

The Law of God & the Christian

–Lesson 6–

- 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. The law/covenant of works
- A. *Nomista*: But is that not too great a punishment for so small an offense as eating the forbidden fruit?
 1. Besides the truth of the Scripture that to break one commandment is to break them all since the offense is not against a particular law, but against the Lawgiver Himself (Js 2.10-11), the offense in the Garden was in no way small. It was an intolerable injury and attack on God Himself.
 - a) God's dominion and authority in His holy command were violated; God's justice, truth, and power in his righteous threat were despised; God's most pure and perfect image in which man was created was utterly defaced; and God's glory in man was lost and spoiled. Can this sin which did this, be small?
 2. Moreover, since God had summarized Adam's whole obedience (the law written on his heart) in the one precept (Gen 2.17), Adam broke the whole law in that one offense:
 - a) He chose himself another god when he followed the devil
 - b) He idolized and deified his own belly by choosing the fruit over God
 - c) He took the name of God in vain when he did not believe Him
 - d) He did not keep the rest and estate in which the Lord had set him
 - e) He dishonored his Father who was in heaven
 - f) He effectively murdered himself and all his posterity
 - g) He committed spiritual adultery
 - h) He stole that which God had forbidden
 - i) He bore witness against God when he believed the witness of the devil before Him
 - j) He coveted what the Lord had not given him.
 - B. *Nomista*: But why couldn't Adam recover himself and his posterity out of misery by renewing the covenant with God and doing better next time?
 1. The covenant of works was incapable of renovation. Once broken, it was closed forever, like Eden, to all men because the covenant was made between friends, but now man had become God's enemy.
 - a) Besides, it was impossible for Adam to fulfill the terms of the covenant after his fall.
 - (1) He already owed the debt of eternal death for breaking it the first time; and as it required perfect and perpetual obedience, he couldn't give this because he already had disobedience to his account. How could he regain an innocent footing?
 - b) Moreover, his *understanding* was drowned in darkness, his *will* was made perverse and utterly deprived of all power to will well, and his *affections* were set out of order so that he loved evil and despised good. How could such a creature enter into, much less keep, covenant with God upon terms of perfect obedience!?
 - c) "The truth is, our father Adam falling from God, did, by his fall, so dash him and us all in pieces, that there was no whole part left, either in him or in us, fit to ground such a covenant upon" (cf. Rom 5.6; 8.3).

- C. *Nomista*: But couldn't the Lord have forgiven him?
1. Not at all! God's justice is a righteous thing and it is unjust to pardon without satisfaction. The law of God is good and it is righteous to uphold it in punishing the guilty. To forgive him without satisfaction would have questioned the goodness of God's law. Furthermore, even if God had forgiven him and renewed the covenant with him, he clearly lacked the power to keep it and would have sinned again.
- D. *Nomista*: But since the covenant of works is broken, then are not God and man both free from its obligations?
1. God is free of His part (to give eternal life to the obedient) since none can obey the law now to receive it. But man can only be free if God releases him—and He has not, will not, and cannot, for the law is good and righteous and holy, and to release him would suggest otherwise.
 - a) Though man's strength to perform the covenant is lost, since it was lost by his own fault, the obligation upon man remains. Adam and all his offspring are no more discharged of their duties to the covenant of works, since they have no strength to perform it, than a debtor is, who lacks the money to pay his debt.
 - b) So God is not unjust to hold man to the requirements of the covenant of works though since the fall no man has the ability to render it. Man willfully and sinfully squandered his ability and it is his own fault that he cannot render it, not God's. Man has been unjust with God, God remains just, Gen 18.25; Mk 7.37.

III. Man's only hope now is in the covenant of grace, which God made with Adam in the Garden (Gen 3.15) before expelling him out of it.

- A. And in order that Adam (and we) might take care not to run back to the covenant of works for life and salvation, God sent him out of the Garden to keep him, in his fallen condition, from eating of the Tree of Life. This would have been to reach for the promise of God by his own works and on his own (de)merit. After the fall, the tree of life (which stood for eternal life) was only to be had by the covenant of grace. It was no longer available to man upon a covenant of works. It was forfeited by sin and now nothing but the grace of God could help man.

****Next week:** What is the *law of faith*, or covenant of grace? We'll learn of God's eternal purpose in Christ to save a people, often called the covenant of redemption, Ps 89.19.