

**COMMENTARY ON
R. SCOTT CLARK'S COVENANTALISM 13)**

6.2. *In Reformed theology, the covenant of works is identical to the Law which says: Do this and live.*

This is obviously false if the account of Genesis 2-3 is any guide. Most of the over 600 commands of the Mosaic system are not found before Moses' time. Some laws that do appear before Moses can be accounted for as resulting from God's moral consistency, not from a previous law-covenant. No doubt "don't eat that fruit" is a "law," because it is a proscription with a sanction, but the same command is not found in the Mosaic Law, nor anything that would depend on it. Forbidding pork and shellfish is not the same thing, obviously. When the Law says "Do this and you will live," it does not mean "Do some of these things and you'll be OK." It means "Comply with every provision and command in this system and you will live," which is a very different thing. Failure to comply with one command effectively breaks all of them. The unity of the Law must be obeyed whole and entire.

The fact that the Mosaic Covenant contains laws is because it was intended as a comprehensive National Constitution, which (among other things), defined sin in very detailed terms, and showed by types and shadows, the necessity of a real Atonement to come. It also repeated the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant, to which the Law was "added" (Gal 3:15-19). The added Law did not alter the Abrahamic promises in any way, but it did re-confirm and repeat their literal content. The formal similarity of "don't eat this fruit" to "don't eat pigs" does not warrant constructing a "covenant" out of the meager data in the Genesis account.

3. *Jesus Christ fulfilled the covenant of works in his active and passive obedience to God's law on behalf of his people.*

This thesis would be better formulated as "Under the New Covenant which he announced as its Messenger (Mal 3:1), Christ *fulfilled the Mosaic Covenant* by his active and passive obedience on behalf of his people." The Law was "added" to a promise beginning in Gen 3:15, and expanded in the Abrahamic Covenant, whose provisions are presupposed by Moses.

4. *The covenant of works was abrogated as a way to eternal life by the fall.*

But even if it had ever existed, the covenant of works could never have been a "way to eternal life." Obedience to it could only have been a proof that eternal life was present, just as works are under the NC, and as they were under the Mosaic Covenant. "No flesh shall be justified by Law," not even Adam's. Yet even then, the obedience of Adam and Eve before the Fall did not assure eternal life. These dilemmas caused much disagreement among early Covenantalists, and show that the speculative nature of this "Edenic" covenant is an unreliable guide to understanding the Word of God.

5. *Post-lapsam, the terms of the covenant of works continue to obligate all rational creatures and must be fulfilled either personally or vicariously.*

This is the theory that the heathen are to be judged by the still-operating covenant of works and that this is what will condemn them in the final judgement. There is no hint of this reasoning in the Bible. When Paul condemns the heathen in (say) Romans 1 and 2, he never appeals to their having broken any "covenant" with God, but to their violating their own consciences (2:12-16), those good laws in their own societies, and the innate awareness that all have because they are created in God's image (*gnontes ton theon*, 1:21) leading to idolatry (1:25 and 28), and to corrupt societies (1:26-32).

Scripture repeatedly asserts that the heathen did not have the Law (*e.g.* Rom 2:12), so the phrase in 2:15 that “they show the works of the law written in their hearts” cannot mean that they have a knowledge of any legal “covenant,” but is just a reference to their consciences recognizing “good works” formally similar to those the Law of God prescribes in Scripture. In the final judgement, the heathen will be condemned, not for light they have not had, but for suppressing (Rom 1:18) and turning from (1:23+25+26), light they *did* have. All religions have more light and truth than their devotees (Muslim, Hindu, *etc.*) ever live up to, and this “light of nature” condemns them.

6. *Anyone who denies the prelapsarian covenant of works jeopardizes the Biblical and Protestant doctrine of justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.*

So New Covenant theologians are not even real Protestants? *Mē genoito* !! It would be more realistic to say that traditional Covenantalists “jeopardize” the biblical doctrine of *sola Scriptura* (by Scripture alone), since their entire hermeneutic is designed to justify infant baptism, which is a purely human invention, and is based on extra-biblical notions such as the “one and eternal” covenant of grace. It’s hard to imagine what proof there could be for this accusation, since all New Covenant thinkers I’m aware of are pretty calvinistic, and agree without hesitation with the “five *solas*” of the Reformation. Why wouldn’t they??

It is remarkable that someone with a doctorate (from Oxford University no less) would present such a bizarre challenge to the mainly *calvinistic* NCT movement (and there is more of this below), when he must know how various and contradictory the Fathers of Reformed theology from the 1520s to 1900 have been, despite much continuity of the federal idea itself. He must know also, that the usual modern Presbyterian thinking on this topic is merely a convenient *selection* from past thought on the topic of the covenants in Scripture. This has been made very clear by the growing scholarship and research into the history of Covenantalism since the 1980s. The work of D. M. Weir on *Origins of Federal Theology* (1990) and the recent (2004) *Protestant Scholasticism* edited by Trueman and Clark himself are good examples of this. The footnotes of this last volume are particularly helpful.

We shall see below that one of the most important developments in the covenantalism of the past was the infusion of OT laws into the NC doctrine of sanctification by State Church defenders on the Continent, in England, and then in Cotton’s Boston. In their efforts to “sanctify” their whole societies, these theonomic Puritans imposed many Mosaic laws on their people, and developed the “third use” of the Law, which made the Law the means of holiness for the Christian. This was made possible because “the moral Law” in the Pentateuch was supposed to be eternal and not fulfilled on the Cross, and therefore could be transferred to the New Covenant Church, creating the “precisionist” strain of puritan piety and its “antinomian” reaction. The principal “antinomians” were called by this name mainly because they denied that the Mosaic Law was the Christian’s rule of life, and appealed largely to Paul’s argument in Galatians for the backbone of their case against “law-works” as the standard of an individual’s sanctification. For them, the Reformation watchword of *sola Gracia* meant that we do *not* appeal to the Law either to get started (justification), or to carry forward our life (sanctification) in Christ (Gal 3:3, 3:21, 5:1-6). As for the charge of “antinomianism,” we need only point out that the New Covenant documents are full of ethical injunctions and guidance, and that holiness includes obedience in the fear of God. “Be ye holy, for I am holy” applies to the Remnant in all ages, and the believer is still to *live* moment by moment by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God, as Jesus indicated. If Jesus is “our example” in anything, it would be in that pivotal moment displayed in Matthew 4:4. The Mosaic Law could neither justify nor sanctify; salvation is “by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone,” for we are commanded to “Pursue.... sanctification, without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb 12:14). There is no antinomianism under the New Covenant. At the same time, the *entire unified Mosaic Covenant* is “obsolete” (Heb 7:18-19, 8:13).

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