**The Marrow of Modern Divinity**

Lesson 7 – The Covenant of Grace: The Performance of the Promise, Pt. 2

**The Law of Faith or The Covenant of Grace – The Performance of the Promise**

1. The legalist here does not like that nothing is required of a man for him to be authorized to come to Christ. Surely, he must do something. At the least, he needs to be thirsty for Christ (Isa. 55), so that must mean a person must truly repent before he can come to Christ right?
2. Evangelista says no and then begins to explain that repentance is a consequence of faith, not the cause of faith.
3. The legalist understands the Bible references to “thirsting” to be true repentance. However, Evangelista explains that “thirsting” in the various Scripture passages (Isa 55, Rev 22, etc.) is simply man’s thirs for happiness and satisfaction. Thomas Boston notes, “As men are pained with this thirst or hunger, they naturally run to the empty creation to quench their longings. This is the situation in which Adam left all mankind, and the one in which Christ finds them. Therefore, the gospel proclamation is set forth to invite people to come away from their broken cisterns to the waters of life in Jesus Christ.”
4. Nomista defines repentance as “a man’s humbling himself before God, and grieving for offending Him by his sins, and in turning from them all to the Lord.” And the legalist says a person needs to exhibit this before he can come to Christ in faith.
5. To which Evangelista responds that it is impossible to do these things without faith. It is impossible for a person to truly repent before he or she believes upon Christ.
   1. “No one comes to the Father except through me.” –John 14:6 A sinner cannot humble himself before God and turn from his sins without faith in Jesus Christ
   2. “…whoever comes to Me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in Me shall never thirst.” –John 6:35
   3. “God exalted Him [Jesus] at His right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.”
   4. When we put all of these verses together, we see that we have to go to Jesus first to receive true repentance, because true repentance is part of the salvation that Christ brings.
6. You can’t humble yourself before God without having faith first. You cannot sorrow over your sin as displeasing to God without having faith first. Evangelista says, “No man can turn to God, except he be first turned of God: and after he is turned, he repents.”
7. This is legalistic thinking that a person must do something good and required by God before he or she can have faith in God. This type of thinking turns repentance into a work that must be done before one is justified. The Arminian system is a type of legalistic system. It teaches that faith comes before regeneration so in the Arminian system faith becomes a good work in which you are given a new heart by that good work you have done by choosing to have faith in God through Jesus Christ.
8. But what about verses such as Mark 1:15 which says, “….repent and believe in the gospel”? That sure does make it sound like repentance comes before faith does it not?
9. Evangelista responds in two ways:
   1. First, the word “repent” in Greek means to change one’s mind from false ways to right ways and one’s heart from evil to good. For example, in Matthew 21:29 the son who originally said he would not obey his father and go work in the vineyard afterward “changed his mind and went.” It's the same Greek word translated in other places as “repent.”
   2. Second, the context of Mark 1:15 is the days of John the Baptist and Jesus when their hearers had the wrong ideas about what the Messiah would do in establishing a political kingdom and defeating Rome. They also had wrong ideas about how to be justified as well as the resurrection of the dead. So in saying “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel,” Jesus simply is telling His hearers to reject the falsehood that they had been imbibing from the Pharisees and Sadducees and embrace the truth with both mind and heart. The reason Jesus puts repentance first, Boston points out, is because that is the first thing that can be seen and provide evidence of faith. We can never see faith, but we can see repentance and that is the first visible sign that faith has already been worked into a person’s heart.
10. So, faith comes before repentance and not after repentance. In fact, repentance is a consequence of faith. Evangelista says, “When a man believe that God loves him in Christ, he loves God because God first loved him. His love for God then constrains him to humble himself before the Lord for all his iniquities, striving for holiness in the fear of God and fixing his eyes on all of God’s commandments.”
11. And when God does grant faith which leads to repentance, then we are united to Christ in a spiritual marriage and we are freed from the covenant of works [law of works] because Christ has cancelled our debt.
    1. Romans 6:5-6 says, “For if we have been united in Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His. We know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin [in the covenant of works].”
    2. Colossians 2:13-14 says, “And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh [because of the broken covenant of works], God made alive together with Him [Jesus], having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands [the covenant of works]. This He set aside, nailing it to the cross…”
12. At this point Antinomista speaks up and begins to question the relationship between justification and God’s eternality. If God is eternal, and God is the one who justifies, this isn’t justification from all eternity? In other words, if a person belongs to Christ now, then that person was Christ’s from all eternity because God elected from all eternity and Christ covenanted with the Father from all eternity to fulfill the covenant of works on our behalf. This sort of teaching is called “eternal justification” and is associated with antinomian and hyper-Calvinist teaching. The idea being that if I am justified from all eternity, then I can do whatever I want because I am justified and cannot lose my justification.
13. Evangelista responds that it is true that God is eternal. It is true that Christ undertook to fulfill the covenant of works from all eternity. It is true that with respect to election, all the elect were Christ’s from eternity. All this means is that “the sentence of justification was conceived in the mind of God from all eternity” because of His decree. “However, the purchase of their justification was the death and resurrection of Christ, and they are not actually justified until they actually believe in Christ. In the act of justifying, faith and Christ must meet together. Faith is the action that lays hold, and Christ is the object which is laid hold of. For Christ does not justify without faith, and neither does faith justify unless it is in Christ.” So while the plan and the decree of election and justification are from all eternity, the application of that plan and decree is carried out in time-space-history. So it is not until we believe upon Jesus that the decree of justification is applied to us through Christ’s past work so that we are actually justified. It’s somewhat mysterious because we are talking about the conjunction of time with eternity and we cannot fully comprehend it. But we do know from Scripture, that even the elect are dead in their sins until God gives them a new heart from which they believe in Jesus and repent of their sins. So eternal justification is an error that leads to or is a fruit of antinomian thinking.
14. What all of this means for us as believers is that we are freed from the “commanding and condemning power of the covenant of works.” In Christ, who has fulfilled the covenant of works in our place since we are unable to keep it, we are now dead to the power of the covenant of works over us. Additionally, the covenant of works is dead to us and cannot do us any good or any harm. The law no longer has any claim over us. Romans 7:4 says, “Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to Him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.”
15. Because of Christ, we are now under the covenant of grace and a person cannot be under both the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, either in part or in whole, at the same time. You are either under one or the other. All of us are born into a broken covenant of works and we remain under that covenant until Christ opens our eyes and draws us to Himself through saving faith, at which time we are placed under the covenant of grace.
16. So because we are under the covenant of grace now through faith in Christ and have been justified and died to the law, no person or preacher has any right to say to you that you need to do certain things in the law and avoid certain sins and then God will justify you and save you. Galatians 3:13 says, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us…” Romans 8:1 says, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”
17. Thus, in regard to the covenant of works, God cannot require of you any obedience or punish you for any disobedience because Christ has fulfilled the covenant of works. Evangelista says, “God cannot threaten you or give you an angry word. For He sees no sin in you that would stand as a transgression of the covenant of works. Thus, even though your spiritual frailty causes you to transgress all of the Ten Commandments, this is not a transgression of the covenant of works, because there is now no such covenant between God and you. God never threatens a man with eternal death after He has given him eternal life. Furthermore, God never speaks to a believer as one who is outside of Christ, and in Christ He never speaks a word to him in the terms of the covenant of works.”
18. If the law or sin or Satan begins to speak to your heart or mind to says that you still owe to satisfy God’s divine justice, and they try to take you to God’s judgment seat, then we can remind them that we are now dead to the law in Christ and that they need to take up their complaint with Christ and not with us for He is godly and righteous for us and in our place. He is the fountain of my salvation and any personal holiness, godliness, or perseverance in good works comes from Him and is part of His salvation that He has already given me. Christ has suffered the sting of death by becoming sin for us and so the law which is the power of sin is dead to us (1 Corinthians 15:56).
19. At the end of the day, if you are in Christ, you have all things necessary to salvation. He is your righteousness, your treasure, and your work. Boston says that Christ is “my righteousness upon which I am justified, my treasure out of which all my debt to the law (or covenant of works) is paid, and my work, the source of my righteousness in which I can opposed any legalistic attempt or outside demand to fulfill the law of the covenant of works.” Sin cannot hurt us. The devil cannot get to us. We are hidden safely in Christ through the covenant of grace, redeemed from the covenant of works with its demands and curses.
20. The Puritan John Preston writes, “Even as the viper that was upon Paul’s hand, though the nature of it was to kill, yet when God had charmed it, you see it hurt him not; so it is with sin, though it be in us, and though it hand upon us, yet the venom of it is taken away, it hurts us not, it condemns us not.”