

A Conditional Covenant

A conditional covenant differs from an unconditional covenant in that, under the terms of a conditional covenant, both parties have obligations to meet. Expressed in legalese, the party of the first part obliges himself to perform certain tasks as spelled out in the contract. The party of the second part agrees that if the party of the first part meets those obligations, the party of the second part becomes obliged to reciprocate as spelled out in the contract.

The Mosaic Covenant is just that sort of conditional covenant. God made an offer to Israel, which should they accept the offer, and they did, it obliged Israel to adhere to the terms spelled out in the covenant. Briefly stated, if Israel did as they agreed to do in the covenant, God would reciprocate by blessing them. If Israel failed to meet the terms of the covenant, then God would discipline the nation, even to the point of removing them *temporarily* from the land He had promised them as an inheritance forever. This can be seen in Deuteronomy 28. Without reading the whole chapter, let's look at some of it to get the picture.

Deut 28:1 “And if you faithfully obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. ² And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the Lord your God. ³ Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. ⁴ Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your cattle, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock. ⁵ Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. ⁶ Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out ...

A list of potential blessings follows this passage, including things like victory in warfare, security in the land, and prosperity. But failure to obey is another matter.

Deut 28:15 “But if you will not obey the voice of the Lord your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you

today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you.
¹⁶ Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the field.
¹⁷ Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. ¹⁸ Cursed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock. ¹⁹ Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out ...

And a very long int of potential discipline follows that passage. The curses for disobedience also include temporary dispossession of the land.

Deut 28:64 “And the Lord will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known. ⁶⁵ And among these nations you shall find no respite, and there shall be no resting place for the sole of your foot, but the Lord will give you there a trembling heart and failing eyes and a languishing soul. ⁶⁶ Your life shall hang in doubt before you. Night and day you shall be in dread and have no assurance of your life. ⁶⁷ In the morning you shall say, ‘If only it were evening!’ and at evening you shall say, ‘If only it were morning!’ because of the dread that your heart shall feel, and the sights that your eyes shall see ...

Israel got themselves so deep in apostasy that God invoked this penalty clause three times. The third expulsion from the land in AD 70, this time for the rejection of their Messiah and the offered kingdom on top of religious apostasy, they were out of the promised land for nearly 2,000 years.

Think about that. This applies to Israel, a **whole nation of people**. What about us as individuals in this Church Age? God has also commanded Church Age believers to live righteous spiritual lives and gave us the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish that. Some charge that salvation by grace totally apart from works with eternal security is just a license to sin — a license to ignore God. How did that work out for Israel? I have previously pointed out that there is no free ride for Christians who attempt to live carnal lives after salvation. Look at how God handles that kind of behavior in a whole nation. If you think you can live a carnal life after salvation, then I ask you how much pain are you personally prepared

to endure? Because you will face pain and maybe even physical death for your rebellion. You good with that?

The Law was given only to Israel

The Mosaic Law was given specifically to the nation of Israel in B.C. 1440.

Ex 19:3 ... while Moses went up to God. The Lord called to him out of the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the **people of Israel** ...

Lev 26:46 These are the statutes and rules and laws that the Lord made between himself and **the people of Israel** through Moses on Mount Sinai

Rom 9:4 They are **Israelites, and to them belong** the adoption, the glory, the covenants, **the giving of the law**, the worship, and the promises.

The Mosaic Law was never given to Gentiles.

Rom 2:12 For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. ¹³ For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. ¹⁴ For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though **they do not have the law**.

The Mosaic Law was never given to the Church.

Rom 6:14 For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

The Church has no animal sacrifices, Saturday worship, and is authorized no specialized priesthood. The Church lives under a higher standard, and because of the indwelling Holy Spirit, Church Age believers have the ability to meet the perfect standard of the Law. “Sin will have no dominion” over

them like it has over those under the Law who are without the indwelling Holy Spirit.

One Exception

True that the Church is not under the Law, but it is argued that the moral code portion of the Law is the exception. The moral code preceded the Law and belongs to the entire world. Its principles are reiterated throughout the New Testament.

The Law was for the whole nation

One should understand that the Mosaic Covenant was made with the entire nation of Israel, not just believers. Every citizen of Israel had responsibilities to meet under the Law.

Exodus 19:3 “Thus you shall say to the **house** of Jacob, and tell the **people** of Israel: ⁴ ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. ⁵ Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; ⁶ and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the **people** of Israel.” ⁷ So Moses came and called the elders of the **people** and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him. ⁸ **All the people** answered together and said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do.”

Believer and unbeliever alike were obliged under the terms of the Mosaic Covenant. All enjoyed the blessing for obedience or the chastisement for failure. Though all Israelites were obliged under the covenant and all understood the covenant, but that does not mean all Israelites kept the covenant. There were always some citizens who only practiced those portions of the Law they could not evade like tithing and legal matters. Others followed the Law “religiously” either as required or as they incorrectly understood it. We will look at that later.

The Law could not save?

It should be clearly understood the Mosaic Covenant was simply a means of managing the whole nation of Israel and to set the Israelite apart as someone in a special relationship with God in the eyes of their neighbors. The Israelite was otherwise no one special to be chosen for this task, but was a creation by God to be a vehicle through which He would work and demonstrate His perfect righteousness and, in that process, demonstrate man's complete inability to produce a righteousness of his own that would compare with God's.

Heb 10:1 For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. ... ⁴ For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Gal 2:15 We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; ¹⁶ yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

Gal 2:21 I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

Paul makes it clear in Galatians that the Law did not save anyone. It was designed to encourage righteous behavior as a carrot and stick process but could not ever produce the righteousness necessary for salvation. Only faith alone could do that. Regarding Abraham, it is said:

Gen 15:6 And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

We see more of this salvation by faith in the "By Faith" chapter 11 of Hebrews that spells out the history of Old Testament saints who found righteousness through faith.

Heb 11:4 **By faith** Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And **through his faith**, though he died, he still speaks. ⁵ **By faith** Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. ⁶ And **without faith** it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. ⁷ **By faith** Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes **by faith**. ⁸ **By faith** Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ **By faith** he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. ¹¹ **By faith** Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. ¹² Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

The Law could not save; only faith alone can save. We say the Old Testament saint looked forward to the Cross in the context of how much detail of the Plan of God had been progressively revealed by God at that point in time. We also say the New Testament believer looks back in faith on what was accomplished at the Cross for our salvation. Believers, Old Testament or New Testament, are saved in exactly the same way — **by faith alone**. Works, good or evil, have zero impact on salvation before or after. Until you grasp that simple and utterly obvious fact and put your faith in it, you cannot claim to be born again.

The Law couldn't produce righteousness

The Israelite under the law could not even find true righteousness because he was compelled to keep the Law using only his own human effort. The

Church Age believer enjoys the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. That was not so under the Law. Few believers enjoyed the indwelling Holy Spirit prior to the Church Age and only for special tasks and temporarily.

Rom 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³ For God has done what the law, **weakened by the flesh**, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

The Law was weak because the Israelite had only his human ability (flesh) with the promise of reward or discipline to keep it. Paul calls it “the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world” (Gal 4:9). The Church Age believer has the Holy Spirit “in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

The Law was to make man aware of his sinfulness

A primary focus of the Law was to make man aware of his sinful nature and the need for a savior.

Rom 3:20 For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

Rom 7:7 What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.”

1 Tim 1:8 Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, ⁹ understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, ¹⁰ the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers,

liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, ¹¹ in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.

The Law was not always practiced as intended.

The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans in chapter 2 has much to say about the Law. He is speaking from the perspective of both a Pharisee well versed in the Law and a Christian with hindsight into Israel under the Law. Let's do a short verse-by-verse on some relevant passages.

Rom 2:17 But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God

“Called” literally means “bears the name” and should be rendered “you who call yourself a Jew”. This is a conditional clause in the Greek first class condition, meaning “if and it is true”. Paul is addressing individuals who are truly Jews.

We now get a list of eight moral and religious details in which the Jew took pride in his race. The verbs used here are all in the present tense, emphasizing the habitual nature of these actions.

1) They rested in the Law. “Rested” sometimes translated “rely” is a word that means rely upon. They put their confidence in the fact that God gave it to them.

2) They “boast” or take glory from that relationship to the Law and the title Jew. It was a source of pride for them in both a good sense and in a bad way, as well, in that it gave them a sense of superiority over the Gentile.

Rom 2:18 and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law;

3) They know His will, that is they have an awareness of God's plan and His desires. Most of mankind has no clue what the future holds? For them life is a day-by-day existence with no real meaning or purpose, but the Jew has an understanding of the plan of God. The same should also be stated

of the Church, but knowledge of God and His Plan are sadly lacking because it isn't taught in many churches today.

4) "Approve what is excellent" – "Approve" means to test and see what passes the test. It is an approval based on comparison to a standard. They have a concern for spiritually superior standards.

5) This ability exists because "they are instructed from the Law". From their youth, they were instructed in the Law by the scribes and rabbis. The Law was an essential part of Jewish life; the Israelite was surrounded by it everywhere he turned, and there was no escaping it even if you were a secular Jew. The Law was understood, perhaps not followed, but certainly understood throughout Jewish society.

Rom 2:19 and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness,

We continue in the Greek first class condition — if and it is true. "Sure" is a word that means to be persuaded and, in this case, carries the meaning of "to believe". It might be translated this way, "If you believe and you do ..."

6) Many Jews were sure or convinced and, as a result, believed certain things about themselves in relation to the Gentiles. Paul lists their responsibilities under the Law. They were to be a guide for the blind. The word used for "blind" can refer to physical blindness or mental blindness, but obviously this refers to spiritual blindness. And the Jew was to bring "light" to those blinded and living in spiritual darkness.

Rom 2:20 an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth—

They were to instruct the "foolish" who were blind in this spiritual darkness. The word used for "instructor" is the same root word from which we get "pedagogue" over in Galatians.

Gal 3:24 So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian,

That word translated “guardian” is the Greek pedagogue and refers to the cultural practice in wealthy families to having a trusted slave care for the children and teach them what they needed to know socially to function as an adult. In the Romans 2:20 passage it is translated “instructor”. Here the application is made to the Jew, that he should be using the Law is to instruct others by giving them this light of revelation that God has given to them.

7) This confidence leading to belief by the Jews rests in “having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth”. The law was the embodiment of knowledge about God and His truth. One of its purposes was to reveal God and His righteousness to man.

Rom 2:21 you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal?

8) “You teach others, but do you teach yourself?” The Law was designed to make the Jew aware of what was sinful in their own lives. You have the Law and you teach others about its moral code, but what have you learned from it? Do you walk the walk or do you just talk the talk? Paul is going to charge them with just talking the talk.

The question is followed by a series of questions about specific prohibitions in the Law and begins with stealing. You preach about stealing but do you steal? The word is “klepto” which means to take away by stealth.

Rom 2:22 You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?

You say adultery is wrong but do you commit adultery? Implied in these questions is the accusation that they do these things themselves. The Law denounces idolatry but Israel was notorious for their “whoring after false Gods,” as the Scriptures put it. It is interesting that the sexual sin of adultery is in the same sentence with idolatry. The Jew was considered “married” to God through the covenant of the Law (Jer 3:14). Israel was God’s spouse and, as His spouse, Israel was said to commit adultery with false gods thus the use of the term “whoring” in scripture when referring to

this practice. The underlying meaning of course is that Israel was unfaithful to its vows under the Law.

Ho 4:12 My people inquire of a piece of wood, and their walking staff gives them oracles. For a spirit of whoredom has led them astray, and they have left their God to play the whore.

Judges 8:33 As soon as Gideon died, the people of Israel turned again and whored after the Baals and made Baal-berith their god.

1 Chron 5:25 But they broke faith with the God of their fathers, and whored after the gods of the peoples of the land, whom God had destroyed before them

There are many more references to the wife of God (Israel) whoring after false gods, but you get the picture. Continuing with our study in Romans ...

Rom 2:23 You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law.

You Jews brag about having the Law. It is a source of pride turned into arrogance, yet by breaking the Law they dishonor God, a charge of blatant hypocrisy. How can you take pride in the Law and yet not keep it? An honest Jew would have to respond to Paul here by admitting the truth of what he is saying.

Rom 2:24 For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”

Paul then quotes from Isaiah but uses the LXX. “Thus saith the Lord, On account of you my name is continually blasphemed among the Gentiles.”

The Jew blasphemes God through their self-righteous attitudes and yet do not follow what they teach. This causes the Gentile to blaspheme God. If they do not practice what they preach, why should the Gentile believe them? Their actions often spoke louder than their words.

We Christians are guilty of the same thing. We can sometimes become very smug about the light we have received through our own thirst for the

truth of God. We take that knowledge and doctrine and often make it a source of arrogance and look down upon other Christians or unbelievers who may not have received the same truth we have. This often manifests itself in a critical heart towards others. It can destroy our own witness and turn off those who may be seeking the truth. Paul said he was willing to become all things to all men for the sake of the Gospel. This does not mean Paul compromised his standards, but it means Paul went out of his way to avoid offending others, so the truth would get a fair hearing and be judged solely on the basis of the facts. His life was to be a reflection or embodiment of what he taught. And our lives should also.

Failure Under the Law

As Paul stated, many Israelites did not keep the law and often walked away from God into apostasy and idol worship even to the point of sacrificing their children to Molech. God was forced to administer discipline when they did.

It was understood by God that the observant Israelite would not always meet all the terms of the covenant, thus He made allowances in the Law to cover that. The repentant Jew could make sacrifices at the Temple to find a form of judicial righteousness under the terms of the Law Covenant. That is, if he was repentant and made the appropriate sacrifice, his sin would be “covered” or “hidden” from God’s view by the blood of the sacrifice. Technically he had to make a sacrifice for each sin he committed. By doing this, the observant Israelite would be declared “blameless” under the terms of the covenant. Paul specifically mentions this in Philippians.

Phil 3:4 If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

Paul is not saying he was without sin but is saying that when he sinned he made the proper sin sacrifice and was thus declared “blameless” under the terms of the covenant. Once a year, on the Feast Day of Yom Kippur, the

High Priest made a sacrifice for himself, his family, and the people of Israel that “covered” their sins and “hid” them from God’s view. Under the terms of the covenant, this satisfied God for one year, and then it had to be repeated next Yom Kippur. It was temporary until the shed blood of Jesus Christ made permanent what was only temporary before.

When we studied the Five Cycles of Discipline we saw how Israel could be severely disciplined for failure under the Law. Obviously, one could not expect all Israelites to act righteously and be declared blameless in meeting the terms of the covenant. When the failures began to outnumber the blameless and even reached hideous levels of rebellious behavior, Israel would be disciplined nationally even to be invaded by their even more evil neighbors, the nation destroyed, and the surviving citizens taken into bondage or scattered among the nations, as happened three times in their history.

As previously noted, there is this warning in Deuteronomy.

Deut 28:64 “And the Lord will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known. ⁶⁵ And among these nations you shall find no respite, and there shall be no resting place for the sole of your foot, but the Lord will give you there a trembling heart and failing eyes and a languishing soul. ⁶⁶ Your life shall hang in doubt before you. Night and day you shall be in dread and have no assurance of your life. ⁶⁷ In the morning you shall say, ‘If only it were evening!’ and at evening you shall say, ‘If only it were morning!’ because of the dread that your heart shall feel, and the sights that your eyes shall see ...

The Law was designed to point to Christ

One major aspect of the Mosaic Covenant and the Law was to point to Christ. Paul speaks of this in Galatians.

Gal 3:24 So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian ...

That word translated “guardian” is the Greek word pedagogue and refers to the tradition in Roman and Greek culture for parents to have a trusted and educated slave care for their children. Their responsibility was to educate the children in the culture and social practices they would need to know to function as productive adults in their society. Once the child reached social maturity, usually around 14, the child “graduated from Pedagogue High School” and assumed the responsibilities expected of a mature adult.

What Paul was saying is the Law was like this pedagogue teacher or guardian until “faith has come,” meaning Christ and the indwelling Holy Spirit. Its function was limited and pointed to Christ. Paul goes on to point out that now that Christ has come, the pedagogue (the Law) is no longer needed. We have a higher standard in the spiritual life made possible by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Christ/Messiah and His attributes were revealed in the Law for Israel to see and look forward to so that when Messiah came they would recognize Him. Only a few got that. Instead of rejoicing and worshiping their Messiah, they conspired to have Him killed. They are without excuse, for He was revealed in the sacrifices. We will look at those a little later.

Messiah was also revealed their own Holy Scriptures, specifically Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22, among many other passages found in the Old Testament. Yet “he was despised, and we esteemed him not” (Isa 53:3).

Psalm 22 is a particularly poignant picture of Christ on the Cross as depicted through this psalm written by David.

They had the Law and lots of revelations about the Kingdom and Messiah. They were without excuse and their discipline has lasted for 2,000 years and is not yet complete.