

#05: Covenant of Law - Moses

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We have a little more material to cover this morning than usual so we have given you an outline and if we don't cover it all then you will have the outline to test you and bring to full fruition what we begin this morning.

Probably the source of greatest debate concerning the Old Testament has to do with the Mosaic covenant. Modern Marcionites always train their guns, primarily, at this particular administration of God. Even we ourselves who wish to embrace the totality of Scripture find ourselves most often neglecting—and therefore being practical Marcionites—this particular portion of Scripture.

What do you do with Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy in the Old Testament? If you will notice on your outline we shall first of all make some very brief comments about the essence of the Mosaic covenant and then treat more fully the primary aspects of the Mosaic covenant.

First of all, what is the essence of the covenant which God made with Moses? And the answer is: The essence of this covenant is that the Mosaic covenant is an externalized administration of the will of God.

The patriarchs were aware of the will of God in general terms. Sometimes they had very specific revelation of what God wished them to do. But now in the Mosaic covenant we have an externalized administration of the will of God. Now the fact that this is the essence of the Mosaic covenant is established by the emphasis on the—quote—10 Words—unquote—and the virtual identification of the—quote—10 Words—unquote—with the covenant of Moses itself.

If you look at Exodus chapter 20, Exodus 34 verses 27 and 28, “And the Lord said unto Moses, ‘Write thou these words. For after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel.’ And he was there with the Lord 40 days and 40 nights and he did neither eat bread nor drink water and he wrote upon the table the words of the covenant, the 10 Words.”

What is a covenant? The essence of the covenant is summarized in this externalized administration of the will of God. And put out in your margin if you want to make notes here, Deuteronomy 4:13 and Deuteronomy nine verses nine and 11 which also emphasize these 10 Words as the essence of the Mosaic covenant.

Now, furthermore, the fact that this is the essence of the Mosaic covenant is established by the stone engraven character of this particular covenant. This pillar of these two tables of stone set outside man not only give to us an image of the permanence of the law of God, but of the form in which the law is given to us.

Look, it is outside of you. It is written on cold, hard tables of stone. It is an externalized administration of the will of God.

The fact that this is the essence of the Mosaic covenant, this externalized administration of God's will is established, thirdly, by the New Testament characterization of this covenant.

John chapter one verse 17, "The law came by Moses."

What is the covenant of Moses? It is the covenant of the law, of the externalized administration of the will of God.

Galatians 3:17, "The law coming 430 years after the promise cannot disannul the promise."

What is the major essence of the Mosaic covenant? It is the externalized administration of the law of God. So that is basically the essence and often it is the most important thing of Scripture that is overlooked. So remember that the essence of this covenant is the externalized administration of God's will.

Now we look, secondly, then, if you look on your outline, Roman numeral II, primary aspects of the Mosaic covenant. And we have noted three. We might here say, "Some primary aspects." The effort is not here to exalt the primary aspects of the Mosaic covenant, but just to select some things that need emphasis. And, A), the covenant of law is related and if you wish to [?] that organically to the totality of the biblical revelation. B), the covenant of law is related progressively to the totality of the biblical revelation. And C), the covenant of law consummates in Jesus Christ.

Now when we say that the covenant of law is related organically to the totality of the biblical revelation we come immediately into conflict with a particular manifestation of Christianity called Dispensationalism. And at this point let me say that we recognize in Dispensationalism our brethren in the Lord to be sure. The good Dispensationalist is a five point Calvinist without apology and we may go a long way in Christian fellowship and in laboring beside those who designate themselves as Dispensationalism.

And yet in this particular aspect, more than any other, the covenant theologian diverges from the Dispensationalist.

Now we will note in this regard the doctrinal statement incorporated in the catalog of a leading Dispensational seminary. Article five of the doctrinal statement is entitled, "These Dispensations" And it reads in part as follows. "We believe that the

dispensations,” and by dispensations they mean the various epochs of the revelation of God in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, “we believe that the dispensations are stewardships by which God administers his purpose on earth through man under varying responsibilities. We believe that three of these dispensations or rules of life are the subject of extended revelation in the Scripture. “ That is, three of them are more prominent than others. “That is, the dispensation of the Mosaic law, the present dispensation of grace and the future dispensation of the millennial kingdom. We believe that these are distinct and are not to be intermingled or confused as they are chronologically successive.”

Now here is the heart of the disagreement between covenant theology and Dispensational theology. Eschatology is a very secondary matter in the distinction between Dispensationalism and covenantal theology. But the imagery that you get from this description is as follows. You have a Mosaic covenant and you have a covenant of grace and you have a covenant of the millennial kingdom. And these, as he says, as the catalog of one of the leading seminaries of the Dispensational school, these are not to be intermingled or confused as they are chronologically successive.

Now we need to realize that Dispensationalism is not something that has stayed stagnant. It has continued to grow and you should read with great appreciation, if you are interested in Dispensationalism, Charles Ryrie’s *Dispensationalism Today*. And you will find some effort at modification at this, but nevertheless, the basis is the same. “We believe that the dispensations are not to be intermingled or confused as they are chronologically successive.”

Now what does covenant theology look like? We have...Mr. [?] prayed today so we dedicate our [?] dialog to our Texas delegation this morning. Organically related are the covenants of God. They are not so ironcladly in air tight compartments so that one does not flow naturally into the other. But an organic succession of the covenant.

We see Adam in which we emphasized earlier this week the generic character of this covenant in which all that comes later is bound in this particular covenant. We see Noah in which the very same aspects of the covenant of creation again repeats himself. We see Abraham in which the curses and blessings of the covenant, even those same curses that were manifest in creation become even more apparent. We see Moses, a covenant of law. And our emphasis here is that this covenant is not an air tight covenant separated from the others, but it is a natural outgrowth of the previous covenant. We see David and we see Christ. And these are organically related.

Here we have the seed. Here we have the sapling. Here we have the full grown trees bearing 12 manner of fruit according to the 12 months of the year.

Now in order to establish this organic character of the relationship of the covenant of Moses with the other relationships we have to look in two different ways and that is what we have on our outlines here. If you will notice under A) the covenant of law is related organically to the totality of the biblical revelation. And under there points one and two,

law is present prior to Moses under Adam, Noah and Abraham. Law is present subsequent to Moses under David and the new covenant of Jesus Christ.

So if we are going to link this particular covenant organically to all that precedes and all that follows, we must show that there is law, that this is the essential aspect of the Mosaic covenant. We must show that there is law running through here, law succeeding this point.

So then we noted in Adam, the covenant with Adam, law indeed was present. The blessed promise of a seed was given, yet Adam must labor with his own hands in order to bring forth bread to sustain life. The blessed promise of preservation was given to Moses and yet he must institute this principle of God that whosoever sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed. And, in particular, we need to notice that law is present in the Abrahamic covenant.

It is often suggested that there is a radical distinction between the Abraham, the covenant of promise and Moses, the covenant of law. And we need to recognize with great emphasis that law is present under the Abrahamic covenant.

You will notice, for instance, in Genesis chapter 17 verse 14 here we are dealing with a most important aspect of the Abrahamic covenant. It is a covenant seal. It is the equivalent to baptism in the New Testament. And if you look at Genesis 17 verse 14 you find law. Obedience and you are blessed, disobedience and you are cursed even under the covenant of promise. "And the uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that soul shall be cut off from my people. He has broken my covenant."

Here we have the ultimate curse being pronounced on someone who dares to violate the stipulation of the Abrahamic covenant. He has broken the covenant if he does not practice the covenant seal of circumcision.

If you remember in Exodus chapter four we have a most hair raising incident with Moses himself before the Mosaic covenant is inaugurated. Moses is living under the administration of the Abrahamic covenant of promise. God says, "I have heard the groanings of my people and I have remembered my promises which I made to Abraham. Therefore I want you to go back and deliver my people because I promised I would deliver them."

And as Moses is jogging along in the way someone meets him. And the Lord almost murders Moses in the way and Zipporah his wife circumcises Moses' sons. Quite a hair raising incident when the proposed deliverer of Israel almost is slain in the way because he has not kept the stipulation of the Abrahamic covenant.

We could go even further into this to show that law is present in the period preceding Moses. But I would simply refer you to a good old southern Presbyterian whose volume has been long forgotten, dusty on the shelf, C.C. Jones *The History of the Church of God*.

Mr. Jones was a professor at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia and pioneered in the work among the Negroes of the South. He wrote a catechism to instruct the Negro brethren. He constantly told our people that we must evangelize all men all over this creation. C.C. Jones shows very effectively that each one of the 10 Commandments has various manifestations in all the period preceding Moses. It is quite an easy task, in fact, to show each of the 10 Commandments present in seed form prior to the Mosaic covenant.

Now we go further and we must, in order to establish, finally, this organic character of the relationship of the Mosaic covenant with the totality of the biblical revelation we must show that law is present after Moses. And it is a very simple thing to do so with the Davidic covenant. If you notice in 2 Samuel 7:14 something of the conditional character of the Davidic covenant. And we shall deal with that tomorrow and David and the covenant of the kingdom.

“If you do my commandments then you will be blessed and if you fail then you will not,” 2 Samuel 7:14.

Notice also the psalm singers of David’s character in Psalm 119:97. Here is the acid test for the Dispensationalists. If they can sing with you this psalm then you I know they are ok. “Oh, how love I thy law. It is my meditation all the day.” What a wonderful song to sing. Would you sing it with me? “Oh, how love I thy law. It is my mediation all the day.”

The prophets speak also, constantly of the law of God. Why is it that Israel is going away into captivity? It is because they have not kept the law of God. Hosea 8:12, one of the earliest of the writing prophets says, “I wrote to them the 10,000 things of my law, but they are counted them as a strange thing.”

But, of course, that is assumed and the primary question is the question that we live with in tension constantly as Christians: Is the Christian under the law? Is law present today for the Christian?

Now this is, indeed, a most difficult problem and its difficulty is manifested for various reasons. One of the difficulties is the various ways in which the term νόμος (nom’-os), law, is used in the New Testament. It is used in an extremely varied manner of ways.

But another thing that makes it so difficult is the seemingly contradictory statements of the New Testament itself concerning this question. Are you under the law or are you not under the law? Are you obligated to the 10 Commandments or are you not obligated to the 10 Commandments?

Well, as we say, part of this problem is involved with the varied use of the term νόμος (nom’-os). Sometimes it refers to the Old Testament Scriptures. Are you under the Old Testament Scriptures or are you not under the Old Testament Scriptures? Sometimes it will refer to moral law in general or to a principle of nature. “I see a law working in me,”

says Paul. Now that possibly is not completely final, but it seems to be that this is just a principle in a general abstract term. Sometimes law is used to refer specifically to the Mosaic covenant. Are you under the Mosaic covenant or are you not under the Mosaic covenant? But we look at some of these passages and they perplex us. We line them up on one side and the other and let me just read some of these.

Romans 6:14, "You are not under law, but you are under grace."

Romans 7:6, "Now we have been discharged from the law having died to that wherein we were held," Romans 7:6.

Galatians 3:23-25, "But before faith came we were kept in ward under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed so that the law has become our tutor to bring us Christ that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith is come we are no longer under the tutor of the law."

So are you under the law? Quite obviously you are not under the law from these passages of Scripture.

On the other hand we can line up some other passages of Scripture.

Romans chapter three verse 31, "Should we then make the law of none effect through faith? God forbid. Nay, we establish the law through faith."

Romans seven verses seven and 12, "What shall we say then? Is the law then? God forbid. So that the law is holy and the commandment holy and righteous and good."

And, of course you know that most important statement of Jesus Christ in Matthew chapter five verses 17 through 19. In this particular passage Christ is setting forth a programmatic statement concerning the way in which he shall teach. Matthew 5:17 and following, "Do not think that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, until heaven and earth shall pass away, one jot or tittle in no wise shall pass away from the law till all things be accomplished. Whosoever, therefore, shall break one of these least commandments and shall teach men so shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whosoever shall do and teach them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

Is the Christian under the law? Quite obviously the Christian is under the law. And if you dare teach and break one of the least of these commandments you shall be least in the kingdom of heaven.

Now how are we going to resolve this particular problem? It is, indeed, a difficult one. And here shuffling my notes I have lost my notes here and I have got to be Solomon now. I don't know what I am going to do. I wish I hadn't made it such a good problem.

One over simplification of the following which is what I was about to look for at this point is that the Christian is under the law for his sanctification, but he is not under the law for his justification. We are not under the law for our justification, but we do have to live under the law for our sanctification. This is not an adequate solution. The Christian, indeed, is under the law for his justification. Christ kept the law for us perfectly. And it is essential that all the righteousness of the law be attributed to us.

We might suggest at this point—without attempting to resolve this problem completely and fully—one area of fruitful discovery which might help us in resolving this problem. We are not under the law in one sense in that most distinctive aspect of the Mosaic covenant. What is the Mosaic covenant in its essence? It is an externalized administration of the will of God. It is an accession of the law of God that stands outside the believer and says, “Now, you conform yourself to these stone tablets.”

At least in principle we are not under an externalized administration of the will of God. For a new covenant has been made and as we shall see in Jeremiah in particular, “Now I administer my law in the heart. Now I administer my will internally. Now I make known to you my will not by giving to you outside yourself a code to which you must conform, but inside your very heart I write my law.”

It is the same law. It is the identical law of God, but its mode of administration is now different. Now it is being administered internally into our hearts.

Now we say this is, at least in principle, the experience of the Christian because when we do reach perfection, when we do reach glory then that will be our final state. But so long as we are imperfect, we will constantly need something of an external administration of the law to continually bring us back and in calling on Christ we shall be renewed in our hearts to conform to that law which now is being written in our heart.

Now we have, if you notice on the outline, coming back to the outline, under A) the covenant of law is related organically to the totality of the biblical revelation. And it is present prior to Moses and it is present subsequent to Moses under the Davidic covenant and under the new covenant. And if you notice under the new we have two points here: presumptive evidence and more specific evidence that we as Christians are under the law, the covenant of law.

By presumptive evidence we here mean or are referring to the fact that all the other covenants manifest themselves in [?]. That is, you have the Adamic covenant manifested here. You have the covenant with Noah here. You have the covenant with Abraham here. You have the covenant with David. Now shall we say all the covenants of God are present under the new covenant except one? This is sheerly presumptive evidence. We read, for instance, in Romans 16:20 about this...the time in which very shortly the serpent shall be bruised under our heel. This is an echo of the Adamic covenant which is now present for us.

In 2 Peter chapters two and three you have allusion to the covenant with Noah and the preservation of the earth. In Romans you have a constant reference to our being the seed of Abraham. And even now in Romans chapter 15 you have a reference to the root of Jesse that still reigns in Zion.

So this is presumptive evidence. All these other covenants are present. Shall we say, well, then, Moses is not present? Now he not only fell outside the Promised Land of Canaan, his covenant did also and it will have no continuation in the organic revelation of God.

Now we have, secondly, more specific evidence that the covenant of law, the covenant of Moses continues today. Three little points: Christians are chastened, Christians are blessed, Christians are judged according to their relationship to the law of God.

If you read 1 Corinthians chapter 11 near the end of that chapter you find a very interesting passage. Paul the apostle hears about these Christians cavorting about the Lord's Table and he says, "For this reason some of you are sick and some of you are dying." God was smiting the Corinthian Christians with sickness and death because of their abuse of his laws of holiness and righteousness.

Christians are blessed according to the keeping of the law of God. What is the meaning of Christ's conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount? "The wise man built his house upon the rock." And who is that wise man? The one who not only hears, but the one who does the will of God.

So then we must realize that our blessing depends on our keeping of the law.

Now we realize and immediately let me qualify this. We realize that under this new dispensation the Holy Spirit of God is in us in a unique way to enable us to keep this law, to deliver us from the bondage of an externalized law to which we must conform. He is writing it in our hearts. He has given us the freedom of forgiveness of sin so that we may be delivered from the curse of the law and transgressions. And yet at the same time on the other hand Christians are blessed according to their keeping of the law in one way or another.

And, finally, Christians are judged. We pointed this out once before in an earlier lecture, but throughout Scripture the consistent picture is given that salvation is by faith, but judgment is by works. 2 Corinthians 5:10, "Every man shall be judged according to the works that he has done in the flesh whether they be good or evil."

So then this organic manifestation of the law of Moses is continued into the new dispensation or covenant. And dispensation is a legitimate word. It just means period or epoch of time.

Now we proceed to note that the covenant of law is related progressively to the totality of the biblical revelation. On the one side we notice the organic character. On the other side

we note progressive character. And we will have to somewhat depend on the outline to write this lecture in your heart.

To say that the law is progressively related to the totality of the biblical revelation, again, we must establish two things. We must establish that the covenant with Moses is an advancement beyond all that precedes and also that the covenant with Moses is less than all that follows. And that is what we have in points one and two under B). The covenant of law is an advancement beyond all that precedes. And, point two, the covenant of law is less than all that succeeds.

And we have pointed out four points here regarding the advancement of the covenant of law. Here, again, we come into conflict with the teaching of...the distinctive teaching of Dispensationalism. If you read C.I. Scofield *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth* as he deals with the covenant of Moses he suggest that Israel at Sinai was a little hasty in accepting the Mosaic covenant. They should have not been so ready to give up the covenant of grace and promise. They should have, perhaps, pleaded with God to continue the covenant of promise under Abraham.

Now the whole suggestion here or the basis of the suggestion is that Israel is going to get worse under Moses than they were under Abraham. We cannot, in the biblical concept of revelation, allow for any such step of regression. God's manifold revelation of his truth has progressed throughout the history of redemption. And we noted these four points in the outline, A, B, C and D to indicate the point or at least some points in which the covenant of law was an advancement over that which preceded. It was an advancement, first of all, in the nationalizing of the covenant people.

Israel could not have been a people of God as a nation without the law of God externally administered to bind them together as a nation. And if you will notice in Exodus chapter 24 the emphasis is very strong on this nationalizing effect of the covenant of law. The 70 elders go up representing the people. Then 12 stones are brought up setting up 12 pillars representing the 12 tribes of Israel as they are now being confederated and organized as the people of God under the law.

This is an advancement beyond simply God's dealing with one family or one individual. Now a whole nation is to be God's people and it could be accomplished only by the giving of the law.

It is an advancement, secondly under B), in the comprehensiveness of the revelation of the will of God. The 10 Words symbolize the fullness, the totality of the revelation of the will of God.

There is a certain variety of perfectionism that boasts freedom from all known sin. "If you will accept our doctrine we can free you from all known sin." I would simply ask the question: Is that a good state to be in? It would be like riding out the hurricane without a radio to know the way in which the hurricane is progressing. It would be like taking a trip

without a map. You make a wrong turn, but as long as you don't know you are making a wrong turn everything is fine.

You see, the comprehensiveness of the revelation of God is of great value. And we should sing and rejoice in the full revelation of God found in his law, that we know what God's will is for us. And this is an advancement over that which preceded.

Point C) in the humbling ability, this, again, is an important aspect of the law. Paul emphasizes this. "If the law had not come I had not known sin. The law is our tutor to bring us to Christ."

And point D) in its typological significance, here is the law manifests what the people of God is to be. They are to be holy, holy to the Lord. Israel, indeed, was a very imperfect image and yet the type is still present. The people of God are to be holy, keeping his law as he was holy.

Now, on the other side of the register in point two on the outline, the covenant of law is regulated progressively because it is less than all that succeeds. The Davidic covenant is greater and certainly we know the new covenant is greater. Read in particular 2 Corinthians chapter three, its beautiful description that although the Mosaic covenant came in glory so that the face of Moses shone, yet the glory of the new covenant is even greater and it is not ministered externally on tables of stone, but internally in your heart.

"Look there and you shall be transformed," says 2 Corinthians. You shall be transformed from glory to glory into the very image of Christ himself because unto the new covenant Christ administers his law in the heart of his people.

Let us pray.

We trust, oh gracious Father, in your truth. Grant to us a sense of appreciation for the oneness of your revelation. Help us we ask, oh Lord, to submit ourselves willingly and gladly to your law. Give us faith to trust in the powerful working of the Holy Spirit which raised Christ from the dead and which also shall raise us from the deadness of sin. Give us the joy of those who can say, "Sin shall not have dominion over us. For we are not under law, but under grace." For we ask in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.