

The Law of God & the Christian

–Lesson 5–

- I. The goal of our study is threefold:
 - A. to distinguish between the law and the gospel, and
 - B. to understand what it means that in Christ we're *delivered from* the Ten Commandments as a covenant of works and yet that in Christ we're *under* the Ten Commandments as a rule of life, and
 - C. to *rejoice* in Christ for our deliverance from the covenant of works and to *walk* in Christ obediently and cheerfully in the covenant of grace.
- II. In this new study on the law and the gospel, we join a conversation between a minister of the gospel, an antinomian, a legalist, and a young believer. This conversation took place in 1645 in a book entitled *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*. This important theological work takes the form of a long conversation, beginning with distinguishing the law of works from the law of faith and the law of Christ and ending in a treatment of the Ten Commandments.
 - A. As the conversation begins, the young believer (*Neophytus*) is grieved over his sins before God.
 1. The legalist (*Nomista*) tells him that if he repents and frames his life according to the law of God (the Ten Commandments) he can expect God to bless him; but if he does not then he will perish since God requires every Christian to lead his life according to the moral law. See the conversation on pp. 40-41.
 2. On the other hand, the antinomian (*Antinomista*) urges the young believer to believe on Christ, rejoice in the Lord, and cast off the moral law and any conviction of sin since justification is by faith alone.
 3. **Given their contradicting counsels *Neophytus* is at a standstill, not knowing what to do.
 4. What is wrong with these two counsels?
 - B. They agree to seek the counsel of a minister of the gospel (*Evangelista*), who sets out to show them how they are both wrong and masterfully directs them to true faith in Christ by the end.
 1. *Nomista* is wrong in that whatever place the Ten Commandments hold in the Christian life it's not a law of works because the believer is freed from the law of works in Christ.
 2. *Antinomista* is also wrong in that while the Ten Commandments are not a law of works in the Christian's life, yet they are to be a rule of life because they are the law which Christ has issued to them.
 3. Thus both the legalist and the Antinomian are destitute of true faith and true holiness; forasmuch as there can be no walking in Christ *first* without a true receiving of Him; and there can be no true receiving of Him without a *consequent* walking in Him. So both of them are off the only way of salvation and if they continue in the way they are going, they will both perish. Therefore it concerns every man to be sure he is in the middle path.
 4. In order to understand the place of the moral law in the Christian life we must begin by distinguishing the three laws mentioned in Scripture: the law of works, the law of faith, and the law of Christ (Rom 3.27; Gal 6.2).
 - a) The *law of works* is the law to be done, that one may be saved. The substance of this law is the Ten Commandments. *This law comes from God out of Christ unto sinners, all the children of Adam. All men are under the law of works by nature.
 - b) The *law of faith* is the law to be believed, that one may be saved. This is a law *only in the sense* that God *commands* all men everywhere to believe upon and receive His Son as Lord and Saviour. *Only by obeying the law of faith may men be set free from the law of works and brought under the law of Christ.
 - c) The *law of Christ* is the law of the Saviour, binding His saved people to all the duties of obedience. The substance of this law is the Ten Commandments, but under a new form (Mt 11.29-30). For Christ delivers us from the *curse* of the law, but not from the *command* and *obedience* of the law. *This law comes from God in Christ unto sinners.

III. The law/covenant of works

- A. Adam owed obedience to God already, as His creature, by the *law of creation* (the law written on his heart). And should Adam render that obedience, he could have expected nothing from God, because it was but his duty, Lk 17.10.
 - 1. However, when God focused the obedience required of Adam into a positive *precept* (Gen 2.17) and added to it a *promise* of life and the *threat* of death, the obedience required of Adam became the substance of a covenant of works, WCF 19.1 (see Lesson 2).
- B. *Nomista*: But where are the Ten Commandments in the covenant made with Adam? The precept only pertains to the forbidden tree, doesn't it?
 - 1. The whole worship of God (required in the moral law) consisted in that one precept, so that as one Puritan put it, "Adam heard as much of the law in the Garden as Israel did at Sinai, but only in fewer words and without thunder."
- C. Adam was created holy and happy, enjoying the sweetest communion with God (Ps 16.11). But he did not continue in that estate. He disobeyed God's express command and became guilty of the breach of the covenant, Ecc 7.29.
 - 1. Was Adam's sin and punishment imputed/credited to his whole offspring? Yes, Rom 5.12.
 - a) Since God created Adam as a "public" person, representing all mankind at once, when he fell in breach of the covenant he threw down all mankind headlong into the same destruction which he met and drowned his whole offspring in the same gulf of misery with himself, Rom 3.10-18
 - b) All that holiness and happiness which he received in creation and in covenant for us and in our name, he subsequently lost in the fall for us and in our name.
 - 2. *Nomista*: Into what condition, then, did Adam's fall bring us?
 - a) All mankind received a threefold damage:
 - (1) the guilt of Adam's covenant-breaking sin (such that, before God, we are counted as having broken it with him, Eph 2.3)
 - (2) the deprivation of all original goodness, righteousness, and holiness (such that we are now corrupt and polluted, vile and wretched, utterly and completely sinful, Rom 7.18). —In the place of wisdom, righteousness, and holiness came blindness, uncleanness, falsehood, and injustice.
 - (3) an habitual natural proneness to all kinds of wickedness (such that it is our nature to sin always and only, Gen 6.5—which results in all our actual sins). Cf. WSC 18.
 - b) "The truth is, our whole nature is corrupted, defiled, deformed, depraved, infected, made infirm, frail, malignant, full of venom, contrary to God, even enemies and rebels to Him."
 - c) Luther: "This is the title we have received from Adam; in this one thing we may glory, and in nothing else at all: namely, that every infant that is born into this world is wholly in the power of sin, death, Satan, hell, and everlasting damnation."
 - d) Musculus: "The whirlpool of man's sin in paradise is bottomless and unsearchable."
- D. *Nomista*: But is that not too great a punishment for so small an offense as eating the forbidden fruit?

****Next week:** We'll learn how Adam broke all Ten Commandments in his one sin, why he could not recover himself out of his plight, why the Lord could not forgive him and let him try again, and why the covenant of grace, the *law of faith*, is our only hope of salvation.