

Christian Reconstruction

Isaiah 61:4

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"NO MATTER WHAT!"

by Gary North

I feel compelled to write to you about one of your concepts which is diametrically opposed to scripture and dangerous in its long term implication for those who would accept your leadership in the matter.

Children cutting elderly parents off from support because they have failed to provide an adequate inheritance . . . or providing a bare subsistence level of support when there are means to do otherwise has no scriptural foundation whatsoever. Rather, children are commanded to honor their parents.

Paul says those who fail to do so in a financial way, when necessary, are worse than infidels. . . .

Please rethink your thoughts about parental support and either supply a strong biblical basis for those thoughts or repent.

Do you have living parents? What are you doing for them? I hope you are not exemplifying what you teach!

This is your standard "you obviously don't know the Bible's teaching concerning. . . ." letter that I get about once a week. It includes the familiar specific warning about my own potentially sinful life. It calls on me to repent from my ideas (and, implicitly, from my potentially sinful relations with others). Standard stuff. It goes with the territory.

We are in a transitional era theologically. Hundreds of formerly pietistic, fundamentalist, and pentecostal pastors have begun to rethink a century of debilitating pietism. They may have begun to scrap their older interpretation of "we're under grace, not law." Or they may have scrapped their older belief in the "any-moment Rapture." But they have not yet understood that central doctrine which undergirds the Christian Reconstruction movement: the covenant.

Oddly enough, the gentleman who has pointed out my theological ignorance is a pastor in a church labeled "Covenant." But what I find is that the majority of churches that bear this title are not joined to any of the Reformation-Calvinist churches that alone maintained the doctrine of the covenant from the sixteenth century until today. Furthermore, they have not adopted the theology which made possible the biblical concept of the covenant, namely, the unconditional sovereignty of God.

The Concept of Unconditional Anything

What few church leaders and expositors of the covenant seem to recognize is the existence of an ancient theological debate which has divided covenant theologians almost from the beginning. One group historically has defended the idea that God's laws are invariable in their application. There can be no deviation in any instance from fixed, declared laws of Scripture. God's specific commandments must be obeyed unconditionally—"no matter what."

A classic example of the debate is the debate over Rahab, who lied to the rulers of Jericho concerning the Hebrew spies. Absolute obedience to God's law, we are told by the "unconditional obedience" theologians, required her to tell the authorities nothing (thereby alerting Jericho's military officers to the imminence of the problem), or else tell them everything (also sealing the fate of the spies). Her lie was therefore evil. Problem: the New Testament account of Rahab does not mention anything evil about her (Hebrews 11:31). Why not?

Another example: Jacob's lie to Isaac, under the direction of Rebecca. A lie is always sinful, we are assured by some commentators. There are no exceptions. Historical circumstances are irrelevant. Yet Jacob is nowhere criticized in the Bible for this alleged sin. Why not?

And then come other questions. What about camouflage during wartime? What about the legitimacy of spies? What about lawful inheritance vs. unlawful fathers who plan to cheat righteous sons and thereby cheat God? In short, what about a **covenantal definition of sin**? What about a covenantal definition of the legitimate means of overcoming sin?

This leads us to the other side of the debate over the covenant. The opponents of "unconditional obedience to revealed law" point to the covenantal nature of revealed law. When two fundamental rules or laws come into conflict with each other, which rule is the faithful man to obey?

When Rahab covenanted with the Hebrew spies as representatives of the God of the Hebrews, she switched sides in a war. She became a spy for God's people. She became an agent of the Hebrew God. That relieved her of any responsibility for telling the truth to the authorities of Jericho. Aren't the key questions in Rahab's case these: "To whom was she covenanted, and therefore to which earthly political authority was she responsible?" Isn't it missing the point to make this the key question: "Was she righteous in lying?"

It is of the essence of pietism (no wine, no lying, no dancing, no matter what the Bible says), as well as legalism (obey all biblical laws unconditionally), to argue that **by definition**, two or more fundamental laws in the Bible can never really be in conflict in specific historical instances, that God will always place us in historical circumstances that make such a conflict impossible. But where does the Bible teach such a doctrine? Nowhere. Where does it say that Rahab could have remained silent, or told everything, without damaging the position of the spies? It doesn't. Such a conclusion is inferred on the basis of premises—premises that need to be demonstrated from biblical examples, not assumed in advance.

What I argue is simple enough: **the covenant's stipulations regarding historical circumstances determine the historical application of a specific biblical law.** If a particular war is legitimate, then spies who are on the side of the faithful are legitimate. They are allowed to lie to the enemy. If you deny this, then you have a moral obligation to rethink the history of warfare, and to interpret the Bible's account of

its spies (including Joshua and Caleb) in terms of your radical thesis concerning an unconditional prohibition on lying.

The covenant teaches that **man is a conditioned creature**. Only God is unconditioned, meaning unbounded by time or place. Man's response to God must always be conditional. Man is bounded by God's law, but he is also bounded by history. He must faithfully apply the law to historical circumstances. The covenant (the law as a whole, as well as the historical books of the Bible) provides us with the details of these historical circumstances. These details must be respected.

This isn't some version of situational ethics, which proclaims that there is no fixed law anywhere. It is simply a defense of **covenantal ethics**, which says that men must exercise **judgment** concerning which biblical rule should govern any particular historical decision.

Pietists and legalists are repelled by the heavy responsibilities of exercising God-fearing covenantal judgment in history. In self-defense, they adopt a "no matter what" view of each specific biblical law. Circumstances are scrapped.

Covenantal Death, Covenantal Release

Consider the following problem. Your father, age 65, turns out to be a bisexual pervert. His philandering with homosexuals made him a carrier of AIDS. The disease has already killed your mother. Your father is now dying from it. Do you owe him the \$140,000 it will cost him to get private medical care until he dies (the average cost per patient for AIDS-related treatment)?

At this point, hard-line legalists and pietists begin to have a problem. Should they recommend that the man's children mortgage their homes to pay? (More debt, a violation of Romans 13:8.) Or should they tell the children to put their father in a tax-supported hospital? (Socialized medicine.) Or should they tell them to put the father in their homes, on a rotating basis, until he dies in peace? (And risk infecting the grandchildren through non-sexual contact, which some physicians say is possible—his "special legacy" to his family.)

What does the Bible say? It says that the State should quarantine the victims of incurable epidemic diseases in sealed-off sections of the community that are distant from healthy people (Lev. 13, 14). But nobody recommends quarantines any more. Too controversial.

Do you owe your pervert father a dime just because he is your father? No. Why not? Because he is the perpetrator of a capital crime (Lev. 20:13), and in the eyes of God, he is **covenantally dead**. You owe no support to physically dead people; neither do you owe support to covenantally dead people.

Covenantal death is the also the justification for divorce from people who perform capital crimes, if the State refuses to step in and execute the criminals as the Bible says. This system of covenantal divorce **protects the innocent partners**. But pietists and legalists refuse to honor the biblical basis of divorce. "Only for adultery," they say. "Only for desertion," they say. But what about an apostate who tries to persuade his wife to worship some false god? The Bible is clear: any family member who entices another family member to worship a false god is to be executed. "But thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. And thou shalt stone him with stones, that he die" (Deut. 13:9-10a). Mercy? Not permitted. The criminal is to die.

Now, what about your personal financial responsibilities to such a criminal, if you live (as we all do) in a pluralistic apostate society which does not recognize the family's obligation before God to police itself in this way with the full support of the civil government? Does society's unwillingness to enforce God's law thereby leave the victims—other family members—undefended financially when the reprobate is brought to poverty by a righteous God? Do they owe this God-hater full financial support in his old age, when God has

graciously impoverished him? The pietist and legalist would have us dig into our wallets to support this reprobate, thereby **subsidizing evil**. We must subsidize him, no matter what. (Unless he spends his money on beer, the pietist warns. **Then** we can step in and cut his allowance. Queers, yes; beer, no.)

This is why pietism and legalism combine to overturn the biblical doctrine of the covenant. Pietists and legalists simply refuse to believe that a man's requirement to obey God's law is conditional, and must be guided by historical circumstances that are in turn defined by the covenant.

If evil men refuse to empower the State to enforce capital punishment on criminals that the Bible says should be executed, the pietists usually applaud. ("We're under grace, not Old Testament civil law!") Then they inform the evildoers' wives, sons, and daughters that there is no escape from their responsibilities to support these evil survivors financially, to remain faithfully at their sides, forever subsidizing them "until death do you part," meaning physical death, not covenantal death.

Baloney. **God declared them covenantally dead when they were excommunicated by the church for committing a biblically defined capital crime**. A victimized spouse owes the sinful spouse no more than is owed a corpse. The covenantal obligation is destroyed by the other person's violation of the covenant bond. If the bond were still in force, there could be no divorce for any reason, even adultery. Furthermore, there could be no remarriage by the victimized spouse after such a covenantally lawful divorce—a position still held by a handful of super-pietists. There is no requirement that God-fearing, covenantally faithful people take such anti-covenantal arguments seriously.

What is the pietists' typical response to this line of argumentation? "The church shouldn't excommunicate anyone. It should show mercy." Question: **What about covenantal, institutional mercy to the victims?** Sorry, Charlie; the mercy of pietists is extended only to the criminals. In this sense, pietism is in league with modern humanistic criminology.

(If the evildoer was not a member of a church, then the relatives who are members should go to their church leaders for official confirmation that they are not obligated to support the capital criminals financially. God-fearing elders will relieve them of this responsibility. If they don't, they had better be prepared for God's judgment on them and their church.)

Are Your Parents Covenantally Dead?

What constitutes covenantal death? Excommunication by the church. God will send them to hell; this condition of being under judgment should be reflected in our covenantal relations with such people. If your parents have been excommunicated by the church, then you are no longer legally required by God to subsidize evil by providing them with care. If you refuse to accept socialism, you may choose to provide minimal care for them as a testimony to your commitment to voluntary charity, **but not as a testimony to your faithfulness to a supposedly unconditional Christian requirement as a child to support aged parents, no matter what**.

Have the parents deliberately cut off their children? Then they have violated the covenant's requirement for inheritance—one of the five fundamental aspects of any biblical covenant. They should be made to suffer earthly consequences as well as heavenly consequences. Children may choose to support them as a testimony against the moral evil of socialism, but they need feel no guilt about supporting them minimally. The parents have reaped what they sowed. The parents should be required by the children to turn over everything they own to a trust directed by the children as a condition of further support. **God's covenantal responsibilities are conditional**. To deny this principle is to deny the covenant. (Fortunately, those who do so also tend to bankrupt themselves and their organizations in orgies of false pity and false piety.)

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