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Seminar

COMMENTARY ON
R. SCOTT CLARK'S COVENANTALISM 9)

26. Law (covenant of works) and gospel (covenant of grace) may be distinguished historically and hermeneutically (i.e., the relations.

I'm not sure what this means; the end might contain a typo. If it is intended to just assert that Law and Grace are different in both the historic and in the hermeneutic development of redemption, I would take that as self-evident. We press on regardless, to the next thesis.

27. The hermeneutical distinction between law (covenant of works) and gospel (covenant of grace) is the distinction between our personal and perpetual obligation to keep the law perfectly for justification and the announcement that Christ has kept the law perfectly for us.

Apart from the traditional covenantalist insistence that an earlier "covenant of works" was somehow included in the Mosaic system, this statement is correct and introduces into the theses the idea that Christ merits salvation for his people, his personal righteousness being imputed to them at their justification. Under the New Covenant, the righteousness that protects us from divine justice is Christ's own merited righteousness, counted to us as a free gift of grace. It is only ours because he gave it to us, not because we generated it or merited it ourselves. The possession of forgiveness *now* and our destination in heaven *then*, depend on it. Most of us have time for some spiritual growth in grace (sanctification) yielding degrees of rewards in the Kingdom (1 Cor 3:12-15), but the thief on the Cross had no time for this, having only his justification by faith in the Savior dying beside him, and that Savior's merited righteousness as his only cloke at the final judgement. The thief received Jesus by faith and was saved "yet so as through fire."

Paul indicates in Romans 1-2 that the Gentiles are condemned not because of an imaginary "obligation" to obey a Law which they did not have, but because they violate their consciences not only by first suppressing what they innately sense about God, but also because they fail to live up to what light and standards they do have in their own societies. Gentile sinners of the world condemn themselves out of their own mouths without even knowing of Moses or Christ, having no covenant relation with God to break, as the Jews did. Throughout the Bible, degrees of responsibility are based on degrees of knowledge (Lk 12:47-48). The notion that a person with no knowledge of God's Law has a "personal and perpetual obligation" to obey *Moses* perfectly is clearly nonsense, and is based on the imaginary covenant of works idea. "Covenant-breakers" in 1:31 just means "untrustworthy."

28. The hermeneutical distinction between law and gospel may be reckoned as the distinction between Moses and Christ.

This statement appears to be quite false on the face of it. The "distinction" between Moses and Christ is that they were two different people living at different times and having different ministries, including being the messengers of two different covenants. The distinction between Law and Grace is that between two different principles of life, "This do and thou shalt live" (Lev 18:5, Deut 8:1, Lk 10:28, Gal 3:12), *versus* "If we live in the Spirit, let us walk in the Spirit" (Gal 5:6, 5:25, Rom 6:6, plus 11-13). The first principle makes life conditional on obedience while the second makes obedience the fruit of a life already received by grace. Besides, the Mosaic Covenant made provision for salvation by Grace through faith in Jahweh's provision through its sacrificial system. Eternal salvation under the Mosaic system was not by Law at all. As a covenant "of Law," the Mosaic system was a wholly ineffective sanctifier, as Hebrews says several times, and it does not become effective merely because

we are in a different age and under a New Covenant. *Law doesn't work. That's why it was replaced by pure Grace through Faith in the living God. New Covenant ethics is not just Old Covenant law under a "new administration." It is based on an entirely different principle originating in the death and resurrection of Christ and our union with him in his eternal life.*

Strictly speaking, the distinction between the Old and New covenants is not between Law and Gospel at all. "Gospel" simply means good news, and that news varies with the context. When the good news was announced to Abraham (Gal 3:8) it was the promise that all the nations would be blessed through him. The Mosaic Covenant was certainly good news to the slaves coming out of Egypt; it freed them to evolve into a nation of God's People in the promised Land. The Gospel preached by John the Baptizer was the good news that the Messiah was about to appear, and that he was in fact Jesus of Nazareth. The Gospel preached by Peter at Pentecost was that the first part of the messianic prophecies had been fulfilled in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus (Acts 2:22-36), and that if only the Nation would repent and turn to him, he would return from heaven and fulfill the second part (3:17-21). Of course, the nation as a whole rejected their Messiah, and the "well-meant offer" of Acts 3:19-21 was rejected with him. Contrary to some Dispensationalists, nothing was "postponed" (since God doesn't have a Plan B), and the then-current believing Remnant of Israel became the *ecclesia* that Christ promised to build (Mat 16:17-18). We watch this process happening in Acts. As the Apostolic age progressed, the emphasis shifted from the immediately historic to the permanently soteriological, as Peter expanded it in 1 Peter 1:3-12, and Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:1-28 or Galatians 2:16-21, or Romans 3:21-31. So the content of "the Gospel," or the good news proclaimed at any point in the unfolding of redemption depends on God's purpose at that contextual moment.

The Mosaic system included both temporal blessings such as peace in their Land, *etc*., and eternal, by faith in the atoning sacrifices presaging the final and sufficient sacrifice of the Cross, and securing the elect believer's future entry into the Kingdom. It was quite possible to have the good news of temporal blessings without ever receiving eternal salvation, for only the elect Remnant were actually regenerated. This was true in the time of Jesus, and is still true today, and will be true when he returns (Zech 14:4-11, Rev 1:7). The "sufferings" have been fulfilled, but there is also "glory to follow" (1 Pet 1:11). It should also be added that good news for the Remnant might be simultaneously the bad news of judgement impending on unbelievers in the same immanent act of God (see the Pauline contrast in 2 Cor 2:14-16).

29. The historical distinction between law and gospel may also be reckoned as the distinction between Moses and Christ.

This is formally correct from his assumptions, but does not advance the argument much.

30. When the law/gospel distinction is reckoned as that between Moses and Christ, there may be said to be a gospel in the law and a law in the gospel. This way of speaking, however, may not be used properly when considering the law/gospel distinction hermeneutically.

Can he be serious? Apparently the *hermeneutic* involved in this double-talk is incompatible with the *historic* perspective! This is caused by the notion of the "one and eternal covenant" in the background. The NCT solution is to start with the historical covenants instead of with the speculative constructions of Covenantalism. The distinction between the two covenants is not one of the degrees of mixture of law and grace, but between those who each is made with, the Old with *a Nation*, the New with *the Elect and regenerate* only. *That* ("properly") is Jeremiah's key point in 31:31-34.