



Post Tenebras Lux Covenant Theology...

The Mosaic Covenant Pt. 3...

Deuteronomy 7:7-11

^{NIV} **Deuteronomy 7:7...**The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. ⁸ But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. ⁹ Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands. ¹⁰ But those who hate him he will repay to their face by destruction; he will not be slow to repay to their face those who hate him. ¹¹ Therefore, take care to follow the commands, decrees and laws I give you today.

If there were any one idea that I could communicate to you concerning covenant theology it would be this. It is about more than infant baptism, or the Lord's Supper, or even the unity of the one people of God. Those things are important. Indeed, those things are crucial but they are not crucial in and of themselves. They are only crucial in that they are connected to a bigger purpose. You see the Bible is primarily about the gracious kindness of God that we have received in Christ. You see covenant theology focuses on all that God has wrought on our behalf in Christ. Christ is the focus of all of God's redemptive history.

That truth of that fact alone was a breakthrough for me. I certainly did not start off believing it. When I began seminary, I was a fairly well read guy. But my

focus, and I say this to my own shame, was always cast in terms of the practical relevance of the Bible. I wanted to make the Bible a living, breathing book for anyone that came under my ministry. And that is still a noble goal. As a result, I strove to find practical applications from any and every part of Scripture. Now providence and a wife who refused to move led me to study at a seminary where practical application was the central focus of all that was taught. There was a particular phrase that was drummed into our heads. It went like this: **“Exposition without application is abortion.”**

You have to admit it’s a catchy phrase. It even seems to ring true. And I admit that I bought into it completely. I structured my sermons and my Sunday school lessons around trying to find pertinent, even creative applications from every text imaginable. Sometimes it was easy. Sometimes, it was not quite so easy. I mean leadership principles from Joshua or Nehemiah are much easier to draw out than are applications on the silver sockets of the tabernacle.

Still, I gave it my best effort. And God was extremely patient and kind. Nevertheless, I was troubled that so much of the Bible was irrelevant to what I wanted to accomplish. Even now as I say that, I am want to blush because of my ignorance. And as I continued to study and to read sermons by some of the great preachers God had given the church I recognized that there was a great gulf between the focus of what I taught and preached and what they taught and preached. If I wanted to sound technical, I could say there was a measure of harmonic dissonance between what they did and what I was doing. But since, I have given up trying to be technical, let me just say men like Knox, Calvin, Edwards and Spurgeon focused on the main thing and I sauntered around in left field.

They kept hammering out sermons on sin, redemption and justification and I kept hammering out sermons on things like leadership or raising positive kids in a fallen world or the like. Even when men like Knox, Calvin or Spurgeon got around to being practical they always based their practical applications on some great doctrinal truth founded on the work of Christ. In other words, they admonished believers to live this way or that way not because it was preferential in some pragmatic way but rather because Christ our Lord had accomplished the eternal redemption of His people.

And that is the driving point of covenantal theology. It is about Christ and all that He has accomplished in working out the redemption of His people. I first came to that realization in the most round about way. In seminary, I was taking a course on the Sermon on the Mount. You will remember that the sermon is found in Matthew 5-7. The basic thrust of the class I was taking was that the sermon had no practical relevance for modern day Christians. My professor argued that the sermon was a sermon containing kingdom ethics for Jews only. He argued that it was sermon directed toward the nation of Israel when Christ was trying to set up His earthly kingdom. However, since the nation rejected Christ, the commands given in the sermon and the hope of an earthly kingdom were laid aside and the gospel went instead to the Gentile nations. Now, I have to admit that I never liked that particular interpretation. It seemed to me that Christ was trying to accomplish something else altogether. It seemed to me that Christ was trying to puncture the self-righteousness of the Jews by more fully explaining the basic demands of the law.

There were two or three parts of the sermon that seemed to reinforce that idea. For example, Jesus made it a point to tell His listeners the following.

^{NIV} **Matthew 5:20...**For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

He also told them:

^{NIV} **Matthew 5:19...**Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Now if nothing else, those two statements should make us want to examine ourselves to see if our righteousness is of a better kind than that of the Pharisees. It should also make us go very slow in deciding which commandments are no longer applicable for us.

But Jesus did not stop there. He went on to examine most of the Ten Commandments. In doing so, He made it a point to reinterpret the various commandments in way that was not only as severe as the Pharisee's own understanding of the law but actually more severe, more damning. Let me see if I can explain what I mean.

When it came to murder, Jesus said that the ancients said do not kill. To that understanding Jesus added that His understanding was that we were not to hate. Listen to how He put it:

^{NIV} **Matthew 5:21..."You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'** ²² **But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.**

Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca, 'is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

On the topic of adultery, Jesus did the same kind of thing. He said it was no longer adequate to abstain from external fornication. His command was that we should abstain from even adulterous thoughts. Listen to how He put it.

**^{NIV} Matthew 5:27..."You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.'
²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.**

On the issue of revenge, Jesus demanded even more:

**^{NIV} Matthew 5:38..."You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'
³⁹ But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. ⁴⁰ And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. ⁴¹ If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. ⁴² Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.**

Now, what should have happened is that His audience should have come to better understanding of the righteousness which God required. They should have been driven to their knees in repentance. Indeed, what Christ showed them clearly was that they were far from the righteousness, which they thought they had already attained.

Matthew drove that point home literarily in chapter 8 by introducing the story of a leper. Right on the heels of telling them what God demanded, Matthew had a leper approach Jesus and beg for cleansing. Listen to how Matthew puts it:

^{NIV} **Matthew 8:1**...When he came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. ² A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "**Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.**" ³ Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "**I am willing,**" he said. "**Be clean!**" Immediately he was cured of his leprosy. ⁴ Then Jesus said to him, "**See that you don't tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.**"

That should have been the response of everyone who heard Him. They should have recognized that their self-righteousness was a mile wide and an inch deep. They should have come to a self-realization that they were in exactly the same state as this leper who came to Christ saying:

^{NIV} **Matthew 8:2**...A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "**Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.**"

But that is not what happened. They trusted in their own ability to keep the law, which they had been given to show them their actual need. They thought it revealed their righteousness as a nation while it actually revealed the righteousness that God was offering in Christ. Now, in case you think I am making that up let me remind you what Paul would later go on to say in Galatians.

^{NIV} **Galatians 2:15**..."We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' ¹⁶ know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

Do you get the point Paul is making? Even we who are Jews and not vile sinners like you Gentiles recognize that no man is justified by keeping the law. Why on earth do you think you can be justified by keeping the law? Then he adds:

NIV Galatians 3:17...What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. ¹⁸ For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise. ¹⁹ What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was put into effect through angels by a mediator. ²⁰ A mediator, however, does not represent just one party; but God is one. ²¹ Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. ²² But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.

And then he says:

NIV Galatians 3:23...Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. ²⁴ So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.

It is exactly the same kind of thing Paul says in Romans:

NIV Galatians 3:19...What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was put into effect through angels by a mediator. ²⁰ A mediator, however, does not represent just one party; but God is one.

Now, here is the point. The law was never given to gain righteousness before God. It was given to drive men to humility before God. It was given to drive men

to despair. While the promise of the covenant was real, the need to show men their sinfulness and need before God was also very real. It is when men understand their sinfulness that they are driven to the covenantal promises of God. They are driven to seek comfort in God's promise to Abraham. And those promises to Abraham are fulfilled in Christ. It is a point that Paul makes over and over again.

^{NIV} **Galatians 3:7**...Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. ⁸ The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "**All nations will be blessed through you.**" ⁹ So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

^{NIV} **Galatians 3:13**...Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "**Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.**" ¹⁴ He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

^{NIV} **Galatians 3:16**...The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "**and to seeds,**" meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ.

^{NIV} **Romans 4:16**...Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring-- not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. ¹⁷ As it is written: "**I have made you a father of many nations.**" He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed-- the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.

^{NIV} **2 Corinthians 1:20**...For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "**Yes**" in Christ. And so through him the "**Amen**" is spoken by us to the glory of God.

Now the point of all this is that in Christ one finds the fulfillment of all the promises made to Abraham. One finds the fulfillment of all the promises made to Adam and Eve. One finds the fulfillment of all the promises made to Moses. One finds the fulfillment of all the promises made to David. One finds the fulfillment of all the promises made to Jeremiah.

And all that is true because the point of the Bible is Christ.

We know that from the way the promises are linked to Christ and we know that because Christ Himself revealed that that is the case. In the gospel of Luke, shortly after the resurrection Christ appeared to two disciples on the road to Emmaus. As they walked along, Jesus asked them why they were so sad. They reproached Him by asking Him if He not heard about the crucifixion. They said their hope had been that Christ would deliver them but now they had lost heart and despondent. It was then that Christ told them.

^{NIV} **Luke 24:25...**He said to them, "**How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!** ²⁶ **Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?**" ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. ²⁸ As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, "**Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.**" So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. ³² They asked each other, "**Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?**"

Now generally, we accept that the promises made to Abraham were fulfilled in Christ. Oh, the church still has trouble with the land promises even though we

have God's word promising us that all His promises are yes in Christ. We have difficulties seeing that the advance of the gospel in Acts and elsewhere more than fulfilled the promise of land and dominion. We even have trouble