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# The Creation Ordinances

### MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

An often overlooked element of Christian ethics is the law that God gave to all men in the creation ordinances. This body of legislation that applies to all the descendants of Adam continues in force until the last day. In this lecture, Dr. Sproul outlines the nature of the covenant with Adam, its stipulations, and its application in today's world.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To be able to outline the stipulations of the Adamic covenant.
2. To be able to explain the relationship between eternal law, natural law, and positive law.
3. To be able to explain how the creation ordinances relate to modern legislative efforts.

### QUOTATIONS

*Natural law is not only the revelation of God's will, but it is also a revelation of his perfections—the divine qualities or attributes by which we may speak of the knowledge of God. He is good, loving, compassionate, faithful, merciful, patient, gentle, forbearing, just, and righteous. As the order of creation reveals the perfections of God, so does the moral order. Because God is good, loving, compassionate, faithful, and merciful, he expects his people to live out these same qualities in their relationship with him and with one another. The creation ordinances (worship, family, work, social relationships) presuppose these qualities.*

— Willem VanGemeren

*It is a fact that the law of God which we call the moral law is nothing else than a testimony of natural law and of that conscience which God has engraved upon the minds of men.*

— John Calvin

## LECTURE OUTLINE

### I. Introduction

- A. One element of Christian ethics that is often overlooked is what is called the “creation ordinances.”
- B. All the grace that comes to us in the New Testament does not change the fact that we live under law.

### II. Covenant Relationship with God

- A. If we look at the Bible, we see that it is divided into different covenants—the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.
- B. In simplest terms, a covenant is an agreement, a contract between two or more persons.
- C. Every covenant has contained within it certain benefits and promises, but every covenant also includes stipulations—legal requirements or laws.
- D. There is no such thing as a covenant without laws.
- E. The curse of the law of the Old Covenant has been removed for those who are in Christ, but that does not mean that Christians are now free to do whatever they want to do.
- F. Every member of the Christian Church participates in the New Covenant just as every member of Israel participated in the Old Covenant.
- G. We know that Jews and Christians are covenant people, but what about the rest of the world?
- H. The Bible teaches that all men everywhere are in covenant relationship with God.
- I. The first covenant that God made with mankind was with Adam, the one who represented the whole human race.
- J. By nature, every descendant of Adam is bound by the covenant of creation.
- K. We can deny that covenant, we can violate it, we can repudiate it, and we can be hostile to it; but we cannot escape the covenant itself.
- L. The laws that God gives to man in creation are binding on men whether or not they are religious, whether or not they are Jew or Christian.

### III. The Ordinances of the Covenant of Creation

- A. God gives to all men a certain body of moral legislation under the covenant of creation.
- B. In the first place, God reveals the sanctity of life, the principle that underlies the prohibition against murder.
- C. Second, God reveals the sanctity of marriage in creation, thus the recognition by the church of civil marriage ceremonies.
- D. Third, God reveals the sanctity of labor.
- E. Fourth, God reveals the sanctity of the Sabbath day.
- F. As Christians we live under more than one covenant; we are members of the New Covenant, but we are also still under the laws of the covenant of creation.

- G. Just as one person can be under the jurisdiction of a state government as well as the federal government, so too can one person be under the jurisdiction of more than one biblical covenant.

#### IV. The Application of the Covenant Ordinances

- A. The first thing we have to understand is that the creation ordinances transcend the confines of the Christian Church.
- B. One question that is often raised is whether the Church should be providing input in matters of legislation.
- C. The Church certainly should not do something like attempt to impose the celebration of the Lord's Supper on every resident of the United States.
- D. But what if the state is derelict and not fulfilling its obligation of enforcing the creation ordinances?
- E. The Church is then required to be the prophetic voice of God in a given society, to call attention to the fact that all men are under the authority of the creation mandates.

#### V. "You Can't Legislate Morality"?

- A. A common statement in our culture that has almost become a cliché is: "You can't legislate morality."
- B. The original and correct idea behind the statement was that legislation, in and of itself, will not necessarily change human behavior.
- C. The idea behind the statement today is that it is wrong for the government to ever pass legislation of a moral nature.
- D. If legislation of a moral nature were not permissible, then there could be no laws against murder, stealing, false weights and measures because these are moral issues.
- E. Moral issues lie at the heart of all legislation.
- F. The question is not whether the state should legislate morality; the question is which morality the state should be legislating.

#### VI. Eternal, Natural, and Positive Law

- A. There has been a significant shift in the history of Western civilization away from a Judeo-Christian concept of law.
- B. Even in our own history, we see three stages of law: the eternal law, natural law, and positive law.
- C. Positive law is nothing more than a particular law that appears on the books.
- D. Historically, the Church has said that the laws we find in nature are nothing more than external manifestations of the eternal law of God.
- E. From those eternal principles that are part of the makeup of God Himself, we get a reflection of God in natural law.
- F. Particular positive laws that are enacted in this world are called to reflect the natural law, which in turn reflects the eternal law.

- G. A law is considered good or just if it ultimately corresponds to God's standards of righteousness.

#### VII. The Enlightenment Reaction

- A. Beginning in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, there was a tremendous reaction against biblical revelation.
- B. Societies began to try to base their legal structures on natural law without any consideration of the revealed law of God.
- C. In the nineteenth century, confidence in natural law began to erode with the rise of the philosophy of positivism.
- D. Oliver Wendell Holmes argued that law can no longer be enacted with an appeal to transcendent principles of ultimate truth, but instead law merely reflects the tastes and preferences of the current society at any given moment.
- E. When this happens, it is incumbent upon the Church to open its mouth and call attention to the eternal law of God that is manifested in natural law and built into creation.
- F. Men make laws, but those laws are supposed to be subordinate to the law of God.

#### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. In simplest terms, a covenant is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. A list of laws
  - b. An agreement or contract between two or more persons
  - c. A religious ceremony such as marriage
  - d. A distinct period of time in redemptive history
2. There is no such thing as a covenant without \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Sin
  - b. Circumcision
  - c. Laws
  - d. God
3. The first covenant God made with mankind was made with \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Adam
  - b. Noah
  - c. Abraham
  - d. David
4. Every descendant of Adam belongs, by nature, to the \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Old Covenant
  - b. New Covenant
  - c. Covenant of creation
  - d. Covenant of redemption

5. Which of the following is not an ordinance of the covenant of creation?
  - a. The sanctity of life
  - b. The sanctity of marriage
  - c. The sanctity of the sabbath
  - d. The sanctity of circumcision
  
6. \_\_\_\_\_ is nothing more than a particular law that appears on the books.
  - a. Natural law
  - b. Positive law
  - c. Eternal law
  - d. Ceremonial law
  
7. \_\_\_\_\_ argued that law can no longer be enacted with an appeal to transcendent principles of ultimate truth, but instead law merely reflects the tastes and preferences of the current society at any given moment.
  - a. Oliver Wendell Holmes
  - b. Thomas Jefferson
  - c. George Washington
  - d. Clarence Thomas

#### BIBLE STUDY

1. How do each of the following passages of Scripture contribute to our understanding of the Sabbath?
  - a. Genesis 2:3
  - b. Exodus 20:10
  - c. Exodus 23:12
  - d. Exodus 31:17
  
2. How do each of the following passages of Scripture contribute to our understanding of the institution of marriage?
  - a. Genesis 1:27
  - b. Genesis 2:18
  - c. Matthew 19:4–6
  - d. 1 Corinthians 11:9
  - e. Ephesians 5:22–33
  
3. How do each of the following passages of Scripture contribute to our understanding of the institution of labor?
  - a. Genesis 1:26–28
  - b. Genesis 2:15
  - c. 2 Thessalonians 3:10–12

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Explain the relationship between eternal law, natural law, and positive law.
2. Explain how different people, such as Christians, Jews, and unbelievers, relate to different covenants such as the creation covenant, the Old Covenant, and the New Covenant. Can the same person be under more than one covenant at the same time? How?
3. How would you respond to someone who stated: “You can’t legislate morality”?
4. How did the Enlightenment undermine the foundations of legislation? How should the Church respond?
5. What are some of the ways in which the laws of your nation violate the creation ordinances of God? What are some of the ways in which the laws of your nation conform to the creation ordinances of God? Are there things that you can do as an individual or collectively as a church to remind your nation’s legislators of their responsibility?

## APPLICATION

1. Read Genesis 1–2. Reflect on God’s creative work. Write a summary outline of these two chapters, focusing on God’s creation ordinances.
2. Think about your own views of each of the creation ordinances discussed in this lecture. Are your views of the sanctity of human life consistent with these ordinances? Are your views concerning the sanctity of the Sabbath, marriage, and labor consistent with these ordinances? Do a biblical study of each of these ordinances and ask God to use His Word to conform your thinking to His on each of these elements of His will.

## FOR FURTHER STUDY

Robertson, O. Palmer. *Christ of the Covenants*