

I

OF THE LAW, OR COVENANT OF WORKS

The Nature of the Covenant of Works

evangelista The law of works, opposed to the law of faith (Rom. 3:27), holds forth as much as the covenant of works; for it is manifest, says Musculus, that the word which signifies covenant, or bargain, is put for law: so that you see the law of works is as much as to say, the covenant of works; the which covenant the Lord made with all mankind in Adam before his fall; the sum whereof was, 'Do this, and thou shalt live' (Lev. 18:5); 'and if thou do it not, thou shalt die the death' (Gen. 2:17). In which covenant there was contained first a precept, 'Do this'; secondly a promise joined unto it, 'If thou do it thou shalt live'; thirdly, a like threatening, 'If thou do it not, thou shalt die the death.' Imagine, says Musculus, that God had said to Adam, Lo, to the intent that thou mayest live, I have given thee liberty to eat, and have given thee abundantly to eat: let all the fruits of paradise be in thy power, one tree excepted, which see thou touch not, for that I keep to mine own authority: the same is 'the tree of knowledge of good and evil'; if thou touch it, the meat thereof shall not be life, but death.

nomista But, sir, you said, that the law of the Ten Commandments, or moral law, may be said to be the matter of the law of works; and you have also said, that the law of works is as much as to say the covenant of works, whereby it seems to me, you hold that the law of the Ten Commandments was the matter of the covenant of works, which God made with all mankind in Adam before his fall.

evangelista That is a truth agreed upon by all authors and interpreters that I know. And indeed the law of works (as a learned author says) signifies the moral law; and the moral law, strictly and properly taken, signifies the covenant of works.¹

nomista But, sir, what is the reason you call it but the matter of the covenant of works?

evangelista The reason why I rather choose to call the law of the Ten Commandments the matter of the covenant of works, than the covenant itself, is, because

I conceive that the matter of it cannot properly be called the covenant of works, except the form be put upon it; that is to say, except the Lord require, and man undertake to yield perfect obedience thereunto, upon condition of eternal life and death.

And therefore, till then, it was not a covenant of works betwixt God and all mankind in Adam; as, for example, you know, that although a servant¹ have an ability to do a master's work, and though a master have wages to bestow upon him for it; yet is there not a covenant betwixt them till they have thereupon agreed. Even so, though a man at the first had power to yield perfect and perpetual obedience to all the Ten Commandments, and God had an eternal life to bestow upon him; yet was there not a covenant betwixt them till they were thereupon agreed.

nomista But, sir, you know there is no mention made in the book of Genesis of this covenant of works, which, you say, was made with man at first.

evangelista Though we read not the word 'covenant' betwixt God and man, yet have we there recorded what may amount to as much; for God provided and promised to Adam eternal happiness, and called for perfect obedience, which appears from God's threatening (Gen. 2:17); for if man must die if he disobeyed, it implies strongly, that God's covenant was with him for life, if he obeyed.

nomista But, sir, you know the word 'covenant' signifies a mutual promise, bargain, and obligation betwixt two parties. Now, though it is implied that God promised man to give him life if he obeyed, yet we read not, that man promised to be obedient.

evangelista I pray take notice, that God does not always tie man to verbal expressions, but doth often contract the covenant in real impressions in the heart and frame of the creature,² and this was the manner of covenanting with man at the first;³ for God had furnished his soul with an understanding mind, whereby he might discern good from evil, and right from wrong: and not only so, but also in his will was most great uprightness (Eccles. 7:29); and his instrumental parts⁴ were orderly framed to obedience. The truth is, God did engrave in man's soul wisdom and knowledge of his will and works, and integrity in the whole soul, and such a fitness in all the powers thereof, that neither the mind did conceive, nor the heart desire, nor the body put in execution, anything but that which was acceptable to God; so that man, endued with these qualities, was able to serve God perfectly.

nomista But, sir, how could the law of the Ten Commandments be the matter

¹ Not a hired servant, for there is a covenant betwixt such an one and the master, but a bond-servant, bought with money, of another person, or born in the master's house, who is obliged to serve his master, and is liable to punishment in case he do not, but cannot demand wages, since there is no covenant between them. This was the case of mankind, with relation to the Creator, before the covenant of works was made.

² The soul approving, embracing, and consenting to the covenant; which, without any more, is plain language, though not unto men, yet unto God, who knoweth the heart.

³ The covenant being revealed to man created after God's own image, he could not but perceive the equity and benefit of it; and so heartily approve, embrace, accept, and consent to it. And this accepting is plainly intimated in Eve's words to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die' (Gen. 3:2-3).

⁴ Executive faculties and powers, whereby the good known and willed was to be done.

¹ 'The Moral Law' (61).

¹ Walking back by the way of the covenant of works, which he left by his sinning. Object. 'Do we then make void the law' (Rom. 3:31), leaving an imputation of dishonour upon it, as a disregarded path, by pretending to return another way? Answ. Sinners being united to Christ by faith, return, being carried back the same way they came; only their own feet never touch the ground; but the glorious Mediator, sustaining the persons of them all, walked every bit of the road exactly (Gal. 4:4-5). Thus, in Christ, the way of free grace, and of the law, sweetly meet together; and through faith we establish the law.

not only saying, 'thou shalt not consent to lust,' but, 'thou shalt not lust': it doth not only command the binding of lust, but forbids also the being of lust: and who in this case can say, 'My heart is clean'?

antinomista Then, Nomista, take notice, I pray, that as it was altogether impossible for Adam to return into that holy and happy estate wherein he was created, by the same way he went from it,¹ so is it for any of his posterity; and therefore, I remember one says very wittingly, 'The law was Adam's lease when God made him tenant of Eden; the conditions of which bond when he kept not, he forfeited himself and all for us.' God read a lecture of the law to him before he fell, to be a hedge to him to keep him in paradise; but when Adam would not keep within compass, this law is now become as the flaming sword at Eden's gate, to keep him and his posterity out.

The Covenant of Works Binding, though Broken

nomista But, sir, you know, that when a covenant is broken, the parties that were bound are freed and released from their engagements; and therefore, methinks, both Adam and his posterity should have been released from the covenant of works when it was broken, especially considering they have no strength to perform the condition of it.

evangelista Indeed it is true, in every covenant, if either party fail in his duty, and perform not his condition, the other party is thereby freed from his part, but the party failing is not freed till the other release him; and, therefore, though the Lord be freed from performing his condition, that is, from giving to man eternal life, yet so is not man from his part; no, though strength to obey be lost, yet man having lost it by his own default, the obligation to obedience remains still; so that Adam and his offspring are no more discharged of their duties, because they have no strength to do them, than a debtor is quitted of his bond, because he wants money to pay it. And thus, Nomista, I have, according to your desire, endeavoured to help you to the true knowledge of the law of works.

THE MORAL LAW

The moral law is an ambiguous term among divines. (1.) The moral law is taken from the decalogue, or Ten Commandments, simply. So the law in the Ten Commandments is owned to be commonly called the moral law (*WCF* 19:2-3). And thus our author has hitherto used that term, reckoning the moral law not the covenant of works itself, but only the matter of it. (2.) The moral law is taken for the Ten Commandments, having the promise of life, and threatening of death annexed to them; that is for the law, or covenant of works. Thus the moral law is described to be, 'the declaration of the will of God to mankind, directing and binding every one to personal, perfect, and perpetual conformity and obedience thereunto, in the frame and disposition of the whole man, soul and body, and in performance of all these duties of holiness and righteousness, which he oweth to God and man, promising life upon the fulfilling, and threatening death upon the breach of it' (*WLC* 93). That this is the covenant of works, is clear from *The Westminster Confession*, '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' (19:1). And this our author owns to be the sense of that term, strictly and properly taken; the reason whereof I conceive to be, that the moral law, properly signifying the law of manners, answers to the Scripture term, the law of works, by which is meant the covenant of works. And if he had added, that in this sense believers are delivered from it, he had said no more than the *Larger Catechism* doth, in these words: 'They that are regenerate, and believe in Christ, be delivered from the moral law as a covenant of works' (Q. 97). But, in

the meantime, it is evident he does not here use that term in this sense; and in the next paragraph, save one, he gives a reason why he did not so use it.

ADAM AND THE TREE OF LIFE

The author says, that some learned men think so, and that the words (Gen. 3:22), seem to imply so much; but all this amounts not to a positive determination of the point. The words are these, 'Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever,' &c. Whether or not these words seem to imply some such things, I leave to the judgment of the reader, whom I incline not to entertain with mine own or others' conjectures upon this head; but three things I take to be plain, and beyond conjecture, in this text:

- 1 That there is no irony nor scoff here, as many think there is; but, on the contrary, a most pathetic lamentation over fallen man. The literal version and sense of the former part of the text runs thus: 'Behold the man that was one of us...', compare for the version, Lamentations 3:1; Psalm 3:7; and for the sense, Genesis 1:26-7: 'And God said, Let us make man in our image... So God created man in his own image...' The latter part of the text I would read thus, 'And eat that he may live for ever.' Compare for this version, Exodus 4:23; 1 Samuel 6:8. It is evident the sentence is broken off abruptly; the words, 'I will drive him out,' being suppressed; even as in the case of a father, with sighs, sobs, and tears, putting his son out of doors.
- 2 That it was God's design, to prevent Adam's eating of the tree of life, as he had of the forbidden tree, 'lest he take also of the tree of life'; thereby mercifully taking

Boston's Notes

'The Moral Law' (52).

'Adam and the Tree of Life' (55).