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NAME IT AND CLAIM IT

by Gary North

And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God (Deut. 28:1-2).

But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee (Deut. 28:15).

Blessings and cursings: these are inescapable aspects of every covenant, whether made with God or Satan, whether kingdom or empire. Every covenant is established by an oath, and every covenantal oath is **self-maledictory**: the cursings are guaranteed, and the individual calls them down from heaven or up from hell upon himself, should he fail to obey the covenant's stipulations.

The covenant structure is God's model for all other institutions, minus the self-maledictory oath. It is impossible to run any institution without hierarchy, rules, sanctions, and a system of succession. The hierarchy declares the rules, the rules must be enforced by the sanctions, and the sanctions must produce winners and losers. The winners over time are to inherit ownership or control over the institution: succession into the hierarchy. Without the carrot and the stick, the A and the F, the profit and the loss, no human institution could function very long or grow to become a significant influence.

The ultimate models of the sanctions in action are the New Heaven and the New Earth (II Pet. 3:13) on one side and the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14-15) on the other. The intermediate examples are heaven and hell. The Biblical judicial examples are Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28.

National Covenant Sanctions

The 28th chapter of Deuteronomy parallels Leviticus 26. Both passages announce the existence of national covenant sanctions, positive and negative. There are corporate blessings for obedience and corporate cursings for disobedience. These corporate sanctions accompanied the oath taken by the people at the foot of Mount Sinai: "And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the LORD commanded him. And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the LORD" (Ex. 19:7-8).

This oath was inescapably a self-maledictory oath, as Deuteronomy 28:15-68 indicates. There, the list of cursings is over three times as long as the list of blessings (28:1-

14). By invoking God's name, they were bringing themselves under the threat of God's negative sanctions. They would have to continue to obey God's law in order to remain on the positive side of the corporate ledger.

When the nation corporately **invoked** (called upon) God's name, they were invoking the God who had just delivered them out of Egypt. God had brought national negative sanctions against the Egyptians in recent history; His promise to bring similar sanctions against them was not to be regarded as an idle threat. The Israelites understood this, which is why they asked Moses to intercede on their behalf. They wanted a **representative covenantal agent** in between them and God.

And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die. And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not. And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was (Ex. 20:18-21).

The idea that a biblical covenant is exclusively individual is an error. God's covenant is exclusively **personal**, but it is not exclusively individual. God as a personal agent establishes individual covenants with individual human beings, but He also establishes covenants with groups of individuals whose legal status is determined by their relationship to a representative. The offices of household head, priest, and king testified then and now to the corporate nature of the three institutional covenants. There is only one additional covenant: the personal covenant. This alone is a covenant without visible representation. Yet even this covenant has representatives: Adam and Christ. Every person is under the negative sanctions of God's covenant because of what Adam did in history. The eternal negative sanctions of that Adamic covenant can be escaped only through the judicial representation of the second Adam, Jesus Christ. There is no way that any person can escape the representative character of God's covenants in history.

Visible Sanctions

The Deuteronomic list of covenantal blessings and cursings is comprehensive. They involve such things as health, wealth, political order, and military success. The concrete historical setting of these sanctions proves that the national covenant with Israel was relevant to every resident inside the boundaries of the nation and to every Israelite who was outside the land temporarily. These were not primarily spiritual blessings; they were visible blessings. These blessings were designed by God to be seen by resi-

dent aliens and foreign visitors:

Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? (Deut. 4:5-8).

The language of Deuteronomy 28 is graphic and unmistakable: "And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters, which the LORD thy God hath given thee, in the siege, and in the straitness, wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee" (v. 53). The positive sanctions are not equally graphic, but they are clear. There is no doubt that a normal person would prefer to be under the positive sanctions rather than the negative sanctions. This is true of virtually anyone in any culture.

Natural Revelation

This points to the existence of a common outlook on the basics of economic and political life. In this sense, there is natural revelation. More to the point, there is natural interpretation of natural revelation. There is a **common scale of values** among people. This does not mean that everyone has an identical hierarchy of values, A through Z; if they did, there would be very little voluntary trade. But the types of blessings listed in Deuteronomy 28:1-14 are desirable in all societies; similarly, the curses of Deuteronomy 28:15-68 are universally avoided whenever possible.

The **unity of mankind** is therefore the underlying presupposition of biblical law. This was the gist of Paul's statement to the Athenians: "And [God] hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us" (Acts 17:26-27). If this unity were absent, it would be impossible to create laws and sanctions that would apply to all mankind. But the Creator God has designed a cosmic law-order, including predictable historical sanctions, to apply to the only creature made in His image, man.

Common Reason

One of the crucial assumptions of all economic theory is that a common reason and a common psychology apply to all normal individuals. There are madmen and deviants, of course, but the vast majority of men agree about carrots and sticks, and they respond to them. This is the foundation of all economic analysis. Yet the economist cannot legitimately make this assumption in terms of his own theory of the radical autonomy of the individual. The individual actor has a value scale, but it is impossible on the basis of modern subjectivist economic theory **scientifically** to compare one person's value scale with someone else's. There is no **measurable** scale of common psychological values. The economist assumes that each person has a similar set of desires, but there is no way for him to prove this. The Christian knows why it exists; the humanist rejects this explanation.

Jeremy Bentham, a radical English utilitarian of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, proposed what he called the **felicific calculus**. This calculus would enable

social planners to design a system of law and sanctions that would apply to all men in every culture. Men seek pleasure and avoid pain. Thus, said Bentham, it is possible to design a legal system that provides "the greatest good for the greatest number." The problem was, he never came up with the numbers – the quantitative data – or the formulas that the social planner can use to direct every society along beneficial paths. He never presented a scientific case for the greatest good, nor did he show why the greatest number ought to receive that good.

Every system of law assumes the following: (1) a common idea of individual good; (2) a common idea of collective good; (3) a system of laws to promote both forms of good; (4) a system of sanctions that promotes widespread obedience to the laws. The problem is, when people from many backgrounds come together to discuss the proper legal order, they do not agree on what these goals, laws, and sanctions should be. So there is obviously a vast diversity among men, despite the overarching unity.

Why? Because of sin. Also, because of post-Babel linguistic, religious, and cultural traditions. God separated the languages and confessions of mankind in order to break covenant-breaking man's attempt to create his own universal kingdom on earth. There is only one possible basis of universal order in history: **a universal commitment to God's covenants**. This knowledge is given to all men (Rom. 2:14-15), but covenant-breakers suppress it (Rom. 1:18-23).

Fruits and Roots

The coherence and applicability of God's Bible-revealed law is the sole foundation of mankind's attainment of the positive sanctions listed in Deuteronomy 28:1-14. These blessings are universal goals for all mankind, but only God's law and God's sanctions impartially applied enable men to achieve these goals in history. What separates men is not an implacable disagreement over the benefits that they want in history and the curses that they prefer to avoid. What separates them is (1) their disagreement over whether obedience to God's law will enable them to attain their agreed-upon goals; (2) their willingness to obey; and (3) their ability to obey, corporately, long term.

Any attempt to rely on a hypothetical "common law of nations" or the "common revelation of nature" will inevitably produce social chaos, for covenant-breaking man prefers death to life (Prov. 8:36b), if the price of attaining the positive blessings of Deuteronomy 28:1-14 is covenantal faithfulness to God by widespread obedience to His laws. But this is the price, so covenant-breaking men rebel. They want the fruits of covenant-keeping without the roots. God will not allow them to enjoy the fruits of covenant-keeping on a permanent basis. His covenant people will inherit.

But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations; And repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them: he will not be slack to him that hateth him, he will repay him to his face. Thou shalt therefore keep the commandments, and the statutes, and the judgments, which I command thee this day, to do them (Deut. 7:8-11).

Another thing that separates people is the sin of envy. There are some people who would prefer to see a neighbor cursed, even if this would involve placing limits on their own attainments. The old Russian story is applicable far

beyond Russia. A genie offers to grant a Russian peasant any wish, with this proviso: his neighbor will receive double. The peasant thinks for a while, and announces: "Make me blind in one eye."

Representative Sanctions

The national covenant's visible sanctions were a means of international evangelism. The sanctions' concreteness had a purpose: to testify to the character and power of God in history and, by implication, in eternity. They served as a **pledge**.

In the New Covenant, this pledge or down payment is called an **earnest**. It refers to the gift of the Holy Spirit:

Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts (II Cor 1:22).

Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit (II Cor 5:5).

Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory (Eph. 1:14).

Pie Before We Die

In the Old Covenant, the concept of the afterlife was rarely mentioned. The doctrine of the bodily resurrection appeared clearly only in Daniel 12:1-4:

And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever. But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.

Therefore, the idea that God's earthly blessings and cursings are indicative of His post-resurrection blessings and cursings was muted. It was implicit, not explicit. What was explicit was that there are such sanctions in history, and they are closely related to a nation's obedience to God's revealed law. Nothing could have been farther from the mind of a covenant-keeping Israelite than what is legitimately scoffed at today as "pie in the sky by and by" religion. He knew that there would indeed be pie on the earth for those who remained covenantally faithful to God, assuming that they were members of a society that had not broken its oath to God by disobeying His law.

The primary Old Covenant focus of God's sanctions was corporate, not individual. Bad things could happen to righteous people when they were surrounded by covenant-breakers, as the faithful Remnant learned when the whole nation was taken into captivity: Israel by the Assyrians and Judah and Benjamin by the Babylonians. The wealthy and prestigious did not remain behind in the land of Judah; the dregs of society did. "And he [Nebuchadnezzar] carried out thence all the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold which Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of the LORD, as the LORD had said. And he carried away all Jerusalem, and all the princes, and all the mighty men of valour, even ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths: none remained, save the poorest sort of the people of the land" (II Kings 24:13-14). Either members of the Remnant were poor and stayed be-

hind, or else they went into captivity. In either case, they were under God's visible curse, not because of they had been unfaithful, but because they had been caught in a society of covenant-breakers.

Individualizing the Covenant's Sanctions

It was the mistake of Job and three of his four visitors to regard God's covenant promises as exclusively individualistic and familistic. (Job's children had been killed in a disaster.) Job knew that the negative sanctions he was suffering did not prove the existence of some judicially unatoned-for trespass on his part. His first three accusers did not understand this. The Book of Job is a long inquiry leading to the conclusion that a sovereign God has the lawful authority to do whatever He wants to whomever He wants, even a righteous person.

Asaph the psalmist understood this same principle, and Psalm 73 is a long discussion of how he came to a correct opinion on this question. I reproduce this psalm in its entirety because there is so much confusion and outright heretical theology today regarding the question of covenantal blessings and cursings in history. There are those who, like Job's cross-examiners, still believe that bad things are not supposed to happen to good people. I know of no passage in Scripture that refutes this error better than Psalm 73. Notice that the psalm begins with an affirmation that God is good to Israel: an affirmation of positive covenant sanctions at the corporate level.

Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart. But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth. Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them. And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High? Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning. If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children. When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image. Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins. So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee. Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee. But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all thy works (Psalm 73:1-28).

The Positive Confession Movement

The "positive confession" movement today is based on an erroneous understanding of God's covenant promises: sanctions. It is the same misunderstanding that afflicted Job's visitors and Asaph in the early stages of his confusion. The blessings of God do come to the covenantally faithful in history, but not all of the blessings come at once, and not to every covenant-keeping individual. What we know is this: "Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart." Who is this Israel? God's church, the Israel of God: "And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16). But positive confessionists, who are mostly dispensationalists, do not believe this; the church is not true heir to God's promises, they insist. They do not see God's corporate blessings as part of His system of **corporate inheritance** in history, nor His cursings as His **corporate disinheritance** of rebels.

They invoke God's name: positive confession. They "name it and claim it." What they do **not** do is spend five or ten years of hard work in college and then some professional school. They do not save 25% percent of their after-tax income. Above all, **they do not tithe**. They just blab, and then prepare themselves to grab. They have no concept of the covenant. **When you invoke God's name, you thereby invoke His sanctions, including His negative sanctions.** When you name Him, you invoke a self-maledictory oath. You necessarily place yourself under His law. When you fail to tithe, save at high rates, and work a 70-hour week, you seldom get rich. Also, sign of signs and wonder of wonders, when you then commit adultery, you find that bad things happen to positive confession people.

When we "name it and claim it," we are **naming God and claiming His covenant sanctions**, including negative sanctions. But the positive confessionists are fundamentalists. Like Job's three cross-examiners, their worldview is almost exclusively individualistic and familistic. And unlike Job's visitors, they are antinomians. Their view of God's dealings with men borders on the magical. Theirs is some version of the promise on Groucho Marx's 1950's quiz show, *You Bet Your Life*: "Say the secret word and win a hundred dollars."

Instead of asking themselves why the unrighteous prosper, the positive confessionists ask why Christians visibly fail to prosper, as they surely do when compared to Jews, Asian immigrants, and other hard-working, high-thrift, self-disciplined, advanced-degree-holding, non-fundamentalist groups. They cannot bring themselves to admit that a medical degree from Harvard is worth more on a free market than a B.A. in Sunday School Curriculum from some ob-

scure Bible college. The positive confessionists do not turn to the biblical covenant model to find their answer; instead, they cite covenantal promises as if there were no corporate aspect of these sanctions.

Conclusion

The modern evangelical church suffers from many errors, and therefore suffers many negative sanctions. These errors revolve around the biblical covenant model: the doctrine of God, institutional hierarchy, biblical law, predictable sanctions, and corporate inheritance in history (i.e., eschatology). Almost the whole church denies the absolute sovereignty of God. The fundamentalists deny all explicitly Christian hierarchies outside of the local congregation and the family. The mainstream liberal churches deny the bottom-up appeals court nature of the covenantal hierarchies; they promote top-down bureaucracy in both church and state. Virtually all churches deny biblical law. Amillennialists and premillennialists deny that corporate sanctions are predictably applied by God in history, and therefore they reject the biblical doctrine that covenant-keepers will inherit the earth through their faithfulness to God.

The two groups that do proclaim the predictability of God's sanctions in New Covenant history are the positive confessionists and the Christian Reconstructionists. The positive confessionists, not being covenant theologians, proclaim God's positive historical sanctions only to individuals, families, and (by implication) local congregations. They deny that these positive sanctions apply to a corporate Christian society, since they, like the whole of the modern Protestant church, deny the possibility and/or legitimacy of **Christendom**. Denying the corporate nature of God's positive sanctions, they risk falling apart emotionally when they at last admit to themselves this covenantal fact: bad things **do** happen to good people—hyped-up, poorly educated, low-thrift, tithe-avoiding, biblically illiterate, "no creed but Christ, no law but love" Christian people.

It is fitting that the prostitute whom T.V. evangelist Jimmy Swaggart picked up in California in October of 1991 had a better understanding of God's sanctions than he did. She told one reporter: "Maybe God wants Jimmy off the air and me off the streets." That was a far more theologically precise positive confession than positive confessionism's magical "name it and claim it."

Christian Reconstructionists warn men to flee theological harlotry: antinomianism. They propose covenant theology's version of "name it and claim it": **invoke Him, don't provoke Him**. The Remnant's problem is, modern society has provoked Him.