

# Calvin Speaks



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## PROMISE, OBEDIENCE, **BLESSING\***

(Part 2)

*\*Title not in the original*

Sermon 153.10 March 1556. Deuteronomy 28:1-2.

### Summary of the First Part

*It is of the sheer grace of God that F/e chooses to affix promises to His law. He could simply have commanded, and it **would** be **our duty** to obey, but He sets aside His right to unrecompensed obedience, and gracious/y seeks to win us through promises. A// the same, since the requirement is to keep all of the law, no man is ah/e to receive the promise. Thus, of itself, this promise is no good to us. We must go farther and contemplate the work of our Lord Jesus Christ, on the basis of Whose work the Father is p/eased to **overlook** the flaws in our works, and count them as deserving the promise; but always and only for Christ's sake.*

*Turning more particularly to the verses themselves, we must note that it is of God's grace that He even gives us His law, not leaving us in ignorance of His demands and character. Second, we must note that we are to be **careful** to keep the law, not only because our hearts are so exceedingly deceptive, but a/so because Satan seeks actively to trap and ensnare us in sin.*

### Authority of Office

Now he adds, "to keep all the commandments which I [Moses] set before you this day," or which I ordain for you. Although Moses is the speaker of this, yet he takes the authority and power to command and to subdue men. This is not anything of his own invention, as if to say that it ought to be received without gainsaying because he said so. Rather it is from God, because God speaks by his mouth, and because he himself faithfully delivers the teaching that was committed to him. For that reason he speaks in such a strong way, saying that they should keep his [Moses'] statutes. It does not lie in the power of a mortal man to bind the consciences of people. And yet that is the very thing which has wholly corrupted the church, in that men have usurped the office of God in

making laws and statutes, for the spiritual government of men's souls. And that is a point of high treason against God, for the creature to usurp to himself what pertains only to God, whom the prophet Isaiah termed the Lawgiver (33:22), and also St. James (4:12), so that we should learn to hearken to Him, and wholly to depend on His word. Let us mark well then, that it is not law for men to enjoin laws for the souls of other men.

But when Moses says, "I ordain to you," he presupposes that he is not setting out anything of his own, nor forging any law out of his own brain, nor adding anything to that which God had committed unto him; but only that in that he performed his office faithfully, he might well say, "I ordain for you." Just as when we set forth the pure Word of God, the same very Word is a sovereign commandment. Now this does not mean that we should usurp any dominion or sovereignty over men's souls, but that in doing service to God, we may command in His name and in His person. Thus we see here what Moses' meaning was.

And indeed, does it lie within us to promise men life everlasting, or to denounce against them the vengeance of God? And yet we do it nevertheless, but we go no further than the Word of God, as it is put into our mouth, and that we have His testimony, being His witnesses and His heralds. By His *'witnesses'* I mean we assure the faithful of the grace and salvation which is promised to them, and as His *'heralds'* we pronounce and publish His sentence against all the unbelieving and against all rebels. Therefore, to be short, God meant to show forth the majesty of His Word, when He appointed Moses to speak in that manner.

And it was so that we should receive the word of God with so much more lowliness and reverence, when it is preached unto us, not respecting the person (as if someone should say, "He is but a man that is speaking; he is just like us; as we are, so is he"), but as though we thought thus with ourselves: "It is God Who speaks by the mouth of this man; therefore, let us tremble at His presence. Let us stoop, and receive what He says, and seeing He calls us before Him, let it serve to bring us to such obedience that we do Him homage, to show thereby that we receive what

proceeds from His majesty." Let us keep that in mind from this text.

### Comprehensive Obedience Required

Now here a question might be put forth, why it is said, "When you have kept all His commandments." For it is impossible for us to fulfill the law as long as we stand clothed with this mortal flesh. As I said before, we shall always be full of vices and imperfections. It seems, then, that it is to no purpose for God to require such a fulfilling of the law, seeing it is impossible. But here we must remember what has been spoken before, which is that God in His law does not respect our might, power, or ability, but our duty, and after what manner our life ought to be governed. And the same ought to suffice us, inasmuch as we say a man shall never attain to the perfect obedience of God, but that we are always far from the end of our way. The cause of this is our corrupt nature, being so infected through original sin, that when we think on God we are troubled with many evil fancies, and when we have any good motion, we are by and by plucked back from it, and we do not need any other thing to draw us to the complete antithesis.

But, does the impossibility of our doing it discharge us of our service which we are bound to perform for God? No. For the evil comes from ourselves. It is no marvel, then, that God in His law should have no regard to man's ability or inability, but rather to the duty which we owe Him. Nor is it surprising that He should require the right that belongs to Him, for where is the man that can deny it to Him? God cannot change His nature. If we are rebellious, what does He have to do with our stains and filthiness? But he sets forth such a righteousness that we are not able to reply against.

And in His law He sets down a righteousness of a sort different from what He has in Himself. He does not have respect to His own righteousness, but to the righteousness that ought to be in His creatures, namely such as is in His angels. If we had continued in our integrity, and not been perverted and corrupted through sin, then should we have been able to discharge all that God requires of us in His law. That is certain. Now then, we see how it is not without cause that God will have us to keep His whole law. And yet we are not able to perform it, it is true; but the default proceeds from the sin which dwells in us, as I have showed before.

Now, with all this we have to note that since God promises nothing except to those that have obeyed all the law, it would be too incredibly stupid to suppose that we can merit or deserve by doing this or that thing. We must first of all have kept all the law, which is impossible. The Papists, however, praise their merits, which they think enables them to purchase the kingdom of heaven. They think that when they have done anything good in their own eyes, God is bound to them. "Oh," they say, "I have been devoutly at Mass." It is certain that they provoke the wrath of God by so doing, for we know that it is a devilish abomination. Again, "I have served such and such, a Saint, my patron. I have builded such and such a chapel." And they think that by so doing they earn heaven. Truly all

these things are but a despising of God. They are Satanic superstitions, by which the service of God is thoroughly defaced.

But let us suppose that the Papists did well in their dallying with such garbage, would God be bound to them for it? It is needful for them to consider what court their evidence must pass before. For it is not for us to bridle Him, or to tie Him to the stake, or to subdue Him to our fantasies. It must proceed from His own good will. Now then, what has He said? "When you shall have kept all My commandments, then shall these blessings come upon you." Let every one of us look at how he has kept the commandments of God. Let the Papists brag as much as they like, can they say that they have accomplished a hundredth part of them? If they have kept one of God's commandments, they have offended Him in a hundred sins for it; and if there be but one fault committed, though it be ever so small, they are faulty in all, as St. James says (2:10) that he who breaks the law in only one point is guilty of having broken all of it.

Seeing then that they are offenders, they are deprived and banished from all the blessings that God has set forth, even from those that concern only this present transitory life; and much less are they able to earn the kingdom of heaven (as they imagine), being not able to deserve one morsel of bread to put into their mouths. They are thus shut out of all. And why? Because God has not promised anything except to them that keep all of His entire law.

### God as Judge and Father

How shall we live, then? We must hear God speak after some other fashion; that is, we must hearken to Him speaking of the free promises which He offers to us in our Lord Jesus Christ. God in the Holy Scripture uses a double kind of speech, by which I do not mean that he contradicts Himself, or that He is contrary to Himself, or that one of His sayings is repugnant to any other, for God always remains the same, and as I have said before He changes not. All the speakings which proceed from Him agree together very well, without any contradiction. Nevertheless, concerning His law, there He has spoken as a judge, and not as a father. In His law He speaks as a judge, saying: "He who lives as he ought will not be deceived. He will not lose his labor. For when you have done Me service, I will cause you to prosper." In such away does God speak in the person of a judge. And when we have received this word, behold, we are confounded, no matter how things stand. And why? Because we do not have the ability to obtain the grace that is offered to us, and we cease not to kindle God's wrath against us, and therefore we shall all be damned.

What is to be done, then? God comes, speaking as a father, and says, "Well, I am content to forbear this rigor, which I might execute upon you by My law, even though that rigor is not overly great, for I have given Myself so far to you as to promise that which is not your due. I have been willing, as it were, to entice you by friendly means, but I have won nothing thereby because of your perversity. What is the remedy, then? I come now to tell you that if you will believe in My son, I will release you of all your debts. If you will receive Him as your Shepherd, that He may guide

you quietly, you will perceive that I do not desire to win you in any way other than by gentle and friendly dealings. It is as if I should say, 'Come to me, and I will forgive you all your sins, and accept you into favor?'- And although you are miserable creatures, deserving utter damnation, yet I will completely forget and bury all your offences. And when I have done that, I promise to beget you anew by My Holy Spirit. And this grace will be given to you by means of My only Son, if you labor to come to Him. And then, even though you are driven to strive against many temptations, and at first encounter you will not have full victory over them, but will be surrounded with many spots and vices, yet I will not lay any of these things to your charge. I forgive you your sins, and the good that you do will be acceptable to Me through My favor, even though it deserves nothing." See here the second kind of speech that God uses toward us in the Holy Scripture.

Let us note, therefore, that when we hear the voice of God, and know what we owe Him, and hear the promises that He has made to us in His law, we must stand confounded and condemned, since none of those things can avail us because of our unthankfulness. Thus, we must have our refuge in the free mercy which is offered to us in our Lord Jesus Christ, and hearken to God when He speaks to us, which He does both in the law and in the prophets, as well as in the gospel, -saying, "I of My own mere goodness have become your Savior, and you must seek your salvation from some place other than in yourselves." After all, the Redeemer which God promised was always kept before the minds of men, that they might rest on Him.

That is why the sacrifices were ordained in the time of the law. For although Christ was not yet displayed openly to the whole world, yet did the Jews understand that all the hope of their salvation depended upon their reconciliation to God by means of the sacrifice that was to be offered. They brought brute beasts to the Temple. Was that to cleanse the uncleanness of their souls? No, for what can corrupt blood do? What can stinking grease do? Can those things purge the soul of her iniquity? No, of course not. But under those figures the Jews saw how they would be delivered from the curse of God, and admitted into His favor, and should be acceptable to Him. And now we have a more certain testimony of this in the gospel, for there we see the thing itself fully accomplished for us, namely that although we have not kept the commandments, Jesus Christ has kept them. And why did He do so? Because He was subject to it? No, but He became subject to the law, for our sakes.

So then, let us have our recourse unto our Lord Jesus Christ, and let us hear God speaking in such a way that He not only says, "These are the things that I command you, and if you do them then you will prosper and be blessed;" but also where He says, "Behold, I am your Father. Come to Me, but come in the name of My only Son, Whom I have appointed to be your mediator. And acknowledge that there is nothing else in you but corruption. And do not trust in your own power, nor in your own free will, but casting away all foolish fantasies of vain presumption, come with lowliness to see the grace of My Spirit. Then you will be sure that I always uphold you by My goodness,

and from day today confirm you in My fear, and make you to walk in My ways, so that I will not lay to your charge the faults of your works; they will not hinder My blessing toward you. Not that you should not confess your transgressions, and always acknowledge before Me that you are sinful, but that your sin will not be laid to your charge, even though there might come occasions why they should be called to reckoning to be reprov'd by Me." Thus the second voice of God, to which we must hearken if we desire to become partakers of the blessings that are here contained.

Here by the way we must note as a conclusion that although the faithful are exempted from the curse of God, so that He will not deal rigorously with them, but rather uphold them and make them to enjoy the blessings which he has promised -in His law, as though they had fully accomplished the same, yet they cease not to suffer many stripes of His rod, and our Lord chastises them continually, exercising some after one manner, and some after another, so that all are smitten. And all the chastisements which God sends us are curses, every one of them, at least to outward appearance. If we are sick; if we are hungry or thirsty; if we are tormented in this present world; if we are troubled and persecuted; all these are the curses of God. Our enemies scoff at us. We are in reproach, in poverty, in vexation, and in many anguishes. One is troubled in his house by his wife; another by his children; and another by his neighbor. Finally, the faithful are in many ways deprived of the blessings of God. It is certainly so.

This, however, does not prevent us from being ever more blessed by Him, because we have a continual taste of His goodness, to allure us to Him. Let us note well, therefore, that when He cuts off His blessings, and does not give them as we wish, this is for our profit, because He sees that we have need of some quickening to make us come to Him. And since every one of us will fall asleep in our sins, God is determined to awaken us, and to make us feel that as soon as we withdraw from His service, He will also absent Himself from us, and that His grace will be taken away from us, and we stand dispossessed of it — never, however, so utterly that the blessings of God will not overcome, so that we may rejoice therein, acknowledging Him to be merciful, and waiting upon His fatherly goodness, which will be showed more amply when He will take us again to Himself.

Thus you see how we may possess and enjoy the blessings of God, which are set forth for us in His law. And when we see that our Lord interlaces these blessings with many afflictions and corrections, as though He had cursed us, we must realize that His purpose in this is to provoke us day to day to repentance, and to keep us from falling asleep in this present world. We know that our pleasures make us drunken and unmindful of God, unless He constrains us by pricking and spurring us forward. Thus you see how things which at first sight seemed contraries, agree very well in fact. And in that respect does Moses say that these blessings will light upon us and encompass us round about, as if he had said that we shall always be certain of God's favor, so certain of it that it shall never fail us if we serve Him.

For the word 'encompass,' or to light upon us, indicates

that the grace of God is not fleeting, as though it fell at random, and as though we would not be able to catch it. No, says Moses, you shall be surrounded or encompassed with it. And therefore let us assure ourselves that the goodness of our God will never fail us, so that we can never come to that goodness unless He draw us to Himself. And since we are subject to so many infirmities and vices, He, by bearing with us, shows us that we must have recourse to His free goodness for the forgiveness of our sins by the reconciliation that He has made in our Lord Jesus Christ, and that we, in straining ourselves to do His will, will perceive that the goodness of God does not cease to be free to us, without owing us anything at all.

#### Prayer

Now let us fall down before the majesty of our good God, with acknowledgement of our sins, praying Him to make us feel them more than we have done before, that being beaten down, and as it were drowned in despair, we may be drawn to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; and knowing that we are altogether empty and naked of all goodness, let us beseech Him to renew us by His Holy Spirit, until we are fully changed. Let us pray that we be more and more increased in His graces, so that we may have testimony that God regards us, and is near to us, and dwells in us; and that we may be confirmed in His adoption, that we may always wait for the heavenly inheritance and not be weary in this world to walk in His obedience; that it may please Him to bestow this grace not only upon us, but also upon all people and nations of the earth, etc.

### ☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆ ATTENTION !!! ☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆

- ✓ Did you know that for nearly 12 centuries both the eastern and western churches practiced paedocommunion [ 'paedocommunion' is the practice of giving the sacrament of the Lord's Table to infants and small children] .
- ✓ Have you ever wondered why it is that the Reformed baptize their infant children, but do not allow them to commune?
- ✓ If infants and children ate at the Lord 's Table under the Old Covenant, then why are they excluded today ?
- ✓ If Christ were to invite you and your family over for a meal at His house, much like you invite friends over for fried chicken, do you think that he would ask you to leave your children at home? Or to bring them, and then forbid them to eat? Every celebration of the Lord's Supper at your church ("the House of God") is an invitation by Christ to come have dinner with Him. Yet, the Church has been denying her children communing privileges for centuries.

In answer to the above concerns, as well as numerous other substantial considerations, Geneva Divinity School has published two *Special Editions* of **The Geneva Papers**. We are making them available to you because we are convinced that this is one of the most timely contemporary theological topics of this decade.

Each of the *Special Editions* is one long essay. The first is written by James B. Jordan, editor of both *Calvin Speaks* and *The Geneva Papers*. In it, Professor Jordan offers 25 separate theses in defense of paedocommunion. The second 'edition' is written by Ray Sutton, frequent contributor to *The Geneva Papers*. His paper, *Presuppositions of Paedocommunion*, deals with some of the broader questions involved, and then zeroes in on the one passage that the Reformed church has used to defend its practice of excommunicating its infants and young children, 1 Corinthians 11. Both of these essays are solid -- Biblically reformed -- and supported by careful exegesis. They are worthy of the serious consideration of every Reformed Christian.

Because of the cost of printing, and Geneva Divinity School's need for a constant inflow of contributions, we can only mail these two essays to you if you include a donation of at least \$5.00 with your request. Due to the nature of the subject, we will only send them to those who specifically request them. Please request your set of two special editions today. We have only a limited number, and they will go fast.