

Of the Law Given to Adam, and the Covenant Made With Him in the State of innocence...

by John Gill

The sermon discusses the law given to Adam and the covenant made with him, exploring its nature, the contracting parties, and the promise and sanction of the covenant.

Scripture: Genesis 2:17, Romans 2:14

Topics: "Covenant Theology", "Federal Headship"

Description

John Gill expounds on the law given to Adam and the covenant established with him in his state of innocence, emphasizing that Adam served as the federal head for all humanity. He explains that this law was both natural and positive, requiring perfect and perpetual obedience, and that it was a covenant that included promises and sanctions. The consequences of Adam's disobedience affected all his posterity, illustrating the profound implications of his role as a representative. Gill highlights the nature of this covenant, its conditions, and the divine sovereignty behind it, ultimately pointing to the necessity of Christ as the second Adam who redeems humanity from the fall. The sermon underscores the importance of understanding our connection to Adam and the grace offered through Christ.

Transcript

A Body of Doctrinal Divinity

Book 3--Chapter 7

OF THE LAW GIVEN TO ADAM, AND THE COVENANT MADE WITH HIM IN HIS STATE OF INNOCENCE; IN WHICH HE WAS THE FEDERAL HEAD AND REPRESENTATIVE OF HIS POSTERITY.

The manner in which God governs rational creatures is by a law, as the rule of their obedience to him, and which is what we call God's moral government of the world; and as he gave a law to angels, which some of them kept, and have been confirmed in a state of obedience to it; and others broke it, and plunged themselves into destruction and misery: so God gave a law to Adam, and which was in the form of a covenant, and in which Adam stood as a covenant head to all his posterity.

And I shall endeavour to show what that law was, that it was in the form of a covenant, and that Adam was a federal head in it. 1. First, The law given him was both of a natural and positive kind. God, who is the Creator of all, Judge of all the earth, and King of the whole world, has a right to give what laws he pleases to his creatures, and they are bound as creatures, and by the ties of gratitude, to observe them. The natural law, or law of nature, given to Adam, was concreated with him, written on his heart, and engraved and imprinted in his nature from the beginning of his existence; by which he was acquainted with the will of his Maker, and directed to observe it; which appears from the remains of it in the hearts of all men, and even of the Gentiles; and from that natural conscience in every man, which, if not by some means lulled asleep, that it does not perform its office, excuses men from blame when they do well, and accuses them, and charges them with guilt when they do ill (Rom. 2:14,15), and likewise from the inscription of this law, in a spiritual and evangelic manner, on regenerate persons, according to the tenor of the covenant of grace; "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts" (Jer. 31:33), so that they become the epistle of Christ, having the law as from him, and by his Spirit written in them, and the Spirit put into them, to enable them to walk in his statutes, and keep his judgments, and do them; and this law that was written on Adam's heart, and is re-inscribed in regeneration, is the same with the Decalogue, as to the substance of it; and, excepting such things in it as were peculiar to the Jews, all of a moral nature; and which is comprised in these two precepts, to which it is reduced by Christ; "Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thou heart; and thou shall love thy neighbour as thyself"; this was binding on Adam, and on all his posterity.

Besides, This natural law, or law of nature, given to Adam, there were others of a positive kind, which were positive institutions of God, such as man could never have known by the light of nature; but were made known by the revelation of God; such as relate to divine worship, and the manner of it; that there was a God, and that he was to be worshipped, Adam knew by the light of nature; but how, or in what manner, and with what rites and formalities he would be worshipped, this he could not know, but by divine revelation.

In all dispensations there have been ordinances of divine service; there now are; and there were under the former dispensation; and so in a state of integrity; which were appointed of God, and revealed to man; for the law that forbid the eating of the fruit of a certain tree, is not the only positive law of God; however, it is certain that was one; "Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat" (Gen. 2:17), which was given as a trial of man's obedience to the will of God, whether he would observe it or not; for the evil of the act of eating did not arise from the nature of the tree, and its fruit, which was as good for food as perhaps any tree in the garden; but from its being disobedience to the will of God.

And be it what it may, in which God is disobeyed, it matters not; and by so much the lesser that is which is forbidden, by so much the greater is the sin of disobedience, the more aggravated, and the more inexcusable. 2. Secondly, This law given to Adam, taken in its complex view, as both natural and positive, was in the form of a covenant; the same to be both a law and a covenant, is not at all inconsistent; so the law given to the people of Israel from mount Sinai, is also called a covenant (Ex. 24:7; Deut. 5:1-3), yea, the covenant of grace is called a law, the law of Christ's mediatorship, which was in his heart to fulfil; even the covenant he made with his Father, and his Father with him (Ps. 40:8).

The law given to Adam, as it was a law, sprung from the sovereignty of God, who had a right to impose a law upon him, whatsoever he thought fit; as it was a covenant, it was an act of condescension and goodness in God, to enter into it with man, his creature; he could have required obedience to his law, without promising anything on account of it; for it is what God has a prior right unto, and therefore a

recompence for it cannot be claimed; if, therefore, God thinks fit, for the encouragement of obedience, to promise in covenant any good, it is all condescension, it is all kindness.

Moreover, It may be observed, that the law given to Adam is expressly called a covenant, as it should seem in Hosea 6:7 "but they, like men", (or like Adam) "have transgressed the covenant": the sense of which seems to be, that as Adam transgressed the covenant God made with him; so the Israelites had transgressed the covenant God made with them; for as well may Adam's transgression of the law or covenant be referred to here, as his palliating his sin, after the commission of it, is referred to in Job 31:33.

Besides, the terms by which the positive law given to Adam is expressed, manifestly imply a covenant; as that if he eat of the forbidden fruit, he should surely die; which implies, that if he abstained from it, he should surely live; which formally constitute a covenant; even a promise and a threatening. To which may be added, the distinction of two covenants of grace and works, called the law of faith, and the law of works; and a twofold righteousness and obedience yielded to the one, and to the other, the righteousness which is of faith, and the righteousness which is of the law (Gal. 4:24; Rom. 3:27; 10:5,6), for without the law of Adam, as a covenant, two covenants cannot be fairly made out; for though in Hebrews 8:7,13 we read of a first and second, an old and a new covenant; yet these respect one and the same covenant, under different dispensations; and though in the passage referred to, the covenant at Sinai may be intended as one, yet as a repetition, and a new edition of the covenant made with Adam.

This covenant is by divines called by various names; sometimes a covenant of "friendship", man being in friendship with God when it was made with him; of which there are many instances; as the placing him in the garden of Eden, putting all the creatures in subjection to him, and providing an help meet for him; appearing often to him, and talking friendly with him, and granting him communion with him; and it was an act of friendship to him to enter into covenant with him; and while Adam observed this he remained in friendship with God; and it was the breach of this covenant that separated chief friends.

Sometimes they call it a covenant of "nature", it being made with Adam as a natural man, and a natural head of his posterity; and promised natural blessings to him and his; was coeval with his nature; and was made with all human nature, or with all mankind, in Adam. it is also called a covenant of "innocence"; because made with man in his innocent state; and who, as long as he kept this covenant, continued innocent; but when he brake it, he was no more so. And it is frequently called the "legal" covenant, the covenant of "works", as the Scripture calls it, "the law of works", as before observed; it promised life on the performance of good works; its language was, "Do this and live".

And it sometimes has the name of the covenant of life from the promise of life in it; though not in such sense as the covenant with Levi, as a type of Christ, is called, the covenant of life; for it is life of a lower kind that was promised to Adam, than what was promised to Christ, for his people, as will be seen hereafter. 3. Thirdly, As in all covenants there are contracting parties, so in this. 3a. God is one of the parties in this covenant; nor was it unworthy of God to enter into a covenant with Adam; for if it was not unworthy of God to make a covenant of conservation with Noah; a covenant of circumcision with Abraham; and a covenant of royalty with David; a covenant respecting the kingdom, and the continuance of it in his family; men in a fallen state; then it could not be unworthy of God to make one with Adam in his perfect state; yea, even since, on the behalf of his people, he makes a covenant with the beasts of the field, the fowls of heaven, and the creeping things of the ground, #Ho 2:18.

Besides, to make a covenant with Adam, was a display of his goodness to him. As he was the work of his hands, he must have a regard to him; as every artificer has for his work; and would not despise him, but be concerned for his good; and therefore in covenant promised good things to him, in case of obedience to his will: this his covenant also flowed from his sovereignty; since all his good things are his own, and he can do with them as he pleases; make promises of them in a covenant way; in like manner he disposed of some of them in such a way to Adam. 3b.

The other contracting party was Adam; who gave a full and hearty assent to what was proposed to him. The stipulation on the part of God, was proposing and promising good, on condition of obedience. The stipulation, or restipulation on the part of man, was his free and full consent to yield the obedience proposed, in expectation of the promise fulfilled; and this may be concluded from the law he was to obey being written on his heart; which he had full knowledge of, approved of, and assented to; for which he had the most sincere affection; and the inclination and bias of his will were strongly towards it: and as for the positive law, which forbid him to eat of a certain tree; his will was to observe it; his resolution to keep it; as appears from what Eve said to the serpent, tempting her; "God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die" (Gen. 3:3), which shows, that she and her husband believed what God had said; judged it to be reasonable to hearken to it; and were determined to observe it: and man had also power to keep this covenant; being made after the image, and in the likeness of God; pure and upright, possessed of a clear understanding of it, a strong affection for it, and a full resolution to keep it; for it was not till sin took place, that the nature of man was weakened, and he unable to keep the law; "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh", &c. or what man could not do in fulfilling the law, his nature being weakened by sin; for then, and not before, was it in such an incapacity.

Though it should be observed, that man was not left to his liberty; it was not at his option, whether he would assent to the proposal in the covenant, and the condition of it; he had not an alternative given him, to agree or not agree, since obedience was due to God, whether he promised him anything or not. Wherefore this covenant differs from any covenants among men; in which the parties not only freely agree to make a covenant, but it is at the option of the one, whether he will accept of and agree to the proposal of the other.

So that this covenant made with Adam, is not strictly and properly a covenant, such as is among men; but is rather a covenant on one side, as a covenant of promise is; and a covenant of God with man, rather than a covenant of man with God. The obedience required of man in this covenant, was personal, perfect, and perpetual. It was personal; it was to be performed in his own person, and not by another for him; as is the obedience of Christ, which is not personal to them, who are made righteous by it; or as would have been the obedience of Adam, had he stood, as reckoned to his posterity; which, though personal to him, would not have been so to them; as his disobedience, by which they are made sinners, is not personal to them (Rom. 5:19).

It was "perfect" obedience that was required of him, both as to parts and as to degrees; it was to be yielded to all the commandments of God, without exception, and to be performed in the most perfect manner; as to matter, all the commands of God, natural and positive, were to be observed; and as to manner, just as the Lord commanded them. And then this obedience was to be "perpetual"; it was not to be done for a time only, but always; life, and the continuance of it, depended on it; otherwise, if a stop was made in it, the law condemned, and the man became accursed; "Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them" (Gal. 3:10).

So that man was bound by it for ever, as a law; but as considered as the condition of a covenant, it was to be yielded to as such, until man was confirmed in his estate, as the angels are; and, as some divines think, until he had children arrived to an age capable of obeying or sinning. 4. Fourthly, The law given to Adam, as it had the nature of a covenant, it contained a promise in it, and had a sanction annexed to it. 4a. It contained a promise; which was a promise of life, of natural life to Adam, and of a continuation of it so long as he should observe the condition of it; just as life was promised to the Israelites, and a continuance in it, in the land of Canaan, so long as they should observe the law of God; for neither the law of Moses, nor the law of nature, made promise of any other than of a natural life.

Some divines, and these of great name and figure in the churches of Christ, think, and indeed it is most generally received, that Adam continuing in his obedience, had a promise of eternal life. I cannot be of that mind. There is, indeed, an ambiguity in the phrase "eternal life"; if no more is meant by it than living for ever in his present life, it will not be denied; but if by it is designed such a state of glory and happiness, which saints shall enjoy in heaven to all eternity; that must be denied for the following reasons: 4a1.

Adam's covenant was but a natural covenant; and which was made with a natural man, as Adam is called by the apostle (1 Cor. 15:46,47), and which covenant promised no supernatural blessing, neither grace nor glory; for as for spiritual blessings, these the elect are blessed with only in heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 1:3). 4a2. It was in another covenant more early than that of Adam's, in which eternal life was promised and secured; God, that cannot lie, promised it before the world began; and this promise was put into Christ's hands, even from all eternity; and the blessing itself was secured in him for all for whom it was designed (Titus 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:1; 1 John 5:10). 4a3.

Eternal life is only through Christ as the Mediator of the covenant of grace; it comes by no other hands but his; it is "through Christ Jesus our Lord"; he came to open the way of it, that "we might have life, and that more abundantly"; a more abundant, durable, and excellent life, than Adam had in innocence: Christ, as Mediator, had a "power to give eternal life" to as many as the Father has given him; and he does give it to all his sheep, that know his voice, hearken to him, and follow him (Rom. 6:23; John 10:10; 17:3; 10:28). 4a4.

If eternal life could have been by Adam's covenant, it would have been by works; for that covenant was a covenant of works; and if by works, then not of grace; it would not have been the gift of God, as it is said to be; "The gift of God is eternal life", carisma, a free grace gift. Eternal life is no other than consummate salvation in the future state; and that is said to be of grace, and denied to be of works; (see Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:8,9). Should the question of the young man in the gospel, and Christ's answer to it, be objected (Matthew 19:16-22).

"Good Master, what good thing shall I do that I may inherit eternal life thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments"; it may be observed, Christ answers him, and deals with him on his own principles; the man was upon the bottom of his own good works, and seeking for eternal life by them; and since he sought for life that way, Christ directs him to keep the commands, there being no good thing better than keeping them; the young man asked him what they were; he tells him; upon which he was very alert, and thought himself in a very good way for heaven: but Christ, further to try him, and to convince him that eternal life was not to be enjoyed by any good thing done by him, bids him, if he would be perfect, sell all that he had, and give to the poor; on which he went away sorrowful, unwilling to part with his possessions; and so found that eternal life was not to be had by doing. 4a5.

Life and immortality, or an immortal, eternal life, and the way to it, are only brought to light by the Gospel (2 Tim. 1:10), not by the light of nature, nor by the law of Moses; only by the Gospel of Christ. 4a6. There is no proportion between the best works of man, even sinless obedience and eternal life; wherefore, though the threatening of death to Adam contains in it eternal death, it does not follow that the promise of life includes eternal life; since, though eternal death is the just wages and demerit of sin; yet eternal life is not the wages and merit of the works of men; it is the free gift of God (Rom. 6:23). 4b.

The sanction of the law and covenant made with Adam, was death; "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17), which includes death corporal, spiritual, or moral, and eternal. 4b1. A corporal death; which lies in a separation of soul and body; as this was threatened, so the sentence of it was pronounced on the day man eat of the tree; "Dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt return" (Gen. 3:19). Adam was at once stripped of the immortality of his body, that gift was at once withdrawn from him, and he became a mortal man; the seeds of death took place in him; and he was immediately subject to diseases, disorders, and miseries, which issue in death. 4b2.

A spiritual, or rather moral death seized upon him; which lies in a separation of the soul from God, and communion with him; in an alienation from the life of God; in a deformation of the image of God; in a corruption and defilement of the several powers and faculties of the soul; in an impotency and disinclination to that which is good; he became dead in trespasses and sins, as all his posterity are. 4b3. An eternal death, which lies in a separation of soul and body from God; in a loss of the divine presence, and in a sense of divine wrath; both which are contained in these words, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire"; a symbol of which was the ejection of Adam out of paradise; as eternal life is the gift of God, so eternal death is the wages of sin (Matthew 25:41; Rom. 6:23). 5.

Fifthly, In this covenant Adam acted not as a private person for himself only, but as a federal head^[1] and representative of his whole posterity; and in this he was alone; Eve was not a federal head with him, he was alone, before an help meet was found for him; yet she was included in it, being formed out of him; and all his posterity, who spring from him; but the man Christ Jesus is to be excepted, since he descended not from him by ordinary generation, and was a Mediator, the Head of another and better covenant.

But as to his natural posterity, it may be observed, there were many things which were common to him and them; and in which they had an equal concern; as in dominion over the creatures, the increase and propagation of their species, the food granted them, and the law of marriage (Gen. 1:28,29; 2:24). However, that in the covenant with him he was the federal head of them, appears, 5a. From Adam being a figure or type of him that was to come; that is, of Christ (Rom. 5:14). Now in what was Adam a type of Christ, but in his being the federal head of his posterity?

Not as a man; so all his sons might be: nor on account of his extraordinary production; for though that of both was in an uncommon way, yet in a different way; the one was created out of the earth; the other, though not begotten of man, was born of a woman, as other men be; but they were both covenant heads to their respective offspring; and the parallel between them as such, is formed by the apostle in the context of the place referred to; that as the one, Adam, as an head, conveyed sin and death to all his natural seed; so the other, Christ, as an head, conveyed grace, righteousness, and life to all his spiritual offspring. 5b.

From Adam being called the first man, and the first Adam, and described as natural and earthly, in distinction from whom, Christ is called the second man, and the last Adam, and described as spiritual, and the Lord from heaven; and these are represented as if the only two men in the world, because the two

heads of their respective offspring. 5c. From the threatening taking place upon the sin of Adam, not on himself only, but on all his succeeding offspring; as they were in him, they sinned in him; and death, the sentence of death, passed on them in him.

In him they all died; through his offence death reigned over them, and judgment came upon them all to condemnation, and by his disobedience they were made, accounted, and charged as sinners (Rom. 5:12,15-19; 1 Cor. 15:22). 5d. It was no unusual thing with God to make covenants with men, and their posterity, unborn; thus God made a covenant with Noah, and all that should descend from him, that he would no more destroy the earth with a flood; and with Abraham, and his natural seed, a covenant of circumcision, which should continue till the Messiah came; and the covenant at Horeb, with the children of Israel, was not only with them that were then present, and on the spot, but with those that should be hereafter descendants of them (Gen. 9:9; 17:4; Deut. 29:14,15).

And so the covenant of grace was made with Christ, as the Head of his chosen ones, who were considered in him, and had grace and all spiritual blessings given them in him before the world was. 5e. Nor have any of Adam's posterity reason to complain of such a procedure; since if Adam had stood in his integrity, they would have partook of all the blessed consequences of his standing, and enjoyed all the happiness that he did; and therefore should not murmur, nor esteem it any injustice in God, in putting their affairs in his hand, that they share in the miseries of his fall; for if they would have received good things through him, had he stood, why should they complain of receiving evil things through his fall?

And if this does not satisfy, 5f. Let it be considered, that since God in his infinite wisdom, thought proper that men should have an head and representative of them, in whose hands their good and happiness should be placed; who so fit for it as the first man, the common parent of mankind, made after the image of God, so wise, so holy, just, and good? and could it have been possible for all men to have been upon the spot at once, and it had been proposed to them to choose an head and representative for themselves; who would they, who could they have chose, but the first man, that was their natural parent, of whose blood they were made; and who, they might reasonably think, had the most tender affection for them, and would take the greatest care of them, and of their good, put into his hands? so that it is reasonable to conclude, they would all to a man have united in the choice of him.

But, 5g. To silence all complaints and murmurings, let it be observed, that what God gave to Adam, as a federal head, relating to himself and his posterity, he gave it in a way of sovereignty; that is, he might, and might not have given it; he was not obliged to it; it was his own that he gave, and therefore might choose whom he pleased in whose hands to deposit it; and who can say to him, What dost thou? ENDNOTES:

[1] The Jews had a notion of Adam being a head to all mankind; see Gill on "Romans 5:12" and some think Plato, who borrowed many of his notions from the Jews, gives an hint of it, when he speaks of a corruption en kefalh, in an head, derived from the first birth, in Timaeo, p. 1087. ed. Ficin.

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