

COMMENTARY ON  
R. SCOTT CLARK'S COVENANTALISM 17)

25. *Sanctity is as gracious as justification*

This is correct. Sanctification (often called “growth in Grace”) is described as increasing conformity to the image of Christ in the very same sentence of Paul that outlines the order of salvation in Romans 8:28-30. It flows from the same predestining sovereignty as Justification.

26. *Sanctity is logically and morally necessary as evidence of regeneration, faith, and justification.*

This statement is intended to offset the common Romanist accusation that “faith alone” leads to “antinomianism.” In fact, Hebrews 12:14 states explicitly that nobody sees the Lord without sanctification. In Ephesians 1:3-6, the same point is made, and James says that faith unproductive of good works is “dead” (Jas 2:14-26), and therefore not saving faith. The Catholic Council of Trent (1545-63) claimed that our justification can be “increased” by added good works, and so blended justification with the meritorious sanctification of the believer by works. This separated Rome from the Reform for the next 400-odd years, down to Vatican II. Our knowledge of at least some personal sanctification can be loosely thought of as “evidence” that we have indeed been born again, but the *ultimate* proof of regeneration is the sovereign promise of the regeneration of the believer, which our initial faith itself evidences, as we see it in the Word of God (1 Pet 1:20-25, Jas 1:17-18, Jn 1:12-13).

27. *Considered relative to sanctification (in distinction from justification) faith can be said to be active and is begun and sustained by grace but involves human cooperation with sanctifying grace.*

This thesis is correct. It is a summary of the difficult idea that we cooperate with a fully sovereign God to produce good works, while denying that our cooperation is the cooperation of two equal and independent parties. We do not produce good works as the result of an autonomous (libertarian) freewill, but as a fruit of the Spirit *causing* us to respond in obedience to Christ as Lord.

Nevertheless, our good works are indeed ours, and will be proportionally rewarded as a matter of justice (1 Cor 3:10-15, Rom 14:10, *etc.*) at the judgement-seat of Christ.

28. *Sanctity is no instrument or ground of justification.*

This is correct, and refutes Trent, the “new perspective,” the Pelagians, and some Arminians.

29. *Sanctity flows out of proper use of the divinely ordained covenant signs and seals.*

This may be allowed as it stands, but there will be a need to define what is included in the “signs and seals” category. The thesis as stated raises the topic of the “means of grace,” without answering it, or telling us how it works.

30. *The third use of the moral law is [the] norm of covenant life.*

During the Middle Ages, Catholic theologians divided the over 600-odd laws of the Mosaic legal system into “moral,” “ceremonial,” and “civil” laws. This is a harmlessly convenient way of characterizing the laws for superficial educational purposes, but it fails completely when a serious

effort is made to place each and every one of these laws under *one* category. Many laws fit convincingly into *two* categories, and the various Sabbath laws are moral, ceremonial *and* civil in their scope and practice. So are others. The real motivation in copying this scheme is that the covenantal theorists wanted to justify imposing Mosaic laws on their members and surrounding communities, for they were all state-churches; they sought complete local conformity in order to promote civil holiness, to “sanctify” their whole community. In the Middle Ages, this process resulted in the Catholic *Canon Law*. In Islamic communities it resulted in the *Sharia*. The Puritans continued this tradition under the heading of “cases of conscience” or *Casuistry*, borrowing the scholastic method of developing it from the mediaeval moral theologians, especially the Jesuits (see Baxter’s *Directory*). The 20<sup>th</sup> century version of all this is the theonomic views of Rousas Rushdoony in his two volumes of *Institutes of Biblical Law*. He just filed out and brought up-to-date the theonomism of the Puritans in the 1600s.

NCT holds that the New Testament Ethic replaces *the entire legal content* of the Mosaic Covenant, including the Ten Commandments, and flows from our spiritual union with Christ through our regeneration. We don’t get our “moral law” from the Mosaic Covenant, but from the NC Text, which is the canonical New Testament. There is no “third use” of the OT Law in the New Covenant.

*31. Denial of the third use of the Law (tertius usus legis) leads to antinomianism.*

This is the classic accusation by traditional Covenantalists against pure grace teaching, and it’s pure nonsense. They hope to scare us into whatever idiosyncratic version of Galatian legalism they happen to culturally approve of at any particular moment of history. Anyone would think that we didn’t know that there are ethical injunctions in the New Testament to which all believers are morally obligated. NCT embraces every one of them without exception. This is a sufficient refutation of this slander. No NC thinker I’ve ever heard of teaches that we may sin the more so that grace may abound.

*32. The third use of the Law, like the first use, also drives us to Christ.*

Peter and Paul taught that the Law brings us under slavery, causes despair, seeks to complete in the flesh what begins in the Spirit, binds a burden on us that our fathers could not carry, and signals that we have “fallen from grace.” According to Acts 15 and the Pauline epistles, there was no “third use” of the Mosaic system to fit the Christian life. If the covenantalist “third use” theory is correct, the Jerusalem Council failed miserably to solve the legalism problem, and its circular letter of 15:22-29 is the most misleading document in the NT collection, and fails hopelessly to give the correct necessary guidance. These key Apostles didn’t even have enough sense to insist on “one day in seven” like current Presbyterians do, let alone present a real sabbatarianism, or institute tithing.....

No doubt a study of the Law (or a realization after fruitless efforts, that nobody can obey it consistently) might easily “drive [an individual] to Christ,” but this is the *second* use of the Law (the paedagogical) as Paul states it (Gal 3:19-25), not the traditional third use, which involves treating the Law as the Christian’s “rule of life.” NCT notes that this third use is the main thing Paul is refuting in Galatians, and the main premise of Theonomism in its various forms, from Canon Law to Rushdoony.

We come next to Scott Clark’s eighth category, the “Ecclesiastical” theses. The very first thesis states the covenantal theory that the visible church as well as the universal is the “confessing covenant community.” By this statement, the believing Body of Christ with whom the NC is made is equated with the visible church, and the NC can then be treated as if made also with unbelievers.

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