

The Law of God & the Christian

–Lesson 11–

- I. *Antinomista*: We see that the law of the Ten Commandments served Israel as a rule for their obedience, but was its form as a covenant of works so completely taken away that it was no longer of any use to Israel?
 - A. Not at all. The moral law in its form as a covenant of works—demanding perfect obedience, promising life upon perfect obedience, and threatening death upon the least disobedience—came from God as a reflection of His own character and as the unbending rule for fellowship with Him is eternally true and remains in effect for all men as sons of Adam, so that...:
 1. **Either man himself (or someone in his place) must fulfill the demand of the law as a covenant of works or else he remains forever under it in a damnable condition.
 - B. Now as Christ has fulfilled the covenant of works for all believers, so the form of the covenant of works was taken away and put under the cover of the ark as a testimony to all those who believed; *but* as regards all the unbelieving Jews, it remained in effect for them as sons of Adam.
- II. *Antinomista*: Was the law as a covenant of works of any use to the unbelieving Jews in Israel?
 - A. Yes it was.
 1. To the unbelievers whom God was yet to call unto Himself in salvation, it was of use to bring them to Christ, Gal 3.24. By seeing what God required of them and what God forbade them, and thereby coming under the guilt of their sins before God and their inability to right themselves, they were driven to the ceremonial law, which taught them what Christ had done for them, and as they believed in the provision made by God for them, they were justified by faith in Him. —This is still true today as regards the preaching of the law of God as the moral law. This is called *the first use of the law*.
 2. To the unbelievers who were not to be saved by God's free grace, it was of use to show them what was good and what was evil; and it served as a bridle to restrain them from sin and as a motive to move them to good from fear of punishment or hope of reward (cf. Dt 28 and the temporal terms of the "national covenant")—which, though such behavior was not in any way pleasing to God or a part of salvation, it was yet provided by God for the good of the commonwealth and the church. —This is still true today and is referred to as *the second use of the law*. **The *third use of the law* is its serving as rule of obedience for believers.
- III. *Antinomista*: But if the covenant of works was taken away as regards the believing Jews and if God related to them only by the covenant of grace, then why are so many of the promises and threatenings of the OT temporal and earthly in nature?
 - A. It is true that the Lord moved His OT people mainly by temporal promises and threats: Isa 1.10, 19-20; 2.6, 8; 3.1, 8; 5.13-14, 25-26, 29; Jer 7.3-4, 9-10, 20.
 - B. But the reason for this is not because God was relating to them by the covenant of works, but rather because the fulness and spirituality of the covenant of grace could not be easily seen from their vantage point as an OT church, a people under age.
- IV. *Antinomista*: But it seems that both believers and unbelievers were treated equally by God as both fell under the temporal punishments of disobedience and enjoyed the temporal blessings for obedience?
 - A. It is true, for example, that Moses and Aaron, for their disobedience, were forbidden to enter Canaan (Num 20.12) as well as the others who disobeyed (Num 14.31-33). When believers in the OT disobeyed God's temporal judgments went out against them; and when unbelievers in the OT obeyed God's temporal blessings were enjoyed by them.
 - B. **But here is the difference:
 1. *Because the believers were under the covenant of grace before God*, their temporal judgments had no eternal judgments included in them or following after them but were fatherly chastisements for their good, while their temporal blessings had eternal blessings in them

and following after them; *and because the unbelievers were under the covenant of works before God*, their temporal blessings had no eternal blessings included in them or following after them, while their temporal judgments had eternal judgements included in them and following after them.

- V. *Antinomista*: Then it seems all the obedience rendered to God by any of the Jews was either for fear of temporal punishment or hope of temporal reward.
- A. There were three sorts of people among the Jews who endeavored to keep the law of God.
1. The first were true believers who, according to the measure of their faith, believed in the resurrection and eternal life in glory, not by the works of the law, but by faith in the promised seed; and as far as they believed this, they offered obedience to the law freely as sons, without fear or hope of anything temporal; but as far as their faith was weak, they stood in need of being constrained to obedience by fear and hope of things temporal.
**And this is just the same today as regards our obedience as NT Christians.
 2. The second sort were like the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection and an afterlife (Mt 22.23) and endeavored to keep the law that it might go well with them in this present life.
 3. The third sort (the greatest number of Israelites, Mt 15.14; Ezk 34.1-2) were like the Scribes and Pharisees who believed in the resurrection and eternal glory and who therefore endeavored to keep the law not only to attain temporal happiness but also eternal happiness by their own works.
 - a) They were persuaded that God gave the moral law for man to be saved and justified by it and that it must therefore be within their reach. Therefore, whereas they should have judged their own evil hearts by the perfection required by the law, they instead measured the perfection required by the law by their fallen hearts; and so they expounded the law literally and externally (Mt 5.20ff; Isa 58.1-5) so that according to their exposition it was possible for a man to keep the law perfectly and be justified and saved by his obedience to it (Mt 19.20).
 - b) Moreover, when this sort did sin, they would observe the sacrifices as externally as they observed the law, as if the blood of bulls and goats took away sin (Heb 10.1-4).
 - c) Thus they separated Christ from both the moral and ceremonial law, resting in their own works and thereby forfeited the righteousness of Christ provided for their salvation, Rom 9.31-32; 10.3-4.
 - d) Therefore by the time Christ came to Israel, the nation was looking for the promised Messiah, but they were looking for him to come in outward pomp and power to deliver them from the only bondage they thought they had: temporal bondage under the Romans. The priests and Levites, as blind guides, (and the Scribes and Pharisees after them) had so turned the whole law of Moses into a covenant of works that they saw nothing of their spiritual bondage under the law, sin, and wrath of God.
 - (1) As they saw it, they were able to keep the *moral law*, and where they failed, they had the *ceremonial law* to atone for it. All they needed was the Messiah to come and rule over them in perfect peace by the terms of the *judicial law*.
 - e) That's why the Messiah, so soon upon His coming, took the occasion to expound the *moral law* truly and spiritually in the Sermon on the Mount, to remove that false legal-gloss which the Scribes and Pharisees had put upon it, that men might see how impossible it is for anyone to keep it and so be justified and saved by it. And likewise, at the death of Christ, the veil of the temple was torn to show that the *ceremonial shadows* of Moses have given way to the light of the gospel (Mt 27.51) and are no more. —It is in this way that we in the NT are driven away from the OT ceremonial laws unto Christ for our atonement (Heb 10.1-14) and away from the OT Pharisaical legal-gloss on the moral law unto Christ as our righteousness (Rom 10.4; Phil 3.7-9).

**Next week: We'll learn how it is that so many, even in view of the covenant of grace, still believe they can be saved by the covenant of works—which opens the door for *Nomista* to testify to his dependence upon his own works for salvation.