

The Law of God & the Christian

–Lesson 12–

- I. *Evangelista*: It's no marvel that so many in Israel turned the covenant of grace into a covenant of works, thinking that they could earn God's favor by the law, because *all men naturally do this*.
 - A. Witness the Galatians. Paul had preached to them of the covenant of grace and justification before God by faith alone in Christ alone; and yet through the deception of false teachers, who came in after his departure, they quickly turned away to the covenant of works and sought to be justified by their own works, Gal 1.6; 3.1-3.
 1. Luther, "This pernicious opinion of the law, that it justifies us and makes us righteous before God, is so deeply rooted in man's reason, and all mankind so wrapped in it, that they can hardly get out. Yes, I have preached the gospel nearly twenty years, yet, notwithstanding, I now and then feel this old filth cleave to my heart, whereby it comes to pass that I would willingly have so to do with God, that I would bring something with myself, because of which he should give me His grace."
 - B. I fear, in fact, that there are many among us who, despite their knowledge and profession of the covenant of grace, do, either wholly or in part, expect justification and acceptance with God by the works of the law.
- II. *Antinomista*: I agree; and I fear *Nomista* is one of them!
- III. *Evangelista*: There are thousands who make a Christ of their works; and here is their undoing.
 - A. They look for righteousness and acceptance with God more in the precept than in the promise, in the law than in the gospel, in working than in believing; and so miscarry.
 - B. When we call them to the duties of the Christian life, they can think of nothing but working themselves to life and they neglect Christ in their pursuit of holiness.
 - C. And when they're wounded by failure and defeat and sin, they run to the salve of more duties and performances, seeking salvation by and in their doing.
 - D. Many can distinguish between the law and the gospel in their judgments and confess that we are justified by faith without the works of the law; yet in effect and practice, in heart and conscience, they feel otherwise.
 - E. And there is something of this in us all; otherwise we would not be so up and down in our comforts and cast down with every weakness—we build too much on something in ourselves, which is variable, rather than on the grace that is in Christ.
- IV. *Nomista*: I think there may be something of this in me. Would you tell me what you think?
 - A. I was raised with a basic knowledge of the things of God and came under conviction by the preaching of a gospel minister. I went to him for counsel. He told me to keep coming to sermons, keep the Sabbath holy, leave off swearing, lying, and all idle communications, read and heed good books (Dod on the *Decalogue*, Bolton on *A Comfortable Walk*).
 - B. I did what he said. I frequented the sermons of faithful preachers, led my family in family worship, spent the Lord's Day in private and public worship, and left off my swearing, lying, idle talk, and so reformed my life that whereas before I had only been interested in keeping the Second Table of the Law (to gain the favor of men and avoid the punishment of men) I was now also careful to keep the duties required in the First Table (to gain the favor me religious men and avoid the punishment of God, even hell).
 - C. With all this change in me, I had the praise of all godly men and ministers. They all thought well of me, counted me an honest man and a good Christian; and because of such approval, I thought myself a Christian too. And I carried on in this way for some time... until I read in Mr. Bolton's book that though the outward righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees was

famous among men (both for all the sins they put off and for all the spiritual duties they put on), and so famous that they were persuaded they would earn heaven and happiness by it, it was an abomination before God!

- D. I concluded that I had as yet done no more than they did. Yet the Saviour says our righteousness must exceed theirs (Mt 5.20) and the Apostle says a true Jew is one inwardly (Rom 2.28-29). So I concluded that I was not yet a true Christian at all! I had done all my righteousness to be seen of men and I had not loved and served God with all my heart!
- E. So I set about to keep the law in earnest, and labored to perform duties, not only outwardly, but also inwardly, from my heart. I labored to bring my heart to every duty. I called upon the Lord in earnest and told Him that whatever He required of me I would do it with all my heart, if He would but save my soul. So I began at this time to take notice of the inward corruptions of my heart—which I had not done before then—and I was careful to govern my thoughts, to moderate my passions, and to suppress the motions and risings of my lust, to banish pride and all vain and sinful desires of my heart. And then, I thought myself not only an outside Christian, but also an inside Christian, and therefore a true Christian indeed.
- F. I went on comfortably for a while, until I considered that the law of God required passive obedience as well as active obedience, whereupon I began to be troubled at my impatience, murmuring, and discontent when outward calamity befell me. I labored to bridle my passions and submit myself quietly to the will of God in every condition. Also, I began to afflict myself for my sins, with abstinence, fasting, and pitiful lamentations in my prayers, sometimes with tears, by which I was persuaded that the Lord took notice of me and would reward me for it. By all this I was persuaded that I did keep the law both actively and passively and I was confident that I was a true Christian... until I considered that the Jews, of whom the Lord complains in Isa 58, did as much as I; and that caused me to fear that I was not yet right with God.
- G. So I went to another minister and told him that despite all I had done and suffered, I was persuaded I was no better than the Jews in Isa 58. He told me that I was certainly better off than they because they did not serve God with all their hearts as I do. So I was content... until I realized that I had been a sinner from the womb, even guilty of original sin in Adam. So that though I had reformed my life since my conversion, yet that would not free me from the guilt of all my sins beforehand. This greatly troubled me.
- H. So I went to a third minister of the gospel and he cheered me and bid me to be of good comfort because even though my obedience since my conversion could not satisfy for my former sins, yet since I had, at my conversion, confessed and forsaken them, God had mercifully pardoned and forgiven them. I returned home again and sought the Lord in prayer that He would assure me of the pardon of all my former sins and also of original sin from Adam, and I promised to be a good servant and do my Christian duties faithfully.
- I. Having gotten assurance of my forgiveness, I betook myself to my promise and heard, read, prayed, fasted, mourned, sighed, and groaned; I watched over my heart, tongue, ways, and actions, with both God and man. But after a while, as I grew more acquainted with the spiritualness of the Law, and the inward corruptions of my heart, I saw that I had deceived myself in thinking I had kept the law perfectly, for I saw in me much sleepiness, drowsiness, and heaviness, in my prayers, in listening to sermons, and in other duties. This troubled me greatly because I perceived that the law of God will not be satisfied without an exact and perfect obedience.
- J. So I went to the same minister again and told him how I had promised and endeavored to keep the law perfectly and yet had found that I still transgress it in many ways and therefore I feared hell and damnation. He told me not to fear, since the best of Christians have their

failings and no man keeps the law perfectly; therefore keep on doing your best, God will accept the will for the deed and wherever you come short, Christ will help you out.

K. This satisfied me greatly and I returned home again and prayed to God that though I could not keep His law perfectly, yet I would not despair because I believed that what I could not do, Christ had done for me. Then I did certainly conclude that I was now a Christian indeed and so I have been persuaded ever since. Therefore *Evangelista*, tell me what you think of me.

V. *Evangelista*: It appears to me that you have gone as far in the covenant of works as the Apostle Paul did before his conversion; and yet, for what I can tell, you have not gone the right way to the truth of the gospel, and therefore I question whether you have as yet truly come to Christ.

VI. *Neophytus*: When you spoke of the covenant of works and grace before I was afraid that I might be out of the right way; but now, having heard *Nomista*'s account and then you tell him, after all that, that you doubt his being a Christian, now I'm absolutely sure that I'm not a Christian! Surely, if he, upon whom the Lord has bestowed such excellent gifts and graces, and who has lived such a godly life, be not right, then woe be unto me!

VII. *Evangelista*: For all I know, you may be in Christ before him.

VIII. *Nomista*: Though I am now thoroughly convinced that I had gone the way of the covenant of works before, yet seeing that I have come to see my need of Christ and have truly believed that wherever I come short of the law, He will help me out, I am sure that I am a Christian now.

IX. *Evangelista*: This conclusion gives you no surer evidence of your being in Christ than you had before because this is nothing other than joining your works to Christ and trying to be saved partly by yourself and partly by Christ.

X. *Nomista*: You are wrong about me sir. I don't believe my works to be meritorious. Rather, I believe God accepts my works only for Christ's sake.

XI. *Evangelista*: Yet still you are in error. **For God demands a perfect *personal* obedience, which means it cannot be a hodgepodge and mishmash of yours and Christ's together, but must be the obedience of one person only. So that if you would be justified before God, you must bring Him a perfect righteousness of your own and renounce Christ's altogether, *or else*, you must bring the perfect righteousness of Christ and wholly renounce your own.

XII. *Antinomista*: Believe me sir, I would advise him to bring Christ's righteousness and wholly renounce his own, as I thank the Lord, I have done.

XIII. *Evangelista*: That is good advice, for the covenant of grace terminates itself only on Christ and His righteousness, directing the sinner to Him alone for justification. God will have none to have a hand in the justification and salvation of a sinner, but Christ only. Indeed, to say it as it is, neighbor *Nomista*, Christ Jesus will either be a whole Saviour or no Saviour; He will either save you alone or not save you at all, Acts 4.12; Jn 14.6.

We can neither come to God the Father, nor be reconciled to Him, nor have anything to do with Him, by any other way or means, than by Jesus Christ alone. So that there is nothing to be preached unto men, as an object of their faith, or as a necessary element of their salvation, which does not in some way or other meet in Christ or refer to Him (cf. 1Cor 2.2; 2Cor 4.5).

**Next week: Elder Lee will explain how Antinomista's faith is also in error and will expose the evil of a legalistic spirit that seeks justification before God by one's own works.