesko's works, it can be perceived that this passage is not dealt with separately but in organic connection to other passages. In the chapter of *Adam, Israel, and Christ*, of Fesko's *Adam and the Covenant of Works*, Fesko attempts to prove that Adam and Israel were both in the *nomos*-governed state, which was covenantal.⁴⁴⁴ From here, we can see how God imputed the respective actions of each federal head, Adam and Christ, to those they respectively represent, and this imputation is also covenantal.⁴⁴⁵

Fesko argues that Paul is contrasting the two redemptive periods—— Adam to Moses and after Moses, with the statement 'death reigned from Adam to Moses'.⁴⁴⁶ The key verse that Fesko explores is Romans 5:12-14; specifically, the verse 'death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam'.⁴⁴⁷ According to Fesko, Adam and Israel were given the law through verbal revelation from God and were under this sanction of law, Adam died of transgression,

⁴⁴³ J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2021), 281.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 282.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 283

and Israel was warned of death upon transgression.⁴⁴⁸ Israel's transgression of the law is indeed the transgression of the covenant since the law was given in the Mosaic covenant and served as Jewish's special possession and covenantal identity.⁴⁴⁹ Furthermore, it is stated in Romans 2:25 that circumcision, a covenantal sign becomes uncircumcision under law-breaking. Murray comments on this verse that 'practicing the law is thus equivalent to keeping the covenant', and that breaking the law is equivalent to breaking the covenant.⁴⁵⁰ Hence, when Paul separates Adam's period and the period after Israel, where they died (in Israel context might die) of the transgression of the law, it shows that Adam's transgression of the law is also a covenantal transgression.⁴⁵¹

One might still argue that the law in the Mosaic covenant does not imply that the commandment in Genesis 2 is covenantal. Nevertheless, Fesko further claims that apart from the creation narrative, there is no other narrative where God administers His law apart from an explicitly stated covenant.⁴⁵² In other words, God's commandment to Adam was likely covenantal. To prove this, Fesko explains that the reason why Paul uses two different terms, sin (ἁμαρτία) and transgression (παράβασις) is that sin denotes moral failure and transgression denotes covenantal transgression.⁴⁵³ He then proves this statement by listing out all instances of παράβασις in both NT and OT.⁴⁵⁴

Adam was given the law; he died of transgression, likewise, Israel was warned of the transgression of the law/covenant. The other people, apart from Adam and Israelites, did not verbally receive the law from the Lord. Hence, they died not due to direct transgression of the covenant but because of Adam's transgression as the

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁹ A. Andrew Das, *Paul, the Law, and the Covenant* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 69.

⁴⁵⁰ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 1, *The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968), 85.

Note the term breaking is equivalent to transgressing. Παράβατης (transgressor) is used in Rom. 2:15

⁴⁵¹ J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2021), 283.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*, 284-290.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*, 285.

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 286-290. All instances of παράβασις in both NT and OT are listed by Fesko

corporate covenantal representative.⁴⁵⁵ Adam's transgression resulted in the imputation of Adam's sin and guilt to all humankind. It does not mean we do not sin, but rather the reason we sin is part of the effect of this imputation. Although, the term 'count' in Romans refers to the imputation of Christ's righteousness on Abraham and us through faith,⁴⁵⁶ we can also equally say that the sin of Adam is imputed to us by referring to Romans 5:18. Furthermore, Fesko argues that for Romans 5:18, the term 'constituted' or 'appointed sinners' over 'made' is preferred, as they show the legal sense of *κατεστάθησαν*: 'many were "constitute" or "appointed sinners" by the virtue of Adam's one sin' (Rom. 5:19).⁴⁵⁷ And hence, the theory of imitation and realism on how we participate in Adam's sin are ruled out.⁴⁵⁸

Just like law and transgression in a covenantal context, imputation, which has a legal sense, is covenantal. Just as Romans 5:18-19 states that the one act of one man affects all those in him, Fesko refers to several Scripture passages to show that the covenant 'binds the one and many together'.⁴⁵⁹ In all that instances, one act of righteousness or transgression can bring positive and negative consequences, respectively.⁴⁶⁰ This shows that the Adam-Christ parallel has a universal effect, Adam fell, and thus all humanity in him faced the negative consequence (the eternal damnation), and Christ's one act of righteousness at the cross brings about eternal life to those who are in Him throughout all generations.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 283, 291.

⁴⁵⁶ Romans 4

⁴⁵⁷ J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2021), 294.

For legal sense see also: William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 492.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 293-295.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 296-298.

See also J. V. Fesko, *Death in Adam, Life in Christ: The Doctrine of Imputation* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2016).

e.g. Achan's sin (Josh. 7), David's sinful census (2 Sam. 24; cf. 1 Chron. 21), Daniel's vision of the Son of Man (Dan. 7), Leviticus 16 and the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:21-22), Isaiah's suffering servant (Isa. 53:11-12), Joshua the high priest's investiture (Zech. 3:1-5; cf. Isa. 61:10)

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

Besides, Fesko argues that Romans 5 is within a covenantal framework evidently by the use of transgression (παράβασις) and constitution (κατεστάθησαν) and is an allusion to Isaiah 53, which also in a covenantal context.⁴⁶¹ Although Fesko does not further explain how Isaiah 53 is being covenantal, moving on to Isaiah 54, we can see the major theme of the covenant of peace after Christ's suffering and the imputation of His righteousness in Isaiah 53.⁴⁶²

3.3.2 *Union with Christ*

a. *John Owen on Union with Christ and Justification*

According to Fesko, Owen played a good part by setting forth on *union with Christ* and *justification* in his engagement of the debates between antinomianism and neonomianism.⁴⁶³ Fesko acknowledges the recent claims about the Reformed orthodox like Owen that they do not have *union with Christ* in mind.⁴⁶⁴ This position is opposite to Calvin, who emphasized *union with Christ*, did not have *ordo salutis* in mind, but regarded justification and justification sanctification as double grace under the *union with Christ*.⁴⁶⁵ In Fesko's essay, he tries to prove that Owen embraces union with Christ while holding an *ordo salutis* that prioritizes the doctrine of justification over sanctification.⁴⁶⁶

According to Fesko, Owen's union with Christ and justification are based on his *pactum salutis* (covenant of redemption).⁴⁶⁷ Fesko lists out the five characteristics of

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 298.

⁴⁶² Michael G. McKelvey, "The New Covenant as Promised in the Major Prophets," in *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Guy Prentiss Waters, J. Nicholas Reid, and John R. Muether (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 206.

⁴⁶³ J. V. Fesko, "John Owen on Union with Christ and Justification," *Themelios* 37, no. 1 (2012): 8.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 8–9.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

'In general terms many Reformed theologians held to a threefold division of the *pactum salutis*, the covenant of works, and the covenant of grace *Pactum salutis* is 'is the covenant made among the members of the Trinity to bring about the redemption of fallen man through the covenant of grace.'

pactum salutis explained by Owen:⁴⁶⁸ (1) mutual agreement of the Father and the Son on the common goal of the salvation of the elect, (2) the Father as the principle of the covenant that requires the Son for the accomplishing of the works in securing the redemption, (3) the promised reward of the Father upon accomplishing His will, (4) the acceptance of the works by the Son, (5) the acceptance of Son's work by the Father. Owen believes these 5 points show that the eternal agreement between the Father and the Son is covenantal and serve as the ground for his doctrine of *union with Christ* and justification.⁴⁶⁹ Fesko points out that for Owen, the election is coordinated with *pactum salutis* which entails other loci like Christology, Pneumatology, and soteriology.⁴⁷⁰ This is because the 'whole of redemption, justification, and reconciliation is predicated upon the work of Christ, which is agreed upon in the *pactum*, but is not effectual until its actual execution in history'.⁴⁷¹ Hence justification is agreed upon in eternity but is only in effect on a believer when he is effectually called and united with Christ spiritually.

In Owen's understanding, Union with Christ is not merely an intellectual comprehension but a spiritual conjugal bond effected by the Holy Spirit out of the love of the triune God.⁴⁷² Owen stated that the grace of union with Christ is our participation in him and his nature.⁴⁷³ It is where God communicates all the graces like adoption, justification, sanctification, etc.⁴⁷⁴ John 14-16 evidently shows that the love of God and

See J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2021), 402. 'The covenant of redemption and its fulfillment in the covenant of grace bookend the covenant of works' For *pactum salutis*, see J. V. Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2016).

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., 10.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² Ibid. 12.

⁴⁷³ John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, ed. W. H. Goold, vol. 21, Works of John Owen (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1854), 149. See Hebrews 3:14, 'For we have come to share in Christ'

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid. 12.

the spiritual blessing meet in the union with Christ and ultimately union with the triune God.⁴⁷⁵ We can only bear fruit if we are to remain in Christ.⁴⁷⁶ Hence, Fesko states that Owen believes the *union with Christ* as an 'all-encompassing doctrinal rubric that embraces all of the elements of redemption'⁴⁷⁷

When God effectually calls the believer, they experience spiritual union with Christ, regeneration of faith, and come to faith in Christ. Fesko notes that Owen had no problem 'with affirming both union with Christ and articulating an *ordo salutis*.'⁴⁷⁸ Sinclair Ferguson summarizes Owen's *ordo salutis* as: Effectual Calling; Regeneration, Faith; Repentance; Justification; Adoption; and Sanctification.⁴⁷⁹ As Paul mentioned in his letters, all these blessings are experienced only in Christ, but with a specific order. Fesko takes for example, 'Owen explains that Paul never speaks about the necessity of sanctification, regeneration, or renovation by the work of the Spirit antecedently to the believer's justification.'⁴⁸⁰ Hence a believer's justification has to be antecedent to his sanctification.⁴⁸¹ Fesko comments that for Owen, justification is more important than sanctification since we are accepted by God, not that we are sanctified, but we are justified.⁴⁸² However, a sanctified heart and life are essential in proving we are justified. Fesko puts it this way:

Owen gives *priority* in this sense: a person can say that they are sanctified because they are justified, but a person cannot say that they are justified because they are sanctified. In other words, Owen maintains the classic hallmark of Reformed theology: justification and sanctification are distinct but inseparable benefits of union with Christ, but a person's sanctification (the fruit of which is good works) is not in any way mixed or confused with their justification. Justification logically comes before sanctification

⁴⁷⁵ Esp. John 14:20-21

²⁰ In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.

⁴⁷⁶ John 15

⁴⁷⁷ J. V. Fesko, "John Owen on Union with Christ and Justification," *Themelios* 37, no. 1 (2012): 12.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., 12. quotes from

Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Christian Life: A Doctrinal Introduction* (Banner of Truth, 2013).

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

⁴⁸² Ibid., 14.

because good works are the fruits and evidences of justification, not its antecedent cause. Moreover, justification is a complete act whereas sanctification is an inaugurated but nevertheless incomplete process.⁴⁸³

It is important to note that when Owen puts the priority of justification over sanctification, it is not in terms of chronologically but logically. Fesko comments that, for Owen, justification and sanctification are the dual benefits of the union with Christ. Justification is prior to sanctification because Christ's perfect righteousness is imputed to us by which God accepts us.⁴⁸⁴

Justification carries a legal sense because it is based on the eternal treaty between the Father and the Son where the Son is the *surety* of the new covenant.⁴⁸⁵ From Owen's LXX lexeme study on *surety*, he concludes that:

A *surety* is an undertaker for another, or others, who thereon is justly and *legally* to answer what is due to them, or from them.⁴⁸⁶

Christ's suretiship is legal in the sense that the sin of the elect is imputed on Christ, and Christ's righteousness is imputed on the elect as the stipulation of the *pactum salutis*. Both justification and sanctification are to be in Christ. When God effectually calls the believers, Holy Spirit works in believers' hearts, causing them to have faith to be united with Christ, the mediator and *surety* of the new covenant. By Christ's legal suretiship and through our union with Him, we experience justification.⁴⁸⁷

b. Union with Christ in the Book of Romans

Fesko notices the connection between Romans 5 and 6. In Romans 5, 'Paul explained the significance of federal headship—either Adam or Christ represents us',

⁴⁸³ Ibid., 9.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid. 18.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., 17.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., 18. Especially Judah's words to Jacob concerning Benjamin, 'I will be surety for him of my hand shalt thou require him.' Owen explains, 'In undertaking to be surety for him, as unto his safety and preservation, he engages himself to *answer* for all that should befall him; for so he adds, 'If I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, let me be guilty for ever.'

⁴⁸⁷ John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, vol. 5 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, n.d.), 196.

and that we are only justified in Christ.⁴⁸⁸ Romans 5 shows that we can only be saved if we come to Christ and receive the imputed righteousness of Christ by faith. Law is not a means of salvation but to show our sinfulness, as Paul said: 'Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more' (Rom. 5:20, Fesko's translation). In Romans 6, Paul clarified that though we are justified by faith, we are not to continue in sin since we are baptized into the death of Christ and dead to sin.

Fesko notices that Paul 'draws attention to the closely related doctrines of baptism and union with Christ.'⁴⁸⁹ Fesko states:

Our baptisms testify to the reality that we have been saved from God's wrath and have been united to Christ through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, by which the Spirit indwells us and effectually calls us into the state of grace out of the state of spiritual death. But to be baptized into Christ means to be joined to Him in everything that He is.⁴⁹⁰

In fact, the phrases like 'baptized into Moses, into Christ', and 'baptized into His death' in the Scripture show the connotation of participation.⁴⁹¹ Certainly, it is not water baptism but the baptism of the Holy Spirit; the water baptism serves as a sign of the new covenant.⁴⁹² It is worth noting that when we are baptized in Christ, we join Him in everything He is. It does not mean we can have a share of Christ's divine nature, but we conform to the perfect image (humanity) of Christ.⁴⁹³ When we put on the uniform of Christ, we are putting on the imputed righteousness of Christ and are counted as a holy people of God. Therefore we are to live accordingly. But it is not our endeavor to live a holy life since we are not only joined to the imputed righteousness of Christ but also

⁴⁸⁸ J. V. Fesko, *Romans*, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Jon D. Payne, The Lectio Continua Expository Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), 152.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹¹ Rom. 6:3, 1 Cor. 10:2, 1 Cor. 12:13, Gal. 3:27.

⁴⁹² J. V. Fesko, *Romans*, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Jon D. Payne, The Lectio Continua Expository Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), 105–106.

⁴⁹³ Eph. 4:21–24, 1 Cor. 15:45

joined to the perfect image of Christ. We are dead to sin and alive to God, start to desire to love God as the bearer of the image of God is supposed to.⁴⁹⁴ Being united with Christ is about being restored in the perfect image of Christ, the Last Adam.⁴⁹⁵

Being united with Christ does not mean that we can experience perfect holiness immediately and never sin. Fesko illustrates that an adult can sometimes be childish even though he is no longer a child. Or we could say the spiritual blessings we are experiencing are *already and not yet*.⁴⁹⁶ Fesko clarifies that Paul is saying that a born-again Christian will never continue to live in sin; he now has a new heart that experiences continual sanctification.⁴⁹⁷ Though we are united with Christ and possess a new heart, we need a constant reminder of our new status as the sons of God to live a holy life effectively. That's why after explaining the impossibility of a believer continuing to live in sin, Paul exhorted the believer 'must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.' (Rom. 6:11)⁴⁹⁸ Fesko comments that recognizing that we are united with Christ by faith will 'undoubtedly have a great impact on our sanctification and the way that we live our lives.'⁴⁹⁹ Still, it is not our cognitive understanding of the union with Christ that gives us the strength to live a sanctified life, but Holy Spirit works in our hearts through the words of God.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁴ J. V. Fesko, *Romans*, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Jon D. Payne, The Lectio Continua Expository Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), 154.

⁴⁹⁵ J. V. Fesko, *The Need for Creeds Today: Confessional Faith in a Faithless Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), 113. See also

⁴⁹⁶ Brandon D. Crowe, *The Path of Faith: A Biblical Theology of Covenant and Law*, Essential Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2021), 147. See Jer. 31:31-34 and Heb. 8:8-12

⁴⁹⁷ J. V. Fesko, *Romans*, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Jon D. Payne, The Lectio Continua Expository Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), 155–157.

⁴⁹⁸ 'must consider' is in imperative form.

⁴⁹⁹ J. V. Fesko, *Romans*, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Jon D. Payne, The Lectio Continua Expository Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), 156.

⁵⁰⁰ J. V. Fesko, *The Rule of Love: Broken, Fulfilled, and Applied* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009), 120.

Union with Christ with *ordo salutis* will help us avoid the dilemma of being antinomian or neonomian. By recognizing that we are justified in Christ, we know that we cannot earn any merit for salvation but receive grace freely by faith. Recognizing the accompaniment of sanctification after justification in Christ will help us see that since we are now united with Christ, we ought to live in the newness of life. Fesko's union with Christ is founded on the *pactum salutis* with Christ as the legal surety. It comes to realization when the Holy Spirit effectually calls a believer, and the believer experiences a spiritual baptism by Christ. Fesko relates *union with Christ* with baptism. Just as baptism into Moses via the Red sea is covenantal, baptism into Christ is covenantal. Hence, Fesko's union with Christ is covenantal.

3.3.3 *Implication*

a. *Inseparableness of Federal headship and Covenant*

Fesko's study on the covenant of works and his exegesis of 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 5 demonstrates the inseparableness of federal headship and covenant. God made the covenant of works with Adam, the federal head of humanity, and gave the covenantal-binding law to Adam. Adam transgressed the covenant of works, and sin and guilt were imputed to all humanity. All humanity is under the liability of the covenant of works, and we are required to keep the law in the covenant of works but no longer can fulfill the covenant of works; we need another federal head to fulfill the covenant of works. God, out of His grace and mercy, sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to enter the sin-fallen world 'under the law' (Fesko regards it as 'under the provision of the covenant of works'), fulfilled the covenant of works and secured the reward of the covenant of works for His people.⁵⁰¹

⁵⁰¹ J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2021), 299.

In the covenant of works, eschatological life was the goal for Adam, but he failed to secure it for himself and his posterity. Fesko comments that Christ came not just as the Messiah but as the last Adam, emphasizing the eschatological aspect of Adam. It is by the Last Adam's works we can enjoy the *eschatos life* promised to the first Adam. Besides, Fesko regards the *union with Christ* as based on the *pactum salutis* with Christ as the surety. Hence, being united with Christ means being united with the covenant surety.

In short, federal headship and covenant are inseparable. A federal head's faithfulness in keeping the covenant will affect those in him. To be in Adam means to be in the covenant of works, whereas to be in Christ means to be in the covenant of grace.

b. Adam-Israel Connection is Important for Understanding the Adam-Christ Parallel

From Romans 5:12-21, Fesko observes that Paul related Adam-Christ parallel from the Adam-Israel connection. Fesko claims: 'the fact that Paul, like Hosea before him, compared Adam's and Israel's states means that they mutually inform one another because of their similar covenantal contexts.'⁵⁰² Fesko makes this claim based on his understanding of the inseparability of the law and the covenant. The law is the detailed obligation a person keeps as a loyalty to the covenant established.⁵⁰³ Adam and Israel were given the law and are obliged to keep it as their loyalty to the Lord. Fesko says that Romans 5:12-14 shows that 'both Adam and Israel were under *nomos*-governed states; in simpler terms, Adam and Israel were both in covenantal contexts.'⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*, 300.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 283.

The designation of the son of God exemplifies the parallel between Adam and Israel in covenantal contexts. Fesko quotes the Scriptures that directly identify both Adam and Israel as the sons of God: Luke 3:38 'the son of Adam, the son of God' and Exodus 4:22 'Israel is my (Yahweh) firstborn son', and claims that God, in the big picture of redemptive history has two sons.⁵⁰⁵ Just as the vassal-king is to do the commandment of the Suzerain-lord, the son is to do the will of the Father.⁵⁰⁶ Horton says: 'part of the significance of the *imago* as image and likeness (Gen. 1:26) is that it is the royal investiture of a servant-son.'⁵⁰⁷ Horton links sonship and royal dominion; he refers to Genesis 1:28 and Psalm 8:4-8 and says that the mandate to rule the whole creation as God's vice-regent is given to humanity but not to any other creature.⁵⁰⁸

Both Adam and Israel, as the sons of God, received the law in the covenant but transgressed the covenant. Adam and Israel are the types of the one who was to come, Christ, the Son of God. Hosea 11:1 and Matthew 2:15 are the passages that directly show Israel typified Christ. Hosea 11:1 says: 'When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son; hence, it is no doubt Hosea 11:1 refers to Israel. Nevertheless, Matthew applies Hosea 11:1 to Christ's exodus from Egypt: 'Out of Egypt I called my son' (Matt. 2:15)⁵⁰⁹ Fesko claims from these passages that it is undeniable that both Adam and Israel typify Christ.⁵¹⁰ The context of Hosea 11:1 shows that despite Israel was called as a son, the more they are called, the more they went away (Hos 11:2); Christ, on the other hand, has been obedient and fulfilled the law. Beale puts it this way:

Therefore, Matthew contrasts Jesus as the "son" (2:15) with Hosea's "son" (11:1). The latter who came out of Egypt was not obedient, and was judged but would

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 340.

⁵⁰⁶ F. C. Fensham, "Covenant, Alliance," ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 235.

Kevin Giles, "The Orthodox Doctrine of the Trinity," *Priscilla Papers* 26, no. 3 (2012): 16.

⁵⁰⁷ Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 397.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 397.

⁵⁰⁹ J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2021), 342.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*

be restored (11:2–11), while the former did what Israel should have done: Jesus came out of Egypt, was perfectly obedient, did not deserve judgment but suffered it anyway for guilty Israel and the world in order to restore them to God. Matthew portrays Jesus to be recapitulating the history of Israel because he sums up Israel in himself. Since Israel disobeyed, Jesus has come to do what they should have, so he must retrace Israel's steps up to the point they failed, and then continue to obey and succeed in the mission Israel should have carried out.⁵¹¹

The context of the temptation of Jesus Christ (Luke 4:1-12) also shows the Adam-Israel-Christ parallel. The chapter before the temptation of Jesus in Luke 4 traces Jesus all the way back to Adam, and this marks Jesus as the new Adam at the start of His ministry.⁵¹² The temptation of Jesus recapitulates the temptation of Adam, Barrett says:

To begin with such typology leads the reader to enter Luke's Gospel by first considering the ways Christ is like and unlike Adam. Like Adam, Christ has come to represent God's covenant people; and like Adam, Christ will be put to the test (Luke 4:1–15) to see if he will remain obedient to the covenant. Yet unlike Adam, Christ will obey where Adam disobeyed, so that by his obedience to the word of God the people of God are redeemed from Adam's curse. As the last Adam, Jesus reveals himself to be the true son of God Adam never was.⁵¹³

Not only does the temptation of Jesus recapitulates Adam's temptation, it also recapitulates Israel's temptation in the wilderness. The temptation of Jesus for forty days parallels the testing of Israel in the wilderness for forty years.⁵¹⁴ Besides, the experience of Israel going into the wilderness through the Red Sea also typifies Jesus's temptation in the wilderness after His baptism.⁵¹⁵

Besides the Adam-Christ parallel and Israel-Christ parallel, Fesko also observes the Adam-Israel parallel. According to Fesko, the way Pentateuch (especially Num.

⁵¹¹ G. K. Beale, "The Use Of Hosea 11:1 In Matthew 2:15: One More Time," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 55 55, no. 4 (2012): 710. Fesko cites Beale works: see J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2021), 342.

⁵¹² Matthew Barrett, *Canon, Covenant and Christology: Rethinking Jesus and the Scriptures of Israel*, ed. D. A. Carson, vol. 51, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* (London; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; IVP Academic, 2020), 222–223.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁴ R. C. Sproul, ed., *The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version (2015 Edition)* (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2015), 1676.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*

25:5-9) describes the promised land in terms evocative of Eden.⁵¹⁶ Besides, Fesko says that just as God gave Adam the command of prohibition with a warning (Gen. 2:17), He also gave Israel a series of commands with similar curses annexed to them.⁵¹⁷ According to Fesko, the Adam-Israel parallel are identified by the earliest Jewish OT interpreters and determined that Israel's tenure in the land was a recapitulation of Adam's probation in the garden.⁵¹⁸

From the above Adam-Christ parallel and Israel-Christ parallel, their covenantal context, and the transgression of Adam and Israel, Fesko concludes that:

Both Adam and Israel typify Christ – this is undeniable. The type-antitype relationship between Adam, Israel, and Christ highlights the faithlessness of God's sons (Adam and Israel) and the faithfulness of God's only begotten Son, Jesus. To argue that the covenant of works does not reappear in the Mosaic covenant disrupts the typological trajectory that culminates in Christ⁵¹⁹

3.4 Critical Examination of the validity of the Covenant of Works

Fesko's study demonstrates the liabilities of the covenant of works and further claims a republication of works in the Mosaic covenant.⁵²⁰ One main issue we perceived from Fesko's works so far is the place of the third use of the law in a covenantal context that has not been dealt with thoroughly. Besides, there was a debate between Venema and Fesko regarding the republication of the covenant of works.

Hence, before using Fesko's work to examine McGowan's headship theology critically, it is crucial to examine the validity of his doctrine of the covenant of works.

⁵¹⁶ J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2021), 340.

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.* Regarding the reflection upon the prohibition against eating the fruit from any new tree for three years (Lev. 19:23) Fesko quotes from *Jacob Neusner, The Halakhah: Historical and Religious Perspectives* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 2, 8 'Then the planting of every tree imposes upon Israel the occasion to meet once more the temptation that the first Adam could not overcome. Israel now recapitulates the temptation of Adam then, but Israel, the New Adam, possesses, and is possessed by the Torah...So when Israel enters the Land, in exactly the right detail Israel recapitulates the drama of Adam in Eden.'

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 342.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, 339-356

See below for Fesko's original paper on The Republication of the Covenant of Works:

J. V. Fesko, *The Republication of the Covenant of Works* (The Confessional Presbyterian Issue 8, 2012), 197-212

We will study the debates between Venema and Fesko on the republication of the covenant of works and then examine the place for the normative use of the law in the covenant of works.

3.4.1 *The Debates on the Republication of the Covenant of Works*

a. Venema's Criticism

Venema correctly summarizes Fesko's formulation of republication. He observes Fesko's preferred term, 'reappearance', rather 're-administration'. This term serves to avoid misunderstanding the republication that Israel was given the law as a means to merit the reward of eternal life.⁵²¹ Venema observes two important points Fesko makes regarding the republication:⁵²²

- (1) It evokes a remembrance of Adam's dwelling in and expulsion from Eden since Israel repeats the pattern exhibited in the covenant of works.
- (2) Israel's tenure in the land and the republication, with blessings and curses, serves as a typology of the person and the works of Christ, the true Israel.

Venema's two main arguments against Fesko are (1) Improper treatment of typology that refers to the past instead of pointing toward the future. (2) Leviticus 18:5 is the lone proof text used out of the original context of grace.

According to Venema, Fesko's formulation of the republication is ambiguous compared to the simplicity and the clarity of WCF's distinction between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.⁵²³ On the one hand, Fesko argues that the Mosaic covenant only 'reveals' to Israel the terms of the covenant of works to remind them of the liability.⁵²⁴ On the other hand, though using the term 'reappearance,' Fesko seems

⁵²¹ Cornelis P. Venema, 'The Law of Moses: Not a Disguised Covenant of Works (A Response to J. V. Fesko's "The Republication of the Covenant of Works")', *The Confessional Presbyterian*, vol. 8 (2012): 213

⁵²² Ibid., 214.

⁵²³ Ibid., 215.

⁵²⁴ Ibid.

to suggest the 'reappearance' function more than reminding the Israelites of the liability and their inability.⁵²⁵ This is because, though Fesko regards the Mosaic covenant as part of the covenant of grace and the law not to merit eternal life, the 'work principle' is applied typologically.⁵²⁶ In other words, Israel, like Adam (or a type of Adam), received the law, is bound to keep the law, and would obtain and retain her inheritance in the land of promise, otherwise will be cast out like Adam. Although Venema acknowledges that Fesko denies the capability of any fallen man could 'merit' the favor of life, he contends that his typological understanding is misleading.⁵²⁷ Venema says:

In Fesko's view, God was not merely "teaching" Israel that she could not obtain his favor through obedience to the law. God was actually placing Israel, so far as the inheritance of the land of promise was concerned, under a legal covenant that had real, even deadly consequences throughout her history.⁵²⁸

Venema believes that 'the obligations of the law under the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of grace are not set forth as a basis for the believer's justification or Israel's inheritance and tenure in the land of promise.'⁵²⁹ Hence, the Adam-Israel typology only reiterates the pre-fall history and obscures the gracious notion of covenant.⁵³⁰ Venema understands the Mosaic law as an obligation in the context of the covenant of grace. Hence, He asserts that 'the WCF explicitly denies that the moral law was given to believers in the covenant of grace "as a covenant of works"'.⁵³¹

⁵²⁵ Ibid., 216.

⁵²⁶ Ibid.

⁵²⁷ Ibid..

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

⁵²⁹ Cornelis P. Venema, 'The Republication of the Covenant of Works (with Response by J. V. Fesko)', *The Confessional Presbyterian*, vol. 9 (2013): 161

⁵³⁰ Cornelis P. Venema, 'The Law of Moses: Not a Disguised Covenant of Works (A Response to J. V. Fesko's "The Republication of the Covenant of Works")', *The Confessional Presbyterian*, vol. 8 (2012): 221.

⁵³¹ Ibid., 220. WCF 19:6 'true believers be not under the law as a covenant of works...'

Regarding exile, He states that it is because of Israel's persistent disobedience to the stipulations and obligations of the covenant of grace.⁵³² In responding to Fesko's explanation of Ezekiel 20:1-6 as a republication of the covenant of works, Venema says:

Throughout the entire course of Israel's history, the grace, mercy, and long-suffering patience of the Lord had sustained her and brought her to this point. At no point in Israel's history until the time of the prophet Ezekiel did God deal with her upon the basis of the so-called "works principle" that governed the pre-fall covenant of works with Adam.⁵³³

Venema made a strong point that throughout Israel's history, God has been sustaining Israel with His long-suffering patience and brought to the point Ezekiel proclaimed, 'the law is not good.'⁵³⁴ Ezekiel 20 shows how the LORD had been sparing Israel despite her persistent rebellion from the days in the wilderness and ESV names the passage as Israel's Continuing Rebellion. If Israel was a type of Adam and was under the liability of the covenant of work to secure the inheritance of the land, they would have been cast into exile with one single sin since the covenant of works requires perfect keeping. Venema states that Israel's history in the OT economy was a history of redemption, not a typology that reiterates the pre-fall history of Adam.⁵³⁵ According to Venema, though the typology of the OT economy reflects imagery drawn from the history of Adam before the fall, 'the OT typology prefigures and foreshadows *New Testament realities that fulfill Old Testament promises*'.⁵³⁶ To Venema, Fesko's understanding of Israel's typology serves as a type of Adam though Fesko claims it as a type of Christ.

Following the typology understanding stated above, Venema states that 'the promises and demands of the Mosaic economy are "typical" of the promises and demands of the new covenant economy.'⁵³⁷ He further states that both redeemed Israel

⁵³² Ibid., 223.

⁵³³ Ibid.

⁵³⁴ Ibid.

⁵³⁵ Ibid., 221

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

⁵³⁷ Cornelis P. Venema, 'The Republication of the Covenant of Works (with Response by J. V. Fesko)', *The Confessional Presbyterian*, vol. 9 (2013): 175.

and today's church are required a response of faith and covenantal obedience.⁵³⁸ Hence, the punishments Israel faced in the OT serve as a reminder to today's church, not a result of the covenant of works to which the church is no longer liable. Venema cites the passages in Hebrews as support of his statement:

Rather than citing this failure as an illustration of the different 'inheritance principles' of the Mosaic economy and the new covenant economy, the author of Hebrews issues a sobering warning that, should the recipients of his 'brief letter' (Heb. 13:22) fall away through unbelief and disobedience, they will experience an even more severe punishment than Israel received (cf. Heb. 2:1-4).⁵³⁹

Venema's arguments on typology, especially regarding warning and punishment, are biblically sound. One explicit example in Hebrews is Hebrews 3:7-11 where God's people are reminded not to harden their hearts in rebellion, just as the Israelites did and failed to enter God's Sabbath.

In Venema's engagement with Fesko's exegesis on key passages on the covenant of works, he notices that though Fesko appeals to several passages, those passages are used to confirm his 'work principle' built from Leviticus 18:5.⁵⁴⁰ Not only does Venema argue that Fesko applies a wrong typological approach (as discussed above) in interpreting Leviticus 18:5, but he also comments that this passage is interpreted out of the original context. Venema states that the original context of Leviticus 18:5 is similar to the giving of the Decalogue, where they are within the framework of Israel's redemption under the administration of the covenant of grace.⁵⁴¹ According to Venema, the repeated title 'the LORD your God' refers to God as Israel's Redeemer, the covenantal God, rather than a 'source' of the law, as Fesko contends.⁵⁴² This is because

⁵³⁸ Ibid.

⁵³⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁰ Cornelis P. Venema, 'The Law of Moses: Not a Disguised Covenant of Works (A Response to J. V. Fesko's "The Republication of the Covenant of Works")', *The Confessional Presbyterian*, vol. 8 (2012): 221.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., 222.

⁵⁴² Ibid., 222.

the LORD relates this title to His redemptive work in the prologue of the Decalogue.⁵⁴³ Venema adds that though the message of Leviticus is a summon to holiness, there are promises and ceremonial laws of sanctification which serve as God's gracious provision to Israel.⁵⁴⁴ Not only does Venema argue that Fesko does not consider the original gracious context in interpreting Leviticus 18:5, but he also comments that Fesko does not correctly consider the Jewish legalism context when interpreting Romans 10:5 and Galatians 3:12 that quotes Leviticus 18:5.⁵⁴⁵ Venema claims that one must view Mosaic law in a broad aspect that contains the promises which point to the gospel; if the Mosaic law is regarded as detached from the gospel promise (in Venema's terms, a narrow aspect of the law), it will be a law that condemns.⁵⁴⁶ The law in the Mosaic covenant is not an invitation to Israel to seek righteousness apart from the gospel but as 'a rule of the covenant' of a redeemed person to live out by faith.⁵⁴⁷ Venema says that in the context of Romans 10:5 and Galatians 3:12, Paul was addressing the Jewish who did not regard the law in God's original intention as 'a rule of the covenant', but sought to base their righteousness before God on obedience to the law.⁵⁴⁸

Venema, in his conclusion, challenges Fesko on what need exist for a 'second' Adamic probation and the fourth use of the law. Venema asserts that the law of God, in its pedagogical use, has been used to reveal human sinfulness and liability to the punishment; there is no need for the covenant of works to be republished to make this

⁵⁴³ Ex. 20:2: 'I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.'

⁵⁴⁴ Cornelis P. Venema, 'The Law of Moses: Not a Disguised Covenant of Works (A Response to J. V. Fesko's "The Republication of the Covenant of Works")', *The Confessional Presbyterian*, vol. 8 (2012): 222

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., 222-225. See also Cornelis P. Venema, 'The Republication of the Covenant of Works (with Response by J. V. Fesko)', *The Confessional Presbyterian*, vol. 9 (2013): 168-174

⁵⁴⁶ Cornelis P. Venema, 'The Republication of the Covenant of Works (with Response by J. V. Fesko)', *The Confessional Presbyterian*, vol. 9 (2013): 168.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., 173.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., 168-174.

evident again.⁵⁴⁹ Furthermore, Venema argues that the republication of the covenant of works would mean that the traditional three uses of the law are inadequate to illustrate how the law of God functions in the covenant of grace in all its administrations, including the Mosaic economy.⁵⁵⁰

b. Fesko's Response

Fesko raised two solid points against Venema's argument on typology. First, the fundamental difference between Fesko's and Venema's approaches to the OT is that Venema largely looks through the *ordo salutis* instead of both.⁵⁵¹ Though, Israel, in the *historia salutis* serves as a type of Christ and, where at a typological level, needs to work to attain/retain the land inheritance, it does not mean that Israel is under the covenant of works. In other words, while Israel as a whole was cast into exile due to their failure to keep the law, the individuals who have genuine faith are saved. Venema could argue with his interpretation of Ezekiel 20 that Israel being cast into exile was due to her persistent rebellion despite God's gracious dealing, not a transgression of the covenant of works. Fesko asks a counter question if Moses was a justified believer and received the law under the gracious Mosaic covenant, why was he excluded from entering the promised land, a type of heaven?⁵⁵² Fesko explains with both lenses of *ordo salutis* and *historia salutis* that 'Moses's salvation does not directly correlate to his function as a divinely ordained type of Christ.'⁵⁵³ In other words, Moses was not merely

⁵⁴⁹ Cornelis P. Venema, 'The Law of Moses: Not a Disguised Covenant of Works (A Response to J. V. Fesko's "The Republication of the Covenant of Works")', *The Confessional Presbyterian*, vol. 8 (2012): 226.

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁵⁵¹ J. V. Fesko, 'The Republication of the Covenant of Works: The Accommodated Scriptures (a Response to Cornelis P. Venema)', *The Confessional Presbyterian*, vol. 9 (2013): 182.

⁵⁵² J. V. Fesko, 'The Republication of the Covenant of Works: The Accommodated Scriptures (a Response to Cornelis P. Venema)', *The Confessional Presbyterian*, vol. 9 (2013): 183.

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.*, 183.

a believer but was also a type of Christ, he failed to keep the law, but Christ fulfilled the law.⁵⁵⁴

Second, though the typological understanding of Israel reminds of Adam, it points not to Adam but to Christ, the antitype.⁵⁵⁵ In Venema's understanding of Israel typology, he understands Israel as pointing to the church in the NT but not to Christ. Fesko states that, for Venema, the 'NT demands an antitypical of the OT demands typical demands'.⁵⁵⁶ In other words, just as Israel was demanded to be faithful to the law of Moses, the church today also are required to be faithful to the law of Christ. Just as the persistence in the rebellion of Israel led to exile, a persistent rebellion of a so-called Christian means apostasy from the faith.

On the other hand, Fesko clarifies that he does believe that Israel is a type of church (e.g. 1 Cor. 10:1-10), but it is first a type of Christ.⁵⁵⁷ Christ fulfilled the law Israel transgressed, then justified His people and sanctified them unto adherence to His demands.⁵⁵⁸ Fesko states that Venema does not consider NT texts that show Israel's typological connection to Christ in his argument.⁵⁵⁹ Passages like Matthew 2:15, 'Out of Egypt I called my son' (cf. Hos. 11:1), Israel's baptism in the Red Sea and 40 years wandering in the wilderness, and Christ's baptism and 40 days wilderness wanderings, inevitably show that Israel is a type of Christ.⁵⁶⁰

As for the exegesis in Leviticus 18:5, though Venema claims to exegete according to the original gracious covenantal context, he does not explain why the law in Leviticus 18:26 also binds upon sojourner, aliens to the covenant.⁵⁶¹ As for the NT

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid., 182.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid. 183.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid. 183-184.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid. 183-184.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid. 183-184.

verses that quote Leviticus 18:5, Fesko argues that the Jewish misinterpretation of the law as a means to gain righteousness in the post-fall epoch does not mean that the law was not a way to life, as even Jesus affirmed the 'do this and live' principle (Luke 10:25-28).⁵⁶²

c. Evaluation

Venema asserts that the typological understanding of Israel, coupled with the republication of the covenant of works, leaves the Mosaic covenant ambiguous, whether it is a covenant of grace or a covenant of works. Nevertheless, Fesko's arguments show that the reappearance of the covenant of works was within the covenant of grace. There are two things in mind: (1) The Mosaic covenant is part of the covenant of grace. (2) The Mosaic covenant is not the covenant of works, but the covenant of works reappeared in the Mosaic covenant. This reappearance is to remind Israel of the covenant liability and their inability to keep it; it points them to Christ, the antitype of Israel who fulfilled the law. WCF 7.2 states:

This covenant (of grace) was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel: under the law it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all fore-signifying Christ to come.

WCF 7.2 says that the covenant of grace was administered by types. Based on Fesko's argument, we can say that even when the covenant of works reappears, it foreshadows Christ to come. The reappearance of the covenant of works in Leviticus 18:5, for example, does not command the Israelites to strive for obedience with their endeavor but invites them to come to the gracious provision of God through the ceremonial laws of sanctification. Though the covenant of works reappeared in the Mosaic covenant and

⁵⁶² Ibid. 182.

the story of Israel, Israel is not a type of Adam but a type of Christ that shows us the true Son of God who fulfilled the law.

Venema refers to WCF 7.5, which states that the covenant of grace is administered in the time of the law and in the gospel, and argues against the republication of the covenant of works in the Mosaic covenant. Nevertheless, it is essential to consider the subsequent sentence in WCF 7.5, 'through the operation of the Spirit 'to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, and WCF 19.6, 'true believers under the law, as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified, or condemned'. Fesko refers to WCF 19.6 and argues inversely that the unbelievers are still under the law as a covenant of works.⁵⁶³ Though the covenant of grace is administered in the Mosaic covenant, it does not mean that all people are regenerated; those who are not regenerated are still under the covenant of works.

In sum, with the distinction of *ordo salutis* and *historia salutis*, and the understanding of typology that points to Christ then to the church, it is clear that the law of Moses is not the covenant of works in disguised; the Mosaic covenant is still part of the covenant of grace.⁵⁶⁴

3.4.2 *The Place for the Normative Use of the Law*

The prologue of the Ten Commandments goes, 'I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.' (Ex. 20:2) Since the Lord referred to His covenantal name and redemptive act before giving the law, many

⁵⁶³ Ibid., 184.

⁵⁶⁴ In Venema's later publication, he does not respond to Fesko's response to his argument but simply republishes his original argument against Fesko's compiled essays on the republication of works in *the Law is not of Faith*. Fesko's Christological typology approach and his latest exegesis explanation are not responded by Venema. See

Cornelis P. Venema, *The Mosaic Covenant: A "Republication" of the Covenant of Works?*, (A Review Article: *The Law is not of Faith: Essay on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant*), MAJT 21 (2010): 35–101.

Cornelis P. Venema, *Christ and Covenant Theology: Essays on Election, Republication, and the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2017), 302.

believe that the Ten Commandments is to be understood in a redemptive context and that the law here is the normative rule for the believers.⁵⁶⁵

We have seen in the section how Fesko draws the parallel between Exodus 20 and Genesis 1-3 to support the covenant of works. The parallels are the title, LORD God, obligation and prohibition, and the blessing and curses. While Fesko uses these parallels to support the covenant of works, it does not mean he takes no notice of the redemptive context. In *the Rule of Love*, an exposition of the Ten Commandments, Fesko states that the prologue places 'the Law within God's covenantal dealings with Israel.'⁵⁶⁶ God kept His promise to Abraham and delivered them from slavery before giving them the law. Hence, Fesko states:

The Law is not revealed to God's people as the means by which they should earn their redemption. Rather, the Law is revealed to show them how they can be conformed to the image of their loving, covenant Lord.⁵⁶⁷

What is emphasized by Fesko is not gratitude but being conformed to the image of God. Fesko adds that Israel is to continuously reflect upon the law to remember their redeemed states since they are now a holy nation of God.⁵⁶⁸

According to Fesko, not only is the Law given in the redemptive context, but the covenant of works also reappears in the Mosaic covenant. Fesko further states in *the Rule of Love* that, by reflecting on the law, it also means that Israel will realize that ' they did not measure up to its rigorous demands, then look to the only one who could

⁵⁶⁵ Ex. 20:2 'As a preface to the Ten Commandments and the rest of the law, this description signifies that Israel's call to covenant faithfulness is preceded by and based upon the Lord's acts on their behalf in covenant relationship. Israel's obedience to the commandments is the means by which they are to appropriate and enjoy what the Lord has already done by delivering them from Egypt and taking them to be his possession. The Lord will use the deliverance from Egypt to identify himself throughout Israel's history, often to call them to remember what he has done for them and to live accordingly (e.g., Judg. 6:8; 1 Sam. 10:18; Ps 81:10; Jer 34:13).'

Kenneth Laing Harris, study note on Exodus 20:2, in *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 175-176

⁵⁶⁶ J. V. Fesko, *The Rule of Love: Broken, Fulfilled, and Applied* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009), 8.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.* See also (Deut. 6:20-23)

fulfill the requirements of the Law—Jesus Christ.'⁵⁶⁹ As Israel remembers the redemptive act of God by reflecting on the Law, it directs them to the coming redemption of Christ.⁵⁷⁰ In the previous section, we have seen how Israel as the type of Christ failed, but Christ the anti-type fulfilled the Law. We have also seen that the Mosaic covenant is part of the covenant of grace. The sacrificial system, and the prophecy of Christ, show Israel's inability to keep the law and point her to Christ. Fesko does see that Israel serves as a type of church. The deliverance of Israel from the land of slavery parallels the deliverance of Christians from the slavery of sins. However, before Israel is the type of the church, she is first the type of Christ. Today, Christians are redeemed to be the holy nations and are to reflect the image of Christ. Fesko states that the Law will show us what is to be to reflect the image of Christ, but we need to be mindful of the image and the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ.⁵⁷¹

In sum, though Fesko does not explain Exodus 20 in a redemptive context in his exposition on the covenant of works, he does believe the Law serves pedagogically and normatively.⁵⁷²

3.5 Evaluation and Summary

Fesko's works show how the law, covenant, and federal headship are related organically in intra-canonical passages. Adam, created in God's image and likeness, received the law by inscription and verbally (formally) to govern the world as the vice-regent of God in the covenantal relationship. The first Adam failed the covenant of works. Nevertheless, the covenant of works is not abrogated, and its principle, 'do this and live' is repeated in the Scripture and fulfilled by Christ, the Last Adam. In chapter four, we examine how Fesko's works can answer McGowan's critics on the covenant of

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁵⁷² Fesko does affirm the civil use of the law, but it is not the main emphasis of this thesis.

works, particularly the law-grace dichotomy, and that federal headship remains one of the essentials elements in covenant theology.