

**COMMENTARY ON  
R. SCOTT CLARK'S COVENANTALISM 25)**

*9:13. Any attempt to re-impose the Mosaic civil laws or their penalties fails to understand the typological, temporary, national character of the Old (Mosaic) covenant.*

This thesis is not just a repudiation of Theonomy, but of all past forms of theonomic legalism, including the long history of same in Presbyterianism. Not many modern people know that the Westminster *Confession of Faith* had an Article 3. of Chapter XXIII in its original form in 1643, stating that “the magistrate” (i.e., state officials) had a responsibility “to take order that unity and peace be preserved in the church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire, that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed, all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed, and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered, and observed.” This of course, is the famous persecution clause, which was so beloved of such Presbyterians as Samuel Rutherford, who wrote a full-scale defense of the persecution of other Christians for doctrinal reasons. American Presbyterians were forced to remove it when the Constitution of the USA was ratified by the States, making state churches impossible in this country. This is the background to G. I. Williamson’s expressed embarrassment in his famous study commentary on the *Confession* (see pages 240-246). Until it was prevented by the US Constitution, covenantalist Presbyterianism (and its cousin, Congregationalism) had always been a persecuting religion, presupposing unity of state and church. Baptists were their main threat at this point, and still are, because Baptists claim that *the NC contains only believers*, that infant baptism is a human invention, and that there can be no such thing as a “state church.” Prominent among the many “heresies” referred to in 1643 text, was the denial of the validity of infant baptism. It was this state persecution on unified covenantal grounds that forced Roger Williams to found Rhode Island as a colony free from such persecution. *Practical effects* follow from the “one and eternal covenant” idea.

Presbyterian unwillingness to insist on theonomic civic pretensions is a very modern affair, and started with the *Constitution* of the United States. Like the Romanists, they were deprived of the legal power to persecute other believers. That’s why they stopped.

*14. The moral law, to the degree that it expresses the substance of God’s moral will and is not tied to the ceremonies of the Old covenant continues to bind all human beings.*

But under what circumstance could we imagine the “moral law” *not* “expressing the substance of God’s moral will”? This shows the ambiguities of the theonomic pseudo-distinction between moral ceremonial, and civil legislation. Also, what does “tied to” mean? Why isn’t the weekly Sabbath “tied to” the other legislated Sabbaths? Sabbatarianism is always arbitrary in its practice, for one always finds ways to develop a casuistic distinction between keeping the seventh day (they always fudge that to mean “one day in seven” which notion is of course, unknown to Scripture). The real problem however, is Paul’s very negative attitude to the incipient legalisms of the apostolic era (Galatians and Colossians 2). The claim that “all human beings” are obligated to a “moral law” goes back to the “covenant of works” idea added to the developing covenant theology by Ursinus and Olevianus in 1562 and developed into an essential feature from 1584-90. The unregenerate conscience is like an ungraduated thermometer until specific laws define each sin. The conscience can tell the general direction of right and wrong, just as an ungraduated thermometer can tell you that tap water is cooler than hot coffee, but cannot tell what the specific temperatures is of either. Further, the unregenerate conscience can be trained, suppressed, or redirected by culture and false religion. The fact that unbelievers often want to do and approve of the right thing only shows that common grace is preventing them from greater evils (Rom 1:26-32, 2:12-15, 3:9-19). Nature by itself cannot generate rational moral standards. At the final judgement, the wicked will be judged by the light they have (which will condemn them), not by laws they have never heard of.

And even if it were conceded that God had a “covenant of works” with Adam, there is no way of showing that it could apply to anyone today, as many Reformed thinkers have pointed out.

*15. In the New Covenant, only the second table of the law can be said to bind the state.*

On the contrary, the state is not involved in the NC *at all*, for only believers are. The imaginary distinction between the two “tables” of the law goes back to the idea that the first tablet was assumed to contain commandments 1-4, while the second had commandments 5-10. This is of course, unprovable, and it is much more likely that both tablets contained *all* the commandments, as a double testimony against the Nation, both copies kept in the ark. Normally one copy would be given to the subject king to display to his people, the other being stored in the archives of the dominant king imposing the covenant.

How anyone can say that “the state” is bound by the law to respect one’s father and mother is not perfectly clear. . . . The whole notion of the two tables is arbitrary and not even hinted at in Scripture. It is a spectacular example of how a mere tradition can prejudice a topic. Does Dr. Clark really think that it is OK for “the state” to make statues for worship? All legalisms are ultimately arbitrary, including the proscription of “work” (whatever *that* includes) on Sunday.

*16. There are two kingdoms, that of the right hand, and that of the left.*

I can’t think of any Scriptures for this. The only “kingdoms” recognized in Scripture are those of God and the world, the second being “this evil age,” under “the prince of the power of the air.”

*17. Both kingdoms are under the authority of Christ, but are administered in different ways.*

If Clark means Church and State, does he think that Hitler’s Nazi regime was “under the authority of Christ” in 1944? If so, in what sense? If he means only that all secular kingdoms are under God’s sovereignty, so are the “kingdoms” of the insects and the mammals, as well as the Pygmies of the Ituri Forest. These are very unfocused ideas. This no way to do theology.

*18. In each kingdom Christians live under Christ’s lordship according to the nature of that kingdom.*

This is a mere truism. Christians are also “under Christ’s lordship” in the kingdom of chemistry. What could “according to the nature of” mean in practice in Saudi Arabia?

*19 and 20. The kingdom of the Right hand describes the ministry of Word and sacrament. The kingdom of the left hand describes the exercise of power in the ecclesiastical and civil realms.*

These two theses should have appeared as part of *Thesis 16*. These notions are not biblical, and are quite arbitrary and idiosyncratic, although they have a long history in various forms. Does Clark really think that Christ is “King” of Iran or North Korea? In what sense could this be true or even meaningful, other than as part of God’s creatorial sovereignty over everything? Is this rule *all* that Zechariah was thinking of in 14:9-11? These curious expressions are apparently preparatory of *Thesis 21*, which we will look at in the next study. Never forget that Luther’s “two kingdoms” were really just Church and State. The Bible says that only at the second coming will “the kingdom[s] of this world” become that of “our Lord and his Christ” (Rev 11:15, 12:10, 19:11 fol., Dan 2:44, etc.) *The redemption of civilization* is the main reason for a Millennial Kingdom.