

# The Law of God & the Christian

## –Lesson 9–

- I. After having been so long in Egypt, God's people had become grossly ignorant of the precepts and penalties of God's righteous law. So He graciously condescended, in the person of the Son (Acts 7.38; Heb 12.25-26) to reveal it to them in express terms and with awful solemnity from Mount Sinai, summing it up in ten commandments.
  - A. After the Son had spoken these words out of the midst of the fire, He wrote them on two tablets of stone, Ex 31.18; Dt 9.10. And after these two tablets had been broken by Moses in Ex 32, He was graciously pleased to write on two other tablets the same words and give them to Israel again (Ex 34.1).
  - B. However, this Sinaitic transaction was clearly a mixed dispensation. In it, the *covenant of grace* was republished (Ex 20.2; cf. Gen 17.7; 15.14); the *covenant of works* was awfully displayed in subservience to it (Gal 4.24; Mt 19.17-19; Gal 3.10, 17-18); and a *national covenant* between God and the Israelites was appended to it (Dt 28)—and the Ten Commandments was at the essentially connected with all three covenants!  
\*\**Thus* while the *covenant of grace* was undergirding all that took place at Sinai—as well as in the entire Mosaic economy—the *covenant of works* was made subservient to it and the *national covenant* was appended to it.
  - C. Distinguishing these three covenants at Sinai is critical to understanding the nature of the Mosaic dispensation and economy as well as the flow of the covenant of grace in the OT.
    1. All orthodox theologians are agreed that *the way of salvation was the same* under the OT and NT, and that the Sinaitic covenant—whatever it was—carried no prejudice to the promise made with Abraham and the way of salvation revealed in him, but served to lead men to Jesus Christ, Gal 3.7-22.
    2. The disagreement—and confusion—is over the *nature* of the Sinaitic covenant, whether it was of works or of grace. Since Scripture teaches that it was *both*, we're wisest not to choose between them, but to affirm both as true and then study diligently to understand how it is so and what it means that it is so. This keeps us humble and teachable.
- II. *Antinomista*: were the Ten Commandments delivered on Mount Sinai as the covenant of works?
  - A. *Evangelista*: Yes.
  - B. *Nomista*: But these were the offspring of Abraham and therefore under the covenant of grace, Gen 17.1-8. Therefore I do not think that they were delivered as the covenant of works, since it is impossible to be under two contrary covenants at the same time.
  - C. *Evangelista*: It is true that this nation was the natural seed of Abraham and were externally under the covenant of grace made with their father Abraham; but I fear that many of them were still under the covenant of works made with their father Adam.
    1. How can Israel be under these two covenants simultaneously?
      - a) The *unbelieving* Israelites were externally and by profession under the covenant of grace made with Abraham (Ex 19.8), as regards their membership in the visible church; but they were under the covenant of works made with Adam internal and really, as regards the state of their souls before God. There is no absurdity in this because it is the same with many today who profess Christ as members of His church but are spiritually still in bondage to sin.
      - b) On the other hand, the *believing* Israelites were internally and really, as well as externally, under the covenant of grace, and only externally under the covenant of works, and only in a manner subservient to the covenant of grace.

- D. *Nomista*: But were the children of Israel any better able to perform the condition of the covenant or works than Adam was?
1. *Evangelista*: No. *God did not renew it* with them because they were better able to keep it, but rather *God displayed it* to them because they needed to be acquainted with it.
    - a) By this time, the law written on the heart of Adam and passed on through the fathers, had been much obliterated and defaced by the loss of time and the corruptions of Egypt. The instructions of their fathers and their fall in Adam were almost forgotten, Rom 5.13-14.
    - b) They were so proud and secure that, though sin reigned in them and they were under curse of death as its wages, they were without a clear law to evidence this sin and death unto their consciences. They did not impute themselves with the sin of Adam, did not see their sin clearly, and did not charge themselves with it in shame.
    - c) Therefore God brought the law in (Rom 7.9) that their guilt in Adam's sin and their own actual sins might all be exposed.
  2. Thus the Lord's intention in this was that by directing the elect unbelievers to look on the covenant of works (*the law*) in all its awful solemnity they might be *reminded* of their duty as sons of Adam if they would seek life by it, and might *see* their utter inability to obtain life by their works, and might thereby be sufficiently humbled to *trust* in the covenant of grace made with Abraham (*the gospel*).
    - a) In other words, the covenant of works at Sinai was used by God as the *law* to bring them down from their self-righteous temper (Ex 19.8) and show them that the *gospel* of the covenant of grace was their only hope. It was meant to convince the people of their sin and misery as sons of Adam and persuade them to seek their help in the covenant of grace made with Abraham, which some did: Ex 20.18-19; Dt 5.22-31.
- E. *Nomista*: Then the Lord didn't repeat the covenant of works with them in order that they might obtain eternal life by obeying it?
1. *Evangelista*: *Not at all!* The covenant of works became weak and unprofitable by the fall (Rom 8.3) and cannot be used by any man as a means to obtaining eternal life, since all men are sinners, already and inescapably under its curse. God gave the law at Sinai as the covenant of works in order it might be their schoolmaster to bring them to Christ for justification by faith (Gal 3.24).
  2. In conclusion, although the same covenant of works made with Adam was displayed on Sinai to Israel, it was for a very different purpose.
    - a) God's design in making the covenant with Adam was that Adam might render that righteousness required of him as a creature and thereby receive the promise of eternal life by his own righteousness.
    - b) But His great design in displaying this covenant to Israel was that they might be stirred up to take hold of the covenant of grace in which a perfect righteousness is graciously provided by God Himself.
    - c) Thus the *covenant of works* was utilized at Sinai to help forward and introduce the *covenant of grace*, i.e., to drive them outside of themselves unto Christ, as He was prefigured in the Mosaic economy.

**\*\*Next week:** We'll learn that the covenant of grace was renewed at Sinai and we'll consider what the covenant of grace looked like under the Mosaic economy.

*Bonus material:*

- I. What evidence is there that the law delivered at Sinai was given as the covenant of works?
  - A. The thunderings, lightnings, trumpets, smoke, darkness, and the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire (Ex 20.18; Dt 5.22-26). This awful display of the law as a covenant of works, though it was not the principal part of the transaction, yet it was the most conspicuous part, Ex 20.18; Heb 12.21.
  - B. The Ten Commandments given to Moses on tablets of stone is called by Paul, “the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone,” (2Cor 3.7). This is obviously only the case as they are the substance of the covenant of works and not essentially (Rom 7.12; 1Tim 1.8).
  - C. The covenant made with Moses on Sinai is specifically called a covenant of works, Gal 4.24; 3.17; Dt 5.2-3.
  - D. The covenant of works was illustrated by Christ by appealing to the law given by Moses, Mt 19.17-19; also by Paul, Rom 10.5; Gal 3.10
  - E. So it is obvious that the covenant of works was displayed on Sinai. But rather than being blended together with the covenant of grace, it was displayed subservient to it and added to it, in order to convince the people of sin and show them their need for the mediation of Moses and the priestly order, which prefigured Christ.