

F.A.C.S. REPORT

FOUNDATION for the ADVANCEMENT of CHRISTIAN STUDIES
P.O. Box 241 Engadine NSW 2233

"Bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5)

Vol. 12, No. 7

©Copyright 1993, Stephen Geard

July, 1993

Covenant Theology: An Introduction

by Stephen Geard

Introduction

One of the foundations of reformed theology is what is known as Covenant Theology. The words "covenant" and "covenantal" are often tossed around in reformed writings. Yet it seems there exists considerable confusion as to what precisely we mean by these terms. This confusion is particularly obvious when it comes to discussing differences between the so-called Old Covenant and the so-called New Covenant. Who are the parties to these covenants? What is old about the Old Covenant? What is new about the New? When did the Old stop and the New start? Or are they still both in force? What is a covenant anyway?

Let us consider the last question first. However, before doing so, we must recognize that there are two types of covenants in the Bible: bilateral covenants between equals and unilateral covenants imposed by a greater power on one very much less. We see bilateral covenants between people standing as equals in a number of places, e.g. Genesis 21 (Abraham and Abimelech) and 2 Samuel 3 (Abner and David). In this context a covenant is just like a treaty or a contract.

However when the Bible normally speaks of a covenant it refers to covenants unilaterally imposed by God on his people. In this context Robertson defines a covenant as a "bond in blood sovereignly administered."¹ It is a bond in that the parties (God and man) are bound together by the covenant — in this sense it is still like a treaty or a contract. But it is more: it is a bond in blood, that is, to the death. The party guilty of breaking the covenant is condemned to die. Finally the covenant is said to be sovereignly ad-

ministered, this underlines its unilateral nature. Robertson writes: "No such thing as bargaining, bartering, or contracting characterizes the divine covenants of Scripture. The sovereign Lord of heaven and earth dictates the terms of his covenant."²

Any theological system must necessarily deal with the covenants that occur in the Bible. However Covenant Theology goes beyond that, by making the Doctrine of the Covenant the central theme of the Bible — indeed the glue that holds the Bible together.

Covenant Theology Defined

Covenant Theology (sometimes known by the older name of Federal Theology) does this by arguing that God made a covenant with Adam in Eden prior to the Fall. Which covenant Adam broke at the Fall, and mankind has laboured under the curse of that covenant ever since. However God in his mercy chose to make a second covenant with a second Adam, Jesus Christ. Offering life and salvation to all his chosen people, the church. These two covenants, the pre-Fall covenant with Adam, and the post-Fall covenant with Christ embrace all of God's dealings with mankind.

The Westminster Confession, the most perfect summary of Covenant Theology, states these ideas as follows, in Chapter 7 ("Of God's Covenant with Man"):

1. The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto Him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of Him as their blessedness and reward, but by some vol-

untary condescension on God's part, which He hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.

2. The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.

3. Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein He freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ. . . .

(Note that the Confession refers to the former covenant as the covenant of works, and the latter covenant as the covenant of grace. As we shall see these terms, especially covenant of works, are somewhat misleading and are better replaced with the terms Old Covenant and New Covenant.)

A second significant point the Confession teaches about the pre-Fall covenant involves its relationship with the Law of God. Viz. Chapter 4 ("Of Creation"):

2. After God had made all other creatures, He created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, . . . having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfil it; and yet under a possibility of transgressing, . . . Beside this law written in their hearts, they received a command, not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; which while they kept, they were happy in their communion with God, and had dominion over the creatures.

And also Chapter 19 ("Of the Law of God"):

1. God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works, by which He bound him and all his posterity, to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience, promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it, and endued him with power and ability to keep it.

1. O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1980), p. 4.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

F.A.C.S. REPORT is published monthly by the FOUNDATION for the ADVANCEMENT of CHRISTIAN STUDIES, a non-denominational educational organization. A free six month subscription is available upon request. Donations are invited, and those who send a donation of \$15 or more will receive a full year's subscription. Foreign subscriptions: a minimum donation of \$30, payable in Australian currency, is required for a year's subscription. Cheques should be made payable to F.A.C.S.

FOUNDATION for the ADVANCEMENT
of CHRISTIAN STUDIES
P.O. Box 241
Engadine NSW 2233
Tel: (02) 548 1886

Permission to reprint material from F.A.C.S. REPORT is granted provided the article is reprinted in full and the name and address of F.A.C.S. REPORT is given.

Editor: Ian Hodge

2. This law, after his fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness; and, as such, was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments, and written in two tables. . . .

All this is summarized well by David Weir in a recent book, he writes:

[F]ederal theology . . . refers to the doctrine that God, immediately after creating Adam, made a covenant with Adam before his fall into sin. This covenant is similar to, if not the same as, the Mosaic covenant made at Mount Sinai, and emphasizes the idea of conditionality: God says to the creatures made in his image that if they obey him, then God will bless them and they will live. But if they disobey him, then God will curse them and they will die . . . Furthermore, part of the covenant before the Fall involves the giving of the moral law, the Decalogue, to Adam and laying it on his heart. . . .

Finally, this covenant was binding on all men at all times in all places, both before and after the Fall, by virtue of their descent from Adam. If Adam had not fallen, his children would have been obliged to keep this Edenic covenant. Adam fell, but still his children are obliged to keep [this] covenant."³

Note carefully what Covenant Theology teaches about the Law, i.e. that it (the same Law that was later revealed at Sinai) was written on the hearts of Adam and Eve. Furthermore it continued after the Fall to be the "perfect rule of righteousness."

History of Covenant Theology

Having defined what Covenant Theology is it is helpful to examine briefly the history of the idea of a pre-Fall covenant. Weir notes that both Augustine and Calvin touched on the idea of a pre-Fall covenant — although neither of them followed the idea through.

Augustine wrote in his *City of God*, whilst discussing the necessity of circumcision in the Old Testament, that ". . . even infants have broken the covenant, not in consequence of any particular act in their own life but in consequence of the origin which is common to all mankind, since all have broken God's covenant in that one man in whom all sinned."⁴ Clearly Augustine here acknowledges the existence of a pre-Fall covenant — but he does not develop the idea.

Calvin implies the existence of such a covenant in his discussion of the sacraments in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. He wrote that a sacrament is a "sign which God has ever enjoined upon men to render them more certain and confident of the truth of his promises."⁵ That is, a sacrament is a sign of a covenant. He then goes on to list the Tree of Life in Eden as a sacrament. Clearly implying the existence of a pre-Fall covenant. Although he fails to explicitly draw that conclusion.

Thus Augustine and Calvin were certainly fore-runners of the idea of a pre-Fall covenant. But the first man to systematically develop it was the German theologian Zacharius Ursinus (1534-83), who is also famous for being co-author, along with Caspar Olevianus, of the Heidelberg Catechism (1563).

Ursinus developed the idea of the pre-Fall covenant in his *Major Catechism* (first published 1584, although Weir argues it was written 1561-62). Ursinus's development of the idea is illustrated by the following quotations:

Q10. What does the divine law [= the Ten Commandments] teach?

A. What sort of covenant in creation God had entered into with man . . . and what God would require of him after beginning with him a new covenant of grace.

And later:

Q36. What is the difference between the Law and the Gospel?

A. The Law contains the covenant of nature, initiated in creation by God with men, that is, it is known to men by nature; and it requires from us perfect obedience to God, and it promises eternal life for those who keep it, and threatens eternal punishment for those who do not fulfil it. But the gospel contains the covenant of grace, that is, existing but not known naturally: it shows to us the fulfilment in Christ of his justice, which the Law requires, and its restoration in us through the Spirit of Christ; and it promises eternal life by grace because of Christ, to those who believe in him.⁶

Note that Ursinus clearly sees that the Law of God bound Adam and his descendants and is still binding today.

We should note that Ursinus refers to the pre-Fall covenant as the "covenant of nature" and "the covenant in creation." Other writers used various different terms including "covenant of creation," "covenant of life," and "covenant of law." According to Weir the first man to refer to it as the "covenant of works" was an English scholar named Dudley Fenner writing in 1585.

It is somewhat unfortunate that the Westminster Assembly should have adopted Fenner's term "covenant of works." As noted this term is misleading, and has caused considerable confusion. Interestingly however, they used "covenant of life" in the Catechisms (c.f. Shorter Catechism Q.12, Larger Catechism, Q.20).

Following the Confession the great Princeton theologian Charles Hodge also used both these terms, explaining "[the pre-Fall] covenant is sometimes called a covenant of life, because life was promised as the reward of obedience. Sometimes it is called the covenant of works, because works were the condition on which that promise was suspended, and because it is thus distinguished from the new covenant which promises life on condition of faith."⁷

Objections to the Covenant of Works Idea

Reformed scholars who criticize the Westminster Confession's teaching on the idea of God making a covenant of works with Adam usually lie in the Dutch Reformed tradition. Such scholars point out, quite rightly, that the Three Forms of Unity know nothing of any covenant of works.

- David Weir, *The Origins of the Federal Theology in Sixteenth-Century Reformed Thought*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 3-4.
- St. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* (completed A.D. 427), trans. Henry Bettenson, London: Penguin Books, 1972), book 16, chapter 27.
- John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559 ed.), trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), book 4, chapter 14, section 18.
- Quotations from Weir, pp. 105-06.
- Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (1878), 3 vols., (reprinted Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), vol. 2, p. 118.

Their objections usually centre on the teaching that life was promised to Adam upon condition of perfect, personal obedience. That is, that Adam could earn the favour of God.

For example, the Dutch-American theologian Herman Hoeksema wrote: ". . . it is quite impossible that man should merit a special reward with God. Obedience to God is an obligation." And he concluded: "Hence, we cannot accept the theory of the covenant of works, but must reject it as unscriptural."⁸

Likewise the Dutch-South African writer Cornelius van der Waal, after quoting Ursinus and the Westminster Confession, concludes: ". . . it is very clear what was thought of as the nature of the so called covenant of works. Obedience to it would bring about righteousness through works. This notion must be radically rejected."⁹

Finally, to bring our examples closer to home, consider Professor Tom Wilkinson from Melbourne, who lectured for many years at Reformed Theological College in Geelong. He has written in a recently published study guide to the Westminster Confession, that: "[to the covenant of works, there is] the objection that God's grace is swallowed up, giving the impression that it was to be a purely human achievement. Furthermore whenever God's covenant is mentioned in the Bible, it has strongly redemptive overtones which are absent from the conception of works. For these reasons there is doubt about the wisdom of speaking of a covenant of works."¹⁰

To respond to these objections it is necessary to understand the context in which God enters into a covenant with his people. That is that the covenants are always made after God has established his people. (In this context I am using the term establish to embrace both creation and redemption.)

In the case of Noah and his family, it was after God had delivered them safely onto the dry land of the post-Flood world that he then entered into his covenant with them. Likewise with Abraham, God brought him out of Ur of the Chaldees and established him in the new land of Canaan and then entered into his covenant with him.

Similarly with the covenant made with Israel at Sinai, it was made after God had established Israel as his peo-

ple — i.e. redeemed then from slavery in Egypt. Note what God did not do: He did not go down into Egypt, whilst Israel were still in slavery, make his covenant with them, give them the Law and then say to them, "If you obey my Law, I will redeem you from slavery." Rather he redeemed them and then said, "I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. . . .", and then proceeded to give them his Law (Exodus 20:2-17). Thus the giving of the Law (= the making of the covenant) came after the redemption.

Then finally, with the New Covenant (the covenant of grace) made with Christ and in him with all the elect. I can do no better than to quote the Larger Catechism:

Q31. With whom was the covenant of grace made?

A. The covenant of grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in him with all the elect as his seed.

"Understanding the Old Testament covenants . . . explains why the Law of God was revealed in such detail to Israel at Sinai."

Q32. How is the grace of God manifested in the second covenant?

A. The grace of God is manifested in the second covenant, in that he freely provideth and offereth to sinners a Mediator, and life and salvation by him; and requiring faith as the condition to interest them in him, promiseth and giveth his Holy Spirit to all his elect, to work in them that faith, with all other saving graces; and to enable them unto all holy obedience, as evidence of the truth of their faith and thankfulness to God, and as the way which he hath appointed them to salvation.

Note again that the demands of the New Covenant (faith and all holy obedience) come after (not before) redemption and is enabled by (not conditional to) the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Thus in all these redemptive covenants we see the same thing, that is God entered into the covenant after he

had established his people. So it was with Adam in the beginning. God had already established (= created, in this context) Adam as his son (Luke 3:38) prior to entering into the covenant of works. Thus Adam already owed God everything, before the covenant was made. A.A. Hodge explained, "The very act of creation brings the creature under obligation to the Creator, but it cannot bring the Creator into obligation to the creature."

Thus it is not at all true to say that Adam's "life" was conditioned upon obedience to the covenant of works as Adam was already alive when the covenant was made! On the contrary Adam was required unconditionally to remain perfectly obedient to God's Law, in response to which God promised to bless him. A.A. Hodge continued, "[the covenant of works] was also in its essence a covenant of grace, in that it graciously promised life in the society of God as the freely-granted reward of an obedience already unconditionally due. Nevertheless it was a covenant of works and of law with respect to its demands and conditions."¹¹

In this sense the covenant of works has obvious parallels with the Mosaic Covenant made at Sinai. There, after God had graciously redeemed Israel, he entered into a covenant with them promising "life" (= blessing) as the reward for obedience, and promising "death" (= cursing) for disobedience - see Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28; 30:15-20.

There is also an obvious, but different, parallel with the New Covenant (the covenant of grace). In that both covenants are conditional upon "perfect and personal obedience." Fortunately however the New Covenant does not depend upon our obedience but upon Christ's. J. Gresham Machen understood this clearly,

[Christ] was not for Himself subject to the law. No obedience was required of Him for Himself, since He was the Lord of all. That obedience, then, which He rendered to the law when He was on earth was rendered by Him as my representative. I have no righteousness of my own, but clad in Christ's perfect righteousness, imputed to me and received by faith alone . . . there awaits me the glorious reward which Christ thus earned for me.¹²

We can now summarize and compare the covenant of works and the

8. Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1966), pp. 217 & 220.

9. Cornelius van der Waal, *The Covenantal Gospel* (Neerlandia, Alberta: Inheritance Publications, 1990), p. 54.

10. T. L. Wilkinson, *The Westminster Confession Now*, published by the author, 1992, p. 58.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 122.

12. J. Gresham Machen, "The Active Obedience of Christ," in *God Transcendent* (1949) (reprinted Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), p. 189.

covenant of grace. We first note that both are covenants of works and covenants of grace depending on how they are viewed. Both are covenants of works in that both are conditional upon the "perfect and personal obedience" of the federal (= covenantal) head of humanity. And here the difference between them becomes most clear: For Adam (the federal head of the first humanity) failed to deliver such obedience and thereby condemned himself and his posterity to death. Whereas Christ (the federal head of the new humanity) did, as noted, render such obedience and secured reward for all his posterity.

"Fields like economics, education, agriculture, civil government, etc., should all be . . . governed by God's Law."

Clearly also, both covenants are also covenants of grace. For God was under no obligation to create Adam or to promise to bless him. Neither was he under obligation to deliver us from sin and death.

Thus in concluding our discussion of objections to the covenant of works idea, we see that the basic problem is one of nomenclature. For the so-called covenant of works was a covenant of grace and the covenant of grace a covenant of works! And furthermore the term covenant of works has been shown to be very misleading. Thus it is better to drop the Confession's terms and simply to speak of the Old Covenant (meaning the covenant with Adam) and the New Covenant (the covenant with Christ).

The Other Old Testament Covenants

Defining the terms Old and New Covenant as we have above leaves unclear the status of the other Old Testament covenants. How do the covenants with Noah, Abraham, and Moses fit in with our scheme of things?

To answer this question it is helpful to introduce the ideas of the Old Covenant world-order and the New Covenant world-order. Defining the Old Covenant world-order as the covenantal structuring of the world during the period from creation to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is, the period prior to the institution of the New Covenant in its full power and glory. The New Covenant world-order referring,

obviously, to the structure of the world since.

The existence of such structuring in the Old Covenant world can be seen in the creation narrative in Genesis 1 and 2. God first created the world, within which he created a special land, the Land of Eden. Then within this special land he established a very special place, the Garden of Eden (c.f. Genesis 2:8). Finally we see man created within the Garden.

Readers familiar with his writings will note that I am at this point drawing heavily on the work of the American scholar James B. Jordan. Jordan refers to these three circumjacent areas that constitute the Old Covenant world-order as the World, the Land, and the Sanctuary. The World entirely surrounded the Land (which was in the first instance the Land of Eden). And the Land entirely surrounded the Sanctuary (in the first instance the Garden of Eden). Furthermore the dwelling place of unfallen man was the Sanctuary.

It is also clear that each of these three areas (the World, the Land, and the Sanctuary, in that order) were progressively more holy and in a sense closer to God than the preceding one. We see this in the progressive falls recorded in Genesis. For when Adam and Eve sinned in the Sanctuary they were expelled out into the Land (Genesis 3:24). Then when Cain sinned in the Land he was expelled out into the World (Genesis 4:16). Eventually, as we know, the whole World became totally corrupt and God sent the Flood to wipe the Earth clean.

After the Flood, God entered into a covenant with Noah giving him and his descendants the whole Earth (Genesis 9:7). Thus we have the re-establishing of the lowest level of our three areas: the World.

Some centuries later, God entered into a covenant with Abraham calling him and his descendants to be a holy people living in a special land, Canaan. Thus we have the re-establishing of our next level: the Land.

Some centuries later again, God entered into a covenant with Israel at Sinai. The centrepiece of this covenant was the setting up of a very special place where Israel met with God - the tabernacle, later replaced by the Temple. So finally we have the re-establishing of the Sanctuary. In summary then, in the covenants with Noah,

Abraham, and Moses we have the progressive re-establishing of the three circumjacent areas: the World, the Holy Land, and the Most Holy Sanctuary.

Readers wishing to explore further Jordan's thoughts on the Old Covenant world order are referred to his books *The Sociology of the Church*¹³ and *Through New Eyes*¹⁴, and also his essay "Rebellion, Tyranny, and Dominion in the Book of Genesis."¹⁵

As noted previously, the dwelling place of unfallen man was in the Garden-Sanctuary. Therein Adam had two responsibilities: "to dress [maintain] it and to keep [guard] it" (Genesis 2:15). Following Jordan we might note that it was Adam's failure to guard the Sanctuary against an intruder (the serpent) that led directly to the Fall.

Immediately after the Fall Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden-Sanctuary and angels with a flaming sword sent to guard against attempted re-entry. For after the Fall access to the Sanctuary was to be very restricted.

When the Tabernacle was built the priests were given the same responsibilities as Adam: to serve in it and to guard it (c.f. Numbers 3:7-8, 8:26, 18:5-6; where precisely the same Hebrew words are used as in Genesis 2:15). However the priests had limited access to the Sanctuary and had principally to guard it from the outside - not from within like Adam. Indeed only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, did the High Priest enter the Holy of Holies and come before the mercy-seat of God (Leviticus 16).

Understanding the Old Testament covenants in this sense explains why the Law of God was revealed in such detail to Israel at Sinai. This was because Israel were the people of the Land, not just a people of the World; and furthermore because they had the responsibility of guarding and maintaining the Sanctuary. Thus they were a people much closer to God than those of the World. Hence they had to be so much more holy than them.

To allow them to be a holy people God did two things. Firstly he revealed his Law to them in exhaustive detail - so that they had it before them in "black and white." And secondly he established the sacrificial system to allow them to cover up (that is the literal meaning of the Hebrew words normally translated "make atonement for") their sins. Of course God knew his people were sinning all the time and thus there was, in addition to specific sacrifices for specific sins, regular

13. James B. Jordan, *The Sociology of the Church* (Tyler, TX: Geneva Ministries, 1986).

14. James B. Jordan, *Through New Eyes: Developing a Biblical View of the World* (Brentwood TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt Publishers, 1988).

15. James B. Jordan, "Rebellion, Tyranny, and Dominion in the Book of Genesis," in Gary North, ed., *Tactics of Christian Resistance*, Christianity & Civilization No. 3, (Tyler, TX: Geneva Divinity School Press, 1983).

sacrifices offered in daily, weekly and yearly cycles.

All this changes, of course, with the coming of the New Covenant world-order. No longer is there an earthly sanctuary, but rather the Sanctuary is now in heaven (Hebrews 9). Furthermore access to this heavenly Sanctuary is unrestricted thanks to the finished work of Christ, our great high priest. The Land also has changed — it is no longer a geographical place — but it is now the boundary-less church. All the members of which are the people of the Land. Furthermore the church is commanded to carry the message of the gospel out to the whole world (Matthew 28:19-20) — that is to bring all the peoples of the World into the Land. Bringing them into that special service and obedience demanded of people of the Land.

So one way of looking at the other Old Testament covenants is to see them as a progressive re-establishment of the Old Covenant world-order. It should be stressed that this is not the only way of understanding these covenants. For example the Westminster Confession in Chapter 7 ("Of God's Covenant with Man"), Sections 5 and 6, present a quite different understanding of the function of the Mosaic Covenant. However Jordan's is the one I find most helpful.

The New Covenant and the Law

The most significant implication of Covenant Theology revolves around its teaching on the Law of God. For the Law was part and parcel of the covenant of works. It was given at creation and is "built in" to the universe. It is the Law that Paul is referring to when he speaks of "the elements [or elementary principles] of the world" (Galatians 4:3).

But what precisely do we mean by Law in this context? Clearly not all the laws given to Israel at Sinai were binding on Adam — any more than they are binding on us. The sacrificial and other "ceremonial" laws certainly didn't bind unfallen Adam.

However we noted above that these sacrificial and ceremonial laws (including, less obviously, the dietary laws and the laws of forbidden mixtures) were given to Israel because they were called to be the people of the Holy Land and guardians of the earthly Sanctuary. Yet they were sinful guardians and these various laws existed to ensure they were sufficiently holy to carry out the task.

Take for example the laws of forbidden mixtures, which forbid

amongst other things, the wearing by Israelites of garments made of mixed cloth (i.e. cloth of wool and linen woven together). Such mixtures were forbidden to ordinary Israelites not because mixtures were unclean or defiled (as is often thought), but because they were holy. In fact the fabric of the Tabernacle and the High Priest's garments were of mixed cloth!

Jordan explains this in one of his unpublished essays, ". . . mixtures were holy. If a man made a garment of mixed wool and linen, he was dressing like a priest. If he did this, God would count him under the special laws of holiness that applied to the priest. Not being an ordained priest, and not being able to keep such laws, the citizen would simply bring judgment down upon himself by wearing holy garments."¹⁶

Clearly such considerations did not apply to the perfectly holy, unfallen Adam. Nor do they apply to Christian believers, all of whom are priests (1 Peter 2:5,9).

Hence by the Law in the Old Covenant we mean the eternal principles of the Covenant, not those special temporary regulations introduced for Israel at Sinai. The Larger Catechism argues as follows:

Q91. What is the duty which God requireth of man?

A. The duty which God requireth of man, is obedience to his revealed will.

Q92. What did God at first reveal unto man as the rule of his obedience?

A. The rule of obedience revealed to Adam in the estate of innocence, and to all mankind in him, . . . was the moral law.

Q93. What is the moral law?

A. The moral law is the declaration of the will of God to mankind, directing and binding everyone to personal, perfect, and perpetual conformity and obedience thereunto, in the frame and disposition of the whole man, soul and body . . .

Q98. Where is the moral law summarily comprehended?

A. The moral law is summarily comprehended in the ten commandments . . .

Thus the Law can be defined as the eternal principles of the Old Covenant as summarized in the Ten Commandments. The Law bound Adam and continues to bind all people everywhere. This has two obvious corollaries.

Firstly, all people everywhere stand condemned before God for failing to keep his Law. This is precisely the Biblical teaching that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). We know, of course, that this is not the end of the story. For God in Christ died on the cross at Calvary taking the punishment due to his people. And furthermore God imputed Christ's righteousness to all his people, so that they can stand in a holy and righteous relationship to himself. Having been restored to a right relationship with God, his people are called upon to obey the Law and are enabled by the Spirit so to do (however imperfectly). This is the fruit of the New Covenant.

Covenant Theology Applied

The second abovementioned corollary is that the Law of God applies to all of life. God is the creator and

"Every field of human endeavour is bound by the Law of God, and everything should be done to the glory of God."

ruler of the whole world including every thought and action. Everything we do and say comes under the judgement of his Law. This is taught in the New Testament in a number of places: Romans 12:2 teaches that we should not be conformed to this world but transformed by the renewing of our minds; 2 Corinthians 10:5 teaches that we should bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; and finally, 1 Corinthians 10:31 teaches that "whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

For example, all human knowledge is under the government of God. Professor John Frame from Westminster Theological Seminary in California explains:

Knowing is an act of a covenant servant of God. That means that in knowing God, as in any other aspect of human life, we are subject to God's control and authority, confronted with his inevitable presence.¹⁷

He goes on to explain that:

All of our knowledge is subject to law, and so all knowledge of the world ("things", "facts") is subject to the norms of God's Word. The law itself is a fact . . . and it is a fact that governs our interpretations of

16. James B. Jordan, "The Law of Forbidden Mixtures," Biblical Horizons Occasional Paper No. 6, 1989, p. 3.

17. John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1987), p. 40.

other facts. Hypotheses or interpretations that on careful analysis are found to contradict Scripture can have no standing in Christian thought.¹⁸

He then argues that we do not know what the Law means until we learn to apply it. For, clearly, it is nonsense to claim to understand the meaning of any law and yet not know how to apply it. And the more we learn about the world, the more we learn about how to apply God's Law. Thus:

[E]very fact tells us about God's law. Everything we learn about eggs or petroleum or solar energy or cold fronts - all this information shows us something about how we may glorify God in the use of his creation. It helps us to exegete 1 Corinthians 10:31 — and much more.¹⁹

However this recognition that God's Law rules over all of our lives should extend beyond theological and theoretical subjects, into the realm of "real world" matters. Fields like economics, education, agriculture, civil government, etc., should all be seen as governed by God's Law.

Let us consider each of the above-mentioned fields in a bit more detail. Firstly, economics, which deals with the exchange of goods and services between and among people, should recognize that all goods and services

are created by God. Furthermore all goods and services are ultimately used for only one of two purposes: to glorify God or to rebel against him. Therefore all economic and financial decisions should give proper consideration to the principles embodied in the Bible's many teachings on matters financial. Amongst these would be teachings on tithing, restrictions on indebtedness, and the right of private property ownership (implied by the commandments, "Thou shalt not steal", Exodus 20:15; and "Thou shalt not remove thy neighbour's landmark [=boundary stone]", Deuteronomy 19:14).

Secondly, education must be seen as the raising of children in the knowledge and love of God. As per Deuteronomy 6:6-7, "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."

Thirdly, agriculture should be seen as one aspect of subduing the earth (Genesis 1:28). It should be practised with thankfulness in recognition that it is God who provides rain, soil fertility, crops and livestock.

Fourthly and finally, civil government must be seen in light of the Bible's teaching that rulers are "minsters

of God to thee for good." (Romans 12:4). And also that kings, governors, etc., are sent by God "for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well" (1 Peter 2:14). Evil, of course, must be defined in terms of God's ever-abiding Law. Thus the civil government has a responsibility to enforce God's Law.

In summary, every field of human endeavour is bound by the Law of God, and everything should be done to the glory of God. To claim that any field is "neutral" or "secular" and not under the government of God is a denial of his covenant lordship over all - and ultimately a denial of God himself.

Conclusion

To conclude by summarizing this essay, we have seen that Covenant Theology is a system of theology that makes the Doctrine of the Covenant the glue that holds the Bible together. It does this by arguing that God has made two covenants with his people. The first was made with Adam and his posterity. This was broken at the Fall and we have laboured under its curse ever since. Yet God has graciously chosen to make a second covenant with a second Adam, Jesus Christ. Through which he promises life to all his people, and demands their complete and overall obedience.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 67.