

**COMMENTARY ON
R. SCOTT CLARK'S COVENANTALISM 26)**

9:21. Because of the distinction between the two kingdoms, and because the Decalogue is substantially identical with natural law, Christians should advocate laws and policies in the civil realm, on the basis of the universal, natural knowledge of the second table of the law.

It is surprising that Clark ends his propositional account of Covenantalism with the issue of civil responsibility rather than with any eschatological conclusions. It seems to me that no theory is going to be complete without a clear account of what kind of eschatology it would suggest. In the past, most Amillennial, Postmillennial, and Premillennial thinkers have seen their covenantal views evolve into their own eschatology. There is little question that one's view of the Covenants can determine the kind of eschatology that is possible.

This thesis suggests a much-reduced policy for historic Presbyterians, but there are problems with even this. Is it really true that the Decalogue is "substantially identical with natural law?" In what sense? *What* "natural law"? How could anyone know this? If it is part of natural law to "honor father and mother," should Christians advocate "in the civil realm," a national health system for the elderly like Medicaid? If not, why not? Should Christians work for the abolition of the government programs of Medicare and Medicaid? If not, why not? What morality should be pressed on "the civil realm"?

I am happy to agree that Christians should advocate just laws for the civil realm, but this has nothing to do with traditional covenantalist principles, and can be based on Scripture quite apart from Covenantalism. In fact, I would even appeal to some of the same verses that Clark would, but without the covenantal construct behind them. The whole issue of what constitutes "natural law" is not only highly controversial, but also quite independent of Covenantalism, and many Calvinist philosophers have serious doubts about historical versions of the idea anyway. I would base Christian social action and the improvement of culture on the cultural mandate of all human beings in God's image, on the continuity of progress in the Kingdom of God with the eschatological Kingdom in view (including the Millennium), but with New Testament Ethics rather than OT legalism, as a moral guide. As a Van Tillian, I do not believe that any theory of "natural law" can be made intelligible apart from revelation.

As a New Covenant thinker, I would say that the "two kingdoms" referred to in *9:21* is really the NT antithesis between the Church and the World. The State is part of the world, and there is no verse in Scripture to encourage a Christian to think that the world as a whole will ever be converted without the second coming of Christ to guarantee that process. Postmillennialism is a "strong delusion" with no verse in the Bible to suggest it. Peter made it very clear to the nation in Acts 3:11-21 that the *sufferings* of the Servant (referring to Isa 53) have been literally fulfilled in history, and that the "*glories* to follow" (1 Pet 1:11) are now dependent on God's "send[ing] Jesus the Christ appointed for you [Jews] whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from ancient time." This time of "restoration" can hardly be other than the "restoring the Kingdom to Israel" that the disciples were so anxious about in Acts 1:6 (and can hardly be thought of as just being forgotten in a couple of days), and the subject of dozens of explicit predictions in the prophets, all tied to a messianic presence of God *on the earth with his People in their Land*. The Incarnation secured the fact that the physical and the spiritual would never be sundered in the biblical worldview. It is no accident that when Zechariah described that momentous Day of the Lord, he notes that when Jehovah goes forth to defend his people, "*His feet* will stand on the Mount of Olives" and only then, "*Then* Jehovah, O My God, shall come, and all the holy ones with him" (14:3-9). Then and only then, "Jehovah will be king over all the earth." Acts also records an angel saying at the moment of the

Ascension, “This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come *in just the same way as you have watched him go* into heaven” (1:11). This is really quite unmistakable language, and when we consider the physical location, it can hardly refer to any other moment in history than the second coming as described in Zech 14. Orthodox A-mills, Post-mills, and Pre-mills all believe in the Second Advent.

It is now time to turn to a selection of the many passages that teach New Covenant Theology. To reach the New Covenant *age* however, it will be necessary to begin where the Bible begins to use the covenant idea, and to follow its use through the covenants actually described in the text. It will be seen that each historical covenant contributes specific elements to the drama of redemption’s progress, until a New Covenant comes that in a series of events, pulls together all the blessings of the previous covenants, as well as contributing much of its own content not previously indicated, but wholly consistent with all the past promises and predictions. The method will be exegetical and progressive rather than abstract and assuming constructs not in evidence in the text. Since all the Bible’s revelation is progressive and cumulative, redemptive and historical, and involves an intimate connection between the physical and the spiritual, we would expect that the primeval promise of the “seed of the woman” in Genesis 1:15 will evolve into the good news of the Pauline epistles (the NT *euaggelion*, or Gospel), through fulfillment of predictions that unfold according to divine predestination of all the many details.

The progress of the historical Covenants also parallels the development of the OT account of the coming Kingdom of the Messiah. The final form of the New Covenant will take shape in the final form of the Kingdom itself. If the Abrahamic Covenant could be expanded by many codicils and new promises *that leave the original promises intact*, so might the New Covenant. God can certainly add spiritual dimensions to physical and literal promises any time he wishes, *without negating the original promises*. In fact, this is an important part of the progress of revelation as the drama of redemption unfolds. A discussion of the principal covenants of the Bible follows.

1) *The Noachic Covenant*: Genesis 6:18, 8:20-22, 9:9-17.

This is referred to as God’s “covenant” eight times in these few verses, and is clearly intended by the writer to be the first *covenant* identified as such. It certainly does not follow from the continuity of the primeval revelation (including sacrifices of thanks, 8:20), that previous revelations had to include “covenants.” Any previous covenants would have to be speculative only. This covenant is a common-grace promise between God and all living things not to destroy them all again with a flood; “While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease” (8:22). As Jesus said, the unsaved farmer will get rain just like the saved farmer (Mat 5:45). Common Grace is the general mercy of God towards people in general, common to the Elect and the non-Elect, that provides restraint on sin, natural gifts, and the continuity of life that makes human civilization possible. It prevents sinners from being fully consistent in their rebellion against God, and allows religion to flourish. It gives us Roman roads and American Interstate highways, the Constitution, and general education. In combination with the rise of Christianity, it has allowed our “Western freedoms” to develop. It provides a natural environment for the supernatural Gospel to be preached.

This guarantee is described as an “everlasting covenant,” “with you and your descendants,” and “all flesh.” It is a promise to cats and spiders as well as to human beings. It continues today, and is wholly gracious and unconditional. Its certainty of blessings will not be altered by whether men exact the death penalty, procreate children, trust God, remain vegetarian, or damage their environment. This covenant has no conditions attached that sinners must meet. Next we look at the Abrahamic Covenant.

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