

NEW-COVENANT ARTICLES
VOLUME TEN

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The Seeking Sinner: Fact or Figment?

Three Verses Misunderstood: Galatians 3:23-25 Expounded.

New-Covenant Articles

Volume Ten

The covenant of which [Jesus] is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises... By calling this covenant 'new', he has made the first one obsolete

Hebrews 8:6,13

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Scripture quotations come from a variety of versions

All my books, kindles, sermons, audio books, articles and videos
can be found at davidhjgay.com

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Note to the Reader

This is the tenth volume in my collected articles on the new covenant. Although such pieces will continue to be posted on davidhjay.com, once again I not only want to set my work in a more permanent form for those who have already discovered it, but in the hope of reaching a new audience. The fact is, there is a growing body of believers who, having had more than enough of the bondage and fear produced by the law teachers and their clever tricks with Scripture, are displaying a voracious appetite for the liberating gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. I am thinking of them. If they find any value in these articles, they might like to explore my full-length books, the links to which are on davidhjay.com.

I express my continued gratitude to Ace and Peggy Staggs for all the internet work they do behind the scenes. I also record my debt to those believers who support me in prayer. Mere words inadequately express what I feel about my brothers and sisters who encourage me in all these ways and more. God will remember them and their labour (Heb. 6:10).

New-Covenant Theology: A Summary

This summary represents my understanding of new-covenant theology. Scriptural justification for these statements may be found throughout my works.

New-covenant theology takes full account of the progressive nature of revelation, and thus it sees the new covenant as the goal and climax of the previous biblical covenants. The Bible is not flat but is progressive in revelation; ‘but now’ is a critical scriptural phrase marking the disjoint between the old and new covenants. The Old Testament (old covenant) must be interpreted in light of the New (new), not the other way about.

God has one eternal plan centred in Jesus Christ.

The law of Moses was one. It cannot, must not, be divided into three bits. God gave Israel the old covenant as a temporary measure, as a shadow of the person and work of Christ who fulfilled it and rendered it obsolete.

Believers are not under the law of Moses, but under the law of Christ. Having died to the Mosaic law, they are not under that condemning letter, but, by the Spirit, they are in union with Christ, married to him, and thus are enabled, empowered and motivated to live to his glory in obedience to Scripture.

Christ is all. He is his law. He is the covenant.

Believers use the law of Moses as a paradigm (pattern or typical example),¹ as part of ‘all Scripture’, but not as a list of detailed rules.

Sinners do not have to be prepared for Christ by first being taken to the law.

There is one body of the redeemed, the eschatological Israel, ‘the Israel of God’ (Gal. 6:16), comprising the redeemed from

¹ See, for instance, 1 Cor. 5:6-13; 9:8-14; 10:1-11,18; 14:21; 2 Cor. 6:14 – 7:1; 8:15; 13:1.

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the time of Adam to Pentecost, and redeemed Jews and Gentiles from that time until the end of the age.

Stop Press! No Law for Believers! Really?

In a Facebook Group devoted to the promulgation of new-covenant theology, one which takes the view that the believer is not under the law of Christ, a recent (September 2017) thread had an opening post which included the following statement:

No Law! ‘But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law’. Galatians 5:22-23 ESV. This verse is indisputable. It cannot be implied that Paul only intends to say that the law of Moses alone is not in play – he plainly says ‘NO LAW OF ANY KIND’. And this indicates that when he says, so many times, elsewhere, that the believer is not ‘under law’, he also means ‘not under any law’. Not merely ‘no longer under the law of Moses’, as some would like to have it, although the Gentile never was anyway.

I profoundly disagree with the major claim in the above. However, in this article I will not repeat the arguments I have set out in several of my works, showing that the believer is under the law of Christ. My present purpose is simply to ask some questions and point out, once more,¹ how some, reading such a categorical statement, might run with it and end up in a very bad place. Of course, if the original premise is scriptural, then those consequences have to be faced, but I hope we can all agree that when we publish we should do everything we can to prevent our readers drawing the wrong conclusion from our words.

The categorical statement

The categorical statement I want to highlight is this:

The believer is not ‘under law’... ‘not under any law’. Not merely ‘no longer under the law of Moses’, as some would like to have it...

¹ See my ‘Words Have Power’.

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Another member of the group later added this comment:

We [that is, believers] are not under law, so there are no laws to obey. We are under grace not law.

As I say, I strongly disagree with both statements, but I have no intention here of arguing that the believer is under the law of Christ, and that that law is written in all Scripture in the hands of Christ and his apostles, having already tackled the leading points in published works.² Even so, I must confess that how anybody can argue that the believer is not under the law of Christ when faced with Matthew 5 – 7, John 12:47 – 16:66 and 1 John, utterly baffles me. I freely admit that the phrase ‘the law of Christ’ is not used in any of those passages, but what else can they be referring to? Nevertheless, all I want to do here is point out that if these two believers are right, then certain consequences follow.

1. If these two believers are right, this can only mean that believers, not being under any law, are not under the law of the land in which they live, and they do not have to obey it.

And yet the apostle is explicit:

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom

² See, in particular, my *Believers*.

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revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honour to whom honour is owed (Rom. 13:1-7).

Do not misread the opening 'Let'. The apostolic 'let' is a command. Every believer must be subject to – that is, he must obey – the governing authorities. Surely that means that every believer has to obey the law of the land. If that paragraph does not mean that the believer is subject to the law of the land and must obey it, I should like to know what it does mean.

Moreover, it was not the last time the apostle said such thing. As he told Titus:

Remind them [that is, believers] to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient (Tit. 3:1).

And Peter had something to say about it:

Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honour everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the emperor (1 Pet. 2:13-17).

On my reading of this passage, I am forced to one conclusion only. The believer is under the law of the State, and it is a vital part of his testimony to the world to obey that law. Of course, if the authorities demand something contrary to Scripture and conscience, something contrary to the law of Christ, then the believer's reply must be the same as Peter and John when the authorities tried to stop them preaching gospel:

Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard (Acts 4:19-20).

We must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29).

Nevertheless, the basic principle is clear: believers are under the law of the land in which they live, and they must obey it.

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So I ask: How can it be right to tell believers that they are under no law?

2. If these two believers are right, why do the Scriptures stress that believers are bondservants of Christ?

Let me begin by continuing the extract from 1 Peter:

Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust (1 Pet. 2:18).

And Paul had something to say on it too:

Bondservants, obey your earthly masters (Eph 6:5).

Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters (Col. 3:22).

Incidentally, do not miss the way Paul describes the relationship between bondservants and masters: ‘Let all who are under a yoke as bondservants...’ (1 Tim. 6:1). Note the word ‘yoke’. A bondservant is under a yoke. Now the concept of the ‘yoke’ plays a large part in the life of the believer. Christ made the position explicit:

Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my *yoke* upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my *yoke* is easy, and my burden is light (Matt. 11:28-30).

Clearly, the believer is a bondservant of Christ; he is under his yoke. Do not miss the ‘upon you’. Yoke? We know the Jews were under the yoke of Moses. When the Jerusalem church met to deal with certain law-men who were insisting that Gentiles had to come under Moses’ law, Peter confronted them:

Why are you putting God to the test by placing a *yoke* on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? (Acts 15:10).

‘Why are you making believers come under Moses’ law?’ That is what Peter was challenging.

Now believers are not yoke-less; they most definitely are under a yoke – Christ’s yoke. They are not under Moses’ yoke,

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of course, and they must not strap that yoke on again, or allow anybody else to strap it on them. As Paul declared:

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a *yoke* of slavery (Gal. 5:1).

And he clearly meant the law of Moses.³

Putting all this together, it is beyond dispute that just as a bondservant is under the yoke of his master, under his master's law, so the believer is under Christ's yoke, under his law. And this of course is borne out by Paul's illustration in Romans 6:

For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law [that is, Moses' law] but under grace. What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law [that is, Moses' law] but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is

³ Yes, 'yoke' is used in more than one way in Scripture. Two oxen would be 'yoked' (Luke 14:19), a believer and an unbeliever can be wrongly 'yoked' (2 Cor. 6:14), two fellow-workers are 'yoked' (Phil. 4:3) – that is they can be in tandem. But when 'yoke' is used of a bondservant, it means he is under his master's law. Israel was under Moses' 'yoke'. Israel was not in tandem with Moses, but under his law. The believer is under Christ's 'yoke'; that is, he is not in tandem with Christ as an equal, but under his law.

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death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 6:14-23).

As the context makes clear, the believer is not under the law of Moses, but is now a slave or bondservant of Christ. As such, he is under his yoke or law. And he has to obey it.

So I ask: How can it be right to tell believers that they are under no law?

3. If these two believers are right, why do the Scriptures stress that believers are married to Christ?

As they do:

A married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress. Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God (Rom. 7:2-4).

The context, as in Romans 6 (there should be no chapter division), makes it clear that Paul is talking about the law of Moses when he says that the believer has died to the law of Moses to be married to Christ. Clearly, then, the believer is under the law of the new husband. This principle of being under the husband's rule, authority – yes, law – is borne out by such passages as these:

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands (Eph. 5:22-24).

Older women... are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled (Tit. 2:3-5).

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Wives, be subject to your own husbands (1 Pet. 3:1).⁴

The believer is subject to Christ as the new husband. He has to submit to his Redeemer. And this means that the believer has to obey Christ's law.

So I ask: How can it be right to tell believers that they are under no law?

4. If these two believers are right, this can only mean that believers never sin.

Which, needless to say, is nonsense. Why do I say that this is the consequence of the claims in the thread? Because of these apostolic statements:

Through the law comes knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:20).

Where there is no law there is no transgression (Rom. 4:15).

I am, of course, familiar with the arguments about the meaning of 'sin' and 'transgression', and I know the way the first of these verses has been misused to teach the preparation of sinners for Christ by the law, but putting all that to one side, surely these verses tell us that where there is no law there can be no sin – transgression being sin more precisely defined. At the very least, there can be no sin that can be objectively defined. Adam sinned because he broke God's command – God's law to him (Gen. 3). Israel sinned by breaking God's law – the Mosaic law given to Israel. Pagans sin when they break the law of conscience (Rom. 2:12-15) and, supremely, when they refuse to obey God's command to repent and trust Christ (John 3:18-19,36; Acts 17:30). Why, even before Sinai, pagans died because of sin, their sin in Adam and their actual sin. And yet, as Paul declared:

To be sure, sin was in the world before the law [of Moses] was given, but sin is not charged against anyone's account where there is no law (Rom. 5:13).

Clearly, then, pagans at that time were under law. They still are. And so are believers. Believers sin when they break a law; when they break a law, they sin. Believers must be under a law,

⁴ See also 1 Cor. 14:34.

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because sin is the breaking of that law they are under – and no believer is perfect in this life. And that law can only be the law of Christ.

So I ask: How can it be right to tell believers that they are under no law?

5. If these two believers are right, why did the apostle say what he did in 1 Corinthians 9:21?

No, I am not referring to the almost-universal translation of the Greek which has Paul saying that he is under the law of Christ (1 Cor. 9:21), though, as I have argued, that is an excellent rendering.⁵ I refer to the fact that when Paul spoke of himself, he said he was one:

...not being outside the law of God (1 Cor. 9:21).

Paul was not outside the law of God. The Greek word he used was *anomos*. He was not *anomos*. This means he was not destitute of law. That is what the Greek means. Paul described the Gentiles as being *anomos* (destitute of) the Mosaic law, calling them ‘those outside the law’ (1 Cor. 9:21), outside the law of Moses, as the context makes clear; that is, those not having the law of Moses, not being under the law of Moses. In contrast, he himself was not *anomos*; that is, he was under law. He was not now under the law of Moses, of course, as he clearly stated, but he was under the law of God. I am convinced this means he was under the law of Christ, but let us leave it more general. Paul was under the law of God.

So I ask: How can it be right to tell believers that they are under no law?

Finally, as I said, what might be the consequences if believers pick up the assertions on that Facebook thread, and run with them? Is there any danger that the idea of being law-less might morph into being lawless? How serious that would be!

⁵ Once again, see my *Believers*.

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‘Against Such Things There Is No Law’

In a previous article,¹ I made some comments on a recent (September 2017) Facebook post which included the following:

No Law! ‘But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law’. Galatians 5:22-23 ESV. This verse is indisputable. It cannot be implied that Paul only intends to say that the law of Moses alone is not in play – he plainly says ‘NO LAW OF ANY KIND’.

I agree wholeheartedly. The correspondent has got it precisely right. There is no law whatsoever that can or will condemn a life displaying the fruit of the Spirit. Excellent! If only he had left it there. Alas, he did not. He moved on:

‘NO LAW OF ANY KIND’. And this indicates that when he [that is, Paul] says, so many times, elsewhere,² that the believer is not ‘under law’, he also means ‘not under any law’.

Hmm! I make two initial comments.

First, we are presented with a gloss. Let us be clear about this. We have been given a gloss. Linking the apostle’s statement at the end of verse 23 with other verses, the correspondent has turned ‘against such things there is no law’ into ‘the believer is under no law at all’. He has put words in the apostle’s mouth. The apostle could have said what the correspondent wanted him to say, but the plain fact is he did not. Why not? Even so, of course, this gloss would be perfectly fair if the context shows that this is what the apostle meant.

Consequently, *secondly*, we must probe the context to see if this is indeed what the apostle was saying.

¹ ‘Stop Press! No Law For Believers! Really?’

² Many times? How many? Three? Rom. 6:14-15; Gal. 5:18. Are there any more? But, I agree, the apostle did talk of ‘under law’. See below.

'Against Such Things There Is No Law'

Before we do, let us remind ourselves that we are dealing with a massive issue. This must be recognised. It is not a question of semantics. If it is true that the believer is under no law at all, very serious consequences follow. Very serious consequences, indeed! So much so, we would be wise to insist on the surest exegesis to make certain that we had good ground before running with the idea that the believer is free of all law, that the believer is law-less.

The apostle was writing to the Galatians to rescue them from law men, men who wanted them under the Mosaic law. He was grieved that they had been listening to these teachers, and buying into their dogma. And he used the strongest, most passionate language to plead with them not to leave Christ.³ Pulling out all the stops, he drew on every argument he could think of to refute the doctrine of the law men, and maintain the liberty the believer has in Christ in the new covenant. I will not argue these points here, having done so in several works.⁴ But this is the general context of the letter. And Galatians 5:23 sits securely within that context. That background must never be forgotten when looking at individual passages, individual clauses (as in this case) or phrases within the book.

Putting it negatively, there is not remotest hint that Paul wrote to the Galatians to tell them they were free of all law; in particular, that they were not under the law of Christ. The law men were not urging the Galatians to come under the law of Christ! That much is certain. It was the law of Moses that Paul and the law men were concerned with from start to finish. And that is why the apostle wrote to the believers to urge them not to listen to the law men. He wrote to convince them of the scriptural liberty that they, as saints, had in Christ.

The fact is, Paul used the word 'law' many times throughout Galatians, and on every occasion, possibly apart from three, he

³ Compare the letter to the Hebrews.

⁴ See my *Christ; Galatians; Three*; 'Three Verses Misunderstood'; and so on. See also various audios and videos.

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meant the law of Moses. Two of the exceptions are: ‘For if there had been a law [legal system] given’ (Gal. 3:21), and ‘against such there is no law [principle or legal system]’ (Gal. 5:23); and in both the closest analogy is the law of Moses.⁵ The third and main exception is: ‘The law of Christ’ (Gal. 6:2).

Again, it must be remembered that when Paul is talking about the law of Moses and uses ‘law’ without the definite article – ‘law’ instead of ‘the law’ – the absence of the article actually strengthens his point. I am not whistling in the dark. I have fully argued the case elsewhere.⁶

All this must be borne in mind when coming to Galatians 5:23.

As for the immediate context of Galatians 5:23, let me start at verse 16. Remember, there is no chapter division:

Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ (Gal. 5:16 – 6:2).

⁵ For Gal. 5:23, see below.

⁶ See my *Christ*.

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Patently, Paul is addressing the subject of the believer's progressive sanctification. That is his concern here. How will the believer live a progressively sanctified life? How can he live a life of godliness, of holiness, of Christ-likeness? By coming under the law of Moses (whittled down to the so-called moral law'), *à la* Calvin – as so many teach today? Paul could not be clearer. The believer will live, the believer can only live, a life of progressive sanctification by the Spirit. The law of Moses? Going under the law of Moses hinders progressive sanctification! As the apostle told the Romans, it is only because the believer has died to the law of Moses that he can possibly live a life of progressive sanctification (Rom. 7:4-6). He virtually says the same here in Galatians:

If [since] you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law (Gal. 5:18).

And he clearly means the law of Moses, as I have argued from the context.

Consequently, the apostle presses his readers to live, not as under the law of Moses, but to live – to walk – in the Spirit:

Walk by the Spirit... If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:16,25).

And he has wonderful news for the Galatians! Paul offers them the most tremendous encouragement – all based on the glorious provisions of the new covenant. As he well knows, every believer has the Spirit (John 14:17; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:3; 1 John 4:2), and the Spirit has given every believer a new heart to live a life of obedience to all God's commands (Jer. 31:31; Ezek. 36:25-27). Nevertheless, as Paul, leaving no room for doubt, makes as clear as noonday, the believer has the responsibility, the duty, to walk in the Spirit; that is, he is duty-bound to live out that life of obedience to God's commands by the Spirit. Note the apostolic imperative: 'Walk!' This is a command!

But Paul then spells out the fruit which the Spirit will produce in the believer's life in this way of obedience:

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

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What a glorious encouragement to every believer! This is what the Spirit will produce in the child of God. The law of Moses cannot do it. But the Spirit of God can, does and will produce it! This is what the apostle is saying in the context, both of the passage and the entire book.

Sadly, as we all have to confess, the believer’s progressive sanctification is never complete in this life. Positionally, his sanctification is perfect the moment he trusts Christ and is thus united to him. But progressively... alas, no. No believer is perfect in this life.⁷

Even so, the believer can still be assured. Indeed he can! The Spirit is producing his fruit in the believer’s life. What is more... the apostle then comes to his punch line. Although the believer, looking at his life, has to confess the inadequacy of his attainment – indeed, the more spiritual he is, the more he sees how weak his progressive sanctification is – nevertheless, he must never forget a glorious truth. Which is? However weak his progressive sanctification – and the apostle is not condoning any inadequacy in himself or others – the believer can rest assured that there is no possibility of condemnation for him. No! As he told the Romans:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. 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, 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 (Rom. 8:1-4).

But see how Paul puts it here: ‘Against such things there is no law’; that is, there is no law whatsoever – whether the law of Moses or the law of Christ, or indeed, any law of man (unless that man is utterly perverted) (Prov. 16:7; 1 Pet. 3:13) – that will condemn him.

⁷ See my *Fivefold; Positional*.

'Against Such Things There Is No Law'

It is essential to remember that there is a fundamental chasm between the unspiritual man, the man in the flesh, and the man in the Spirit (Rom. 7:4-6; 8:1-17; 1 Cor. 2:14-16), and it shows in the life-style of each, and in their everlasting end:

The works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires (Gal. 5:19-24).

Therefore says the apostle:

If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:25).

And the clause we are looking at lies right at the heart of that extract. When talking about the fruit of the Spirit, the apostle is categorical: 'Against such things there is no law'. Every believer has the Spirit. The Spirit is producing fruit in every believer. And, as a consequence, the apostle can assure every single believer that no law will condemn him – none whatsoever because, as Paul so boldly asserts: 'Against such things there is no law'.

This is what the apostle is saying. The notion that he is telling believers that they are free of all law, or even implying it, is wholly foreign to the context. More. It contradicts the entire ambience of the context, which is replete with stressing the believer's responsibility to walk in the Spirit, keep in step with the Spirit, to live a life in the Spirit, producing fruit in the Spirit, obeying God's law (for the believer, this can only be the law of Christ) in the Spirit. As Ezekiel 36:25-27 promises, the believer will, by the Spirit, obey God's commands. God's commands? We know, as Paul has stated so clearly, that the believer is no longer under the law of Moses. There is only one law he can be under, therefore, only one person's commands he must obey.

'Against Such Things There Is No Law'

The Spirit moves him to do it, and he has to do it. Do what? Surely to walk in the Spirit under the law of Christ.

But all this, in a sense, is taking us away from the thrust of the clause we are looking at. Which is precisely what the Facebook correspondent did. He started with an idea – that the believer is free of all law – and he foisted it upon this clause. And then he, like a conjuror producing a rabbit out of a hat, gave us his deduction! The apostle's 'against such [that is, the fruit of the Spirit] there is no law' has been stretched way beyond breaking point to become 'believers are under no law'.

And what an assertion! The believer is under no law! How far reaching! As I have said, we should demand a far better foundation for such a staggering claim, a claim fraught with such serious – not to say, dire – consequences. After all, being law-less can so easily morph into being lawless. History warns us that it has happened before.

Finally, I can only say that I have consulted a string of commentators on the clause, not one of whom got remotely near suggesting that the believer is under no law whatsoever.

I close with a few extracts.

C.H.Spurgeon:

Against such there is no law. Neither God nor man has ever made a law against these things [the fruit of the Spirit] – the more there is of them, the better will it be for everybody. Oh, that they prevailed all over the world!⁸

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. Neither human nor divine! Good men make no law against these things, nor does God, for he approves of them.⁹

And John Brown:

⁸ Exposition following sermon 2632.

⁹ Exposition following sermon 2831.

'Against Such Things There Is No Law'

Some have supposed that the apostle's meaning may be thus expressed: 'If all men were of this description, there would be no need of law'. [But] these are not at all the class of people against whom 'law' is directed. We rather think that the following statement comes at least nearer his object in introducing this clause: The Judaizing teachers, to gain their end, not only talked much of the advantages of submitting to the law of Moses, but also of the danger of not submitting to it. Now, says the apostle, 'these threatenings need not alarm you if you thus walk in the Spirit. That law [that is, the law of Moses] approves of such characters and corresponding conduct; that law [that is, the law of Moses] has no curse for you'.¹⁰

As I have explained, I would take it further. No law whatsoever will ever condemn the believer. That is all Paul was saying in the clause. But that was more than enough!

¹⁰ John Brown: *An Exposition of the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians*, Robert Carter and Brothers, New York, 1853, pp307-308.

Edmund Burke, Thomas Paine and New-Covenant Theology

What? Whatever did Edmund Burke and Thomas Paine know about new-covenant theology? – that is, if you are talking about the 18th century men who wrote against each other on political and society matters, especially revolution, the American and French Revolutions, in particular. Yes, that’s who I mean – the very same Burke and Paine.

Well, what did they know about new-covenant theology? Nothing! I never claimed they did! Look at the title again.

Edmund Burke (1729-1797) was born in Dublin of a Protestant father and a Catholic mother, was brought up and remained an Anglican who supported Catholic emancipation. He was a staunch upholder of the established Anglican religion. For Burke, the State Church has a vital role to play in maintaining a stable political system. But as for the theology of the new covenant? I wouldn’t look to Burke for much light there, I am afraid!

So what about Tom Paine? Tom Paine (1737-1809) was born in Thetford, Norfolk, of a Quaker father and Anglican mother. He was at best a Deist – that is, one who believed that God exists but is virtually absent from his creation – had no time for the Bible, the atonement, the supernatural, and so on. Knowledge of the new covenant? Zilch!

So why this article? Well, as I say, these two men engaged in an extended battle over the question of revolution, pursuing their disagreements by means of a series of pamphlets and books. While, in this article, I have no interest whatever in the ins and outs of their political disagreement, what does interest me – and it interests me very much, indeed – is the basis on which they argued.

They were agreed that they must go back to the start and argue from there. For Burke, that meant going back to the Establishment as it was then constituted – the Glorious English Revolution of 1688, constitutional Monarchy, and the established State Church as settled in 1660. Paine stoutly disagreed. In 1792, in his ‘Rights of Man’, he wrote:

The error of those who reason by precedents drawn from antiquity respecting the rights of man is that they do not go far enough into antiquity. They stop in some of the intermediate stages of a hundred or a thousand years, and produce what was then done as a rule for the present day. This is no authority at all.

So here is the fundamental point of departure for the two men. One stopped at the established position, the *status quo*; the other wanted to go back to the beginning.

As I say, I have not the slightest interest in the political wrangle in question. But what does interest me is the question as to where we should begin when we are engaged in debate. What should be the basis on which we argue? In particular, in this matter of new-covenant theology, where should we begin? What should be the basis on which we argue?

I assert that the basis on which we should argue, the place where we should begin, is Scripture. The Reformed, however, whatever they say by way of ‘subsidiary standards’, really want to begin with, and stay with, the 17th century Reformed Confessions or their systematic theologies based on one or other of those Confessions. In this connection – *and only in this connection* – I agree with Tom Paine. To paraphrase him:

The error of those who reason from the Confessions drawn up by puritan theologians or their followers in the 17th century respecting the theology of the covenants, the law, and so on, is that they do not go far enough back. They stop at this intermediate stage of the 17th century, and produce what was then set up as a Confession as the rule for the present day. This is no authority at all. They must start with Scripture.

That's all I wanted to say. Brief it may be, but I think it very important. Where do you stand on this vital question?

Observations on a Colloquy

The colloquy in question is the In-Depth Studies Colloquy: ‘Is the Cross Alone Sufficient for Salvation?’, which was held on the 29th of April 2017 at the Gilbert Regional Library, Phoenix.¹ Brian Arnold took the ‘No’ position and Geoff Volker took the ‘Yes’.

The issue under debate was the old question of Christ’s active/passive obedience. Is Christ’s life of obedience under the law imputed to those who believe, so that the justified sinner is both cleansed from his sin in the blood of Christ (in simple terms, the passive obedience of Christ) and accounted righteous, made positively righteousness, having received the imputation of Christ’s perfect obedience under the law (in simple terms, the active obedience of Christ)? Brian argued ‘Yes’; Geoff argued ‘No’.

I want to make a very brief response. And I mean brief. Having already written on this subject,² I will only touch on what I see as a few key points raised by the colloquy.

To avoid all misunderstanding, let me say at once that I wholeheartedly agree with both Brian and Geoff that this is an in-house debate between brothers. This is not a wrangle. I publish this article entirely in accord with this spirit. Furthermore, while I have never met Brian, Geoff is a close, good friend and a colleague. We Skype regularly, we engage in conferences together, he and his wife have had me to stay in their home, I have met and enjoyed the company of his family, and so on. But he knows that we do not see eye to eye on this subject of Christ’s active obedience. Nevertheless, we respect each other – and more.

Again, as the two men agreed, there are many issues here which are held in common. We all believe in imputation. We all

¹ It may be found at the following link:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8B6rXRFBNA>

² See my ‘Into the Lions’ Den: Christ’s Active Obedience Re-Visited’.

believe that Christ lived a perfect life, fulfilling all righteousness under the law, and we believe that this perfection was absolutely necessary in order that he might be an unblemished sin-offering on the cross. We also agree that the terms ‘active obedience’ and ‘passive obedience’ are, in some ways, unhelpful, since Christ was active on the cross in his so-called passive obedience. Nevertheless, we are stuck with these terms, and so we have to get on with it. But, to contradict myself a little, since it is agreed that Christ was actively obeying his Father on the cross, this, it seems to me, means that it is wrong to dismiss all talk of Christ’s active obedience.

So, these key points that I spoke about...

‘Active obedience is a theological, not a biblical, construct’

I am, of course, quoting one of Geoff’s arguments.

Let me say at once that Geoff has put his finger on what I consider to be a major issue. In all sorts of areas, far too many believers read the Bible and interpret it in terms of a Confession or systematic theology. They wrest Scripture to fit their system. Let me give a couple of examples of the sort of thing I mean, issues that I have written about, and done so extensively:

1. Election, particular redemption and the free offer of the gospel.
2. The covenants, the law and the believer.

In both of these areas, far too many read the Bible to make it fit their system, rather than the other way about. The results of this tinkering with Scripture are disastrous. We must let God be true and (if necessary) every man and his Confession or system fall. Of course, nearly everybody will agree with the sentiment, but, as I say, in practice far too many work the other way round: Scripture is distorted to fit the system.

Is this the case with ‘the active obedience of Christ’? If it is, if Scripture is distorted to make it fit a system, then the concept should be abandoned forthwith.

But there is a difference between ‘biblical’ and ‘textual’. We all agree that there is no specific text which states that ‘the active obedience of Christ, his perfect obedience to the law, is imputed to sinners when they believe’. No! But does this mean that we must, therefore, abandon the concept? Before we do, let us try the notion on one or two other topics.

Is there a specific text which states that the Godhead is One in Three persons? No!

Is there a specific text that states that the sinner is justified by faith alone? No!

Is there a specific text that states that believers are under the law of Christ? No!³

Shall we, therefore, abandon the doctrine of the trinity, the doctrine of the justification of believers by faith alone, and the claim that believers are under the law of Christ? No! For all three are *biblical* doctrines even though they are not *textual* doctrines.

The question is of course: Is the imputation of Christ’s active obedience a biblical doctrine? I assert that it is, but I will not argue the case here, having already done so in my aforementioned article.

‘Justification is forgiveness’

This, it seems to me, is where Geoff ends up.

But is justification simply forgiveness? Or, as it came out in the colloquy, is the righteousness imputed to the believer defined as ‘cleansing’ or ‘a clean slate’? Let me say immediately that by asking this question I intend no disparagement of forgiveness. How could I? It features so largely in the apostolic writings. But is the righteousness imputed to the believer limited to ‘cleansing’ or ‘a clean slate’?

³ The original of 1 Cor. 9:21 does *not* state it! I agree with the translators, of course, who have translated it that way (see my *Believers*), but the point is, strictly speaking, it is not a textual phrase.

Observations on a Colloquy

I think not. Notice Paul's direct comparison – better, contrast – of 'a righteousness... that comes from the law' with 'that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith' (Phil. 3:9); that is, through Christ. Does he mean '*a clean slate*... that comes from the law' with 'that which comes through faith in Christ, the *clean slate* from God that depends on faith'?

When Paul declares: 'For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God' (2 Cor. 5:21), are we to limit this 'righteousness' to forgiveness? In other words: 'For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become [or have] *the clean slate* of God'?

When Paul says that 'the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law... the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe... his righteousness... so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus' (Rom. 3:21-26), are we to understand this as forgiveness, the imputation of 'a clean slate' to the believer? That is: '*The clean slate* of God has been manifested apart from the law... *the clean slate* of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe... his *clean slate*... so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus'?

When the apostle asserts that 'to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works' (Rom. 4:4-6), was he referring merely to forgiveness, 'a clean slate'? That is: 'To the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as *a clean slate*, just as David also

speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts *a clean slate* apart from works’?⁴

And when Paul links ‘obedience’ (works) and ‘righteousness’ – as he does: ‘For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous’ (Rom. 5:19) – surely he was thinking of more than forgiveness, ‘a clean slate’, was he not? Or are we to think in terms of this: ‘For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be given *a clean slate*’?

⁴ While in Rom. 3:21 – 5:21 Paul does not define righteousness so as to include obedience to the law, but does speak of forgiveness (Rom. 4:7-8), this does not mean that righteousness is only forgiveness. After all, Paul has already said – and only just said – that ‘it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified’ (Rom. 2:13). I am not saying that the believer is justified by his own obedience to the law, of course, but I am saying that the believer’s righteousness does involve that perfect obedience to the law which was wrought for him by Christ. When we read ‘righteousness’ in Rom. 3 and beyond, therefore, this must be borne in mind. Consider: ‘Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; but that Israel who pursued *a law that would lead to righteousness* did not succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works... Being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. For Moses writes about *the righteousness that is based on the law*, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. But the righteousness based on faith says...’ (Rom. 9:30 – 10:6). It is the same point. Righteousness under the law and under the gospel both involve obedience to the law. The law promised life (Rom. 7:10) for perfect obedience. As Christ said: ‘Do this [the law], and you will live’ (Luke 10:28). Israel could say: ‘It will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us’ (Deut. 6:25). In the old covenant, the righteousness had to be the sinner’s own obedience – impossible. In the new covenant, the sinner’s righteousness is Christ’s obedience on his behalf. See below for Rom. 8 and Rom. 10.

When Paul speaks of ‘the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left’ (2 Cor. 6:7; see also Eph. 6:10-17; 1 Thess. 5:8) for the servants of God, is he referring to the weapons of *a clean slate*?⁵

And turning to the old covenant, the Mosaic law – the law under which Christ lived and died – surely the reward for law-keeping was more than forgiveness, ‘a clean slate’, was it not? Does this not play into: ‘Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes’ (Rom. 10:4)? ‘Christ is the end of the law for *a clean slate* to everyone who believes’?

Let us apply the suggestion to Romans 4, Abraham and the believer. Are we to read Scripture like this:

If Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as *a clean slate*’. Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as *a clean slate*... He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of *the clean slate* that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that *a clean slate* would be counted to them as well... the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through *the clean slate* of faith... his faith was ‘counted to him as *a clean slate*’. But the words ‘it was counted to him’ were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our *clean slate* (Rom. 4)?

⁵ John Calvin: ‘By “righteousness” you must understand rectitude of conscience, and holiness of life’. John Gill: ‘By the armour of righteousness, on the right hand, and on the left: meaning, either the whole armour of God, with which a Christian is all over clothed from head to foot, and in the strength of Christ may engage any adversary without fear; or else particularly the sword of the Spirit in the right hand, and the shield of faith in the left, whereby both the offensive and defensive part may be acted; or, as others think, uprightness of conscience, and holiness of life and conversation’.

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Really?

And how about Romans 8:1-4? Is this what Paul meant us to understand:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. 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, in order that the righteous requirement of the law – namely, *a clean slate* – might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Rom. 8:1-4)?

Really?

Brian rightly introduced Phinehas into the conversation. Here is the scriptural record:

Then they yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor, and ate sacrifices offered to the dead; they provoked the Lord to anger with their deeds, and a plague broke out among them. Then Phinehas stood up and intervened, and the plague was stayed. And that was counted to him as righteousness from generation to generation forever (Ps. 106:28-31).

Clearly, Phinehas acted, he did something, he accomplished something by his works. And it was ‘counted to him as righteousness from generation to generation forever’. Are we to understand this in the sense of ‘*a clean slate* was counted to him from generation to generation forever’?

David, having spared Saul, declared:

The Lord rewards every man for his righteousness and his faithfulness, for the Lord gave you into my hand today, and I would not put out my hand against the Lord’s anointed (1 Sam. 26:23).

The point is, David was speaking of his works. ‘His righteousness’ was not merely an absence of sin. He had been positively good in his actions. He had been ‘righteous’. And God rewarded him for his works. ‘Righteousness’ is more than ‘a clean slate’.

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Of course, we must only apply the old covenant to ourselves in light of the new, yes.⁶ And the New Testament shows us how to do it. Clearly, Christ and the apostles did not speak (or write) independently of the old covenant. Far from it. The principles of that covenant were right at the heart of what they were saying! Take for instance, Christ's Sermon on the Mount, particularly Matthew 5. Note, also, the countless references to the law and the prophets in the apostolic writings. The principles set out in the old covenant and its law are fundamental to the New Testament. Consequently, although the old covenant and the Mosaic law are not always overtly referred to, in reading the New Testament we must never forget those principles. The old covenant was a covenant of shadows, yes, but those shadows – law, sabbath, temple (tabernacle), priesthood, sacrifice, altar, and all the rest – were all fulfilled in and by Christ, and their realities belong to every believer through his union with his Redeemer. Christ is the believer's sabbath, priest, sacrifice and so on, and the believer is under the law of Christ. The letter to the Hebrews is replete with this teaching.

What I am saying is, the fact that the righteousness of the old covenant, the righteousness of the law, was a righteousness obtained by works, is essential to a proper understanding of righteousness in the new covenant. In the old covenant, righteousness was obtained by works, by perfect obedience to the law. That is as plain as a pikestaff:

What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law... the law for righteousness... Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them (Rom. 9:30 – 10:5).

The children of Israel were told:

The Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as we are this day. And it will be righteousness for us, if

⁶ Failure to do this leads to salvation by works. Precisely!

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we are careful to do all this commandment before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us (Deut. 6:24-25; see also Deut. 24:13).

So much for the old covenant. Perfect obedience to the law brought righteousness, was righteousness. *The same goes for the new covenant.* With this difference, however: in the old covenant, the righteousness had to be obtained by the works of the individual for himself, whereas in the new covenant, the believer obtains his righteousness vicariously by the work of Christ on his behalf under the law. This is why Christ had to be born sinless under the law (Gal. 4:4). As a man under the law, he had to earn, to merit, deserve, the salvation of his people. The law had to be satisfied, upheld (Matt. 5:17-20; Rom. 3:31). And that is what Christ did. This is what the salvation wrought by the Lord Jesus Christ means. This is what is involved in those familiar passages such as Matthew 1:21; Luke 2:11; John 1:29; Acts 4:12; 5:31; 13:23,38-39; Colossians 1:20-23; 1 Timothy 1:15.

When Job declared: 'I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; my justice was like a robe and a turban' (Job 29:14), as the context makes clear, he was speaking in terms of his works. And he was talking of having more than 'a clean slate'!

And these two following passages must be seen in all their fullness in the new-covenant glory:

Let your priests be clothed with righteousness, and let your saints shout for joy (Ps. 132:9).

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels (Isa. 61:10).

They surely go much further than:

Let your priests be clothed with *a clean slate*, and let your saints shout for joy (Ps. 132:9).

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of *a clean slate*, as a bridegroom

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decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels (Isa. 61:10).

This concept of ‘clothing’ also carries over into the new covenant. See Matthew 22:11; Revelation 3:5; 4:4; 6:11; 7:9,13-14; 19:14.

Take for instance:

For all of you who were [spiritually]⁷ baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ (Gal. 3:27, NASB; see also NIV).

And the concept of ‘being clothed with’ may rightly be extended to that of ‘putting on’ – as the ESV translates it:

For as many of you as were [spiritually] baptised into Christ have *put on* Christ (Gal. 3:27).

See also:

Put on the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 13:15).

Put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness (Eph. 4:24).

Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have *put on* the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator... *Put on* then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved... (Col. 3:9-12).

Other versions use ‘be clothed’ or the equivalent in place of ‘put on’ in those passages.

I am convinced, therefore, that the believer has more than ‘a clean slate’ imputed to him when he trusts Christ. He is clothed with Christ, he has put on Christ, he has put on the whole Christ. His righteousness in Christ, therefore, also includes perfect obedience to the law – not his own, of course, but his by union with Christ and his perfection.

Was Christ’s perfect obedience only a necessary preparation for the cross?

⁷ See my *Infant, Baptist, Hinge*.

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We know that Christ learned obedience by the things that he suffered – suffered throughout his life, and not just on the cross – and that this was an essential part of the lead-up to the cross:

It was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering (Heb. 2:10).

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 5:7-10).

Being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil. 2:8).

We all agree that Christ's life leading up to the cross was a life of perfect obedience to the Father under the law (Gal. 4:4), and that this perfection of obedience was essential – to enable him to fulfil the old-covenant requirement and be a perfect, unblemished lamb, to be the Lamb of God (Ex. 12:5; 29:1; Leviticus *passim*; Numbers *passim*; John 1:29,36; 1 Pet. 1:19). The question is: Is that the end of it? Is that all that Christ's perfection of obedience amounts to? Was Christ's perfect obedience under the law a preparatory qualification – an essential qualification, it is true – to enable him to fulfil the old-covenant requirement and be a perfect offering, but, strictly speaking, it has no bearing on the believer?

In the same connection, what about Christ's statement to John the Baptist:

Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness (Matt. 3:15)?

Is there not a reference here to Psalm 40:7-8?⁸ How often did Jesus speak of doing his Father's will, obeying his Father, pleasing his Father, and all in connection not only with his work on the cross, but – and especially so – with regard to his life on

⁸ More of which later.

earth! See John 4:34; 5:36; 8:29; 17:4; 19:28,30. The question is: Is that the end of it? Is that all that Christ's perfection of obedience amounts to? Was it a preparatory qualification – an essential qualification it is true – to enable him to fulfil God's demands under the law, but, strictly speaking, nothing more?

Was Christ's resurrection a vindication of the cross, and therefore a vindication of Christ's accomplishment of justification for his people, and nothing more?

I refer to Geoff's view of Romans 4:25. Here is the verse:

[Christ] was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification (Rom. 4:25).

Paul used *dia* twice: 'delivered up for (*dia*) our trespasses and raised for (*dia*) our justification'. The same weight, surely, must be given in each case. In my view, it is far too weak to say that Christ was raised from the dead simply to vindicate his work, or give proof of the justification he had accomplished for his people on the cross, or to demonstrate that God was being fair to Christ in that since he had earned the pardon, so it was only right that he should be raised. The apostle used *dia*, 'for', 'on account of', in both parts of the sentence. Christ was delivered up *dia* our offences, and was raised *dia* our justification. The apostle clearly attributes the same weight and power to the resurrection as he does to the death of Christ as far as justification goes. Writing to believers, Paul could say that Christ died for our sins, on account of our sins, to deal with our sins, in order to deliver us from our offences, and likewise he was raised for our justification, on account of our justification, in order to justify us. This passage, I suggest, on its own, drives a coach and horses through the passive-obedience-only view. 'Vindication' for the second *dia* is woefully inadequate. The truth is, union with Christ is the key to this entire discussion, and union with Christ involves union with him in his death *and* resurrection (Rom. 6:4-8).

Hebrews 10 is critical

This is Geoff's major point. He thinks that the writer's statement in Hebrews 10 is clinching, especially when the context of his (the writer's) immediate quote of Jeremiah 31 is factored in. For Geoff, this passage puts the issue beyond doubt: the cross brings perfection, and perfection is identical to cleansing, 'the forgiveness of sins' – 'the clean slate'. This, of course, takes us back to my first point, which cannot be baulked. If Geoff is right, then justification is forgiveness, and forgiveness is justification; the believer's perfection is a clean slate.

Let me quote the Hebrews passage:

By a single offering [Christ] has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying: 'This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days', declares the Lord, 'I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds', then he adds: 'I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more'. Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin (Heb. 10:14-18).

Does this passage teach that 'perfection' and 'forgiveness' are one and the same? We know, as Geoff rightly argues, the cross accomplishes perfection for the elect (to be applied to them upon their believing), and this perfection certainly includes forgiveness. But does forgiveness exhaust the perfection? For instance, the believer's new heart, his new mind is also included in Christ's accomplishment, as the above extract shows.

Moreover, within the same context, the writer has just said:

And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Heb. 10:10).

So positional sanctification – that is what the writer is referring to in this verse – is also part of the perfection which Christ accomplished on the cross. And positional sanctification is more than 'a clean slate'.⁹

⁹ See my *Fivefold*.

Observations on a Colloquy

Furthermore, I deliberately retained the opening ‘and’ in that extract: ‘And by that will...’. We need to go back, go back to the start of the chapter:

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. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshippers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said: ‘Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said: “Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book”’.

When he said above: ‘You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings’ (these are offered according to the law), then he added: ‘Behold, I have come to do your will’. He does away with the first in order to establish the second. And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering [Christ] has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying: ‘This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days’, declares the Lord, ‘I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds’, then he adds: ‘I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more’. Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin (Heb. 10:1-18).

Observations on a Colloquy

Christ, at his incarnation, addressing his Father,¹⁰ vows to fulfil the will of God, doing so by keeping the law¹¹ in the body prepared for him by the Father. This, Christ carried out to the full. In his body, from his incarnation (or, at least, his baptism)¹² to the cross and his final *tetelestai* (John 19:30),¹³ Christ was always doing the will of God – both in his life and in his death. And in doing that will, in his body Christ wrought something. What? ‘And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all’; that is, by his obedience to, and fulfilment of, the will of God (including the law of God – see Psalm 40:8), Christ wrought the positional sanctification (Heb. 10:10)¹⁴ to be applied to the elect upon their coming to faith.

In other words, while the one act of Christ’s obedience at the cross accomplished the believer’s perfection, Christ’s entire obedience – in life and death – is what constitutes that perfection and is what is actually imputed to the believer, not merely Christ’s work in his dying hours on the cross.¹⁵

¹⁰ Quoting Ps. 40:7-8.

¹¹ Do not miss the connection between ‘I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart’ (Ps. 40:8) and the promise of the new covenant that God’s law would be written on the heart of the believer. Of course, in the new covenant the law of God is the law of Christ, but the point is the law of God permeates both covenants. The law of God for Israel was the law of Moses; the law of God for the believer is the law of Christ. See my *Believers*.

¹² I am not entering that minefield, not having been supplied with a map!

¹³ ‘It is accomplished’.

¹⁴ Among other things – see, for instance, 1 Cor. 1:30.

¹⁵ I have recently preached two sermons on this theme: ‘Christ’s Body Prepared: Why?’ (sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=4917917520) ‘Christ’s Obedience’ (sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=5717224112).

Observations on a Colloquy

I do not for a moment question that the work was accomplished on the cross:

As one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous (Rom. 5:18-19).

Thus, the question is not: What work of Christ accomplished the believer's perfection? Rather, it is: What does that perfection comprise? I say the cross of Christ accomplishes the perfection, but that perfection includes Christ's active and passive obedience. It is not the body of Christ or the blood of Christ; it is both (John 6:48-58).

So my position is that though the work was done on the cross, the entire obedience of Christ as Mediator is imputed to the believer. As I have said, union with Christ is the key. This is more than representation, as Geoff would have it. Men are either in Adam or in Christ (1 Cor. 15:21-22,45-49; see also Rom. 5:12-19). Men were not constituted sinners in Adam by mere representation. Neither are believers constituted righteous in Christ by mere representation.

What is more, contrary to Geoff's view of Romans 3:31, it is only this perfection by the entire work of the whole Christ – not simply 'a clean state' – that upholds the law, as Paul so confidently asserts that the gospel does (Rom. 3:31).

Finally, while it did not come up in the colloquy (although Geoff got near to it in referring to his covenant-theology background and seminary training), it is often claimed that the active obedience concept is a product of covenant theology. This is not so. It predates covenant theology (which was invented in the

16th century).¹⁶ I do not quote the following to establish my position on this matter, but simply to show that the concept was not invented in the 16th or 17th century by covenant theologians. What follows probably dates from the late 2nd century:

For what else could hide our sins but the righteousness of that one? How could we who were lawless and impious be made upright except by the Son of God alone? Oh the sweet exchange!... That the lawless deeds of many should be hidden by the one who was upright, and the righteousness of one should make upright the many who were lawless!¹⁷

Of course, I suppose it is possible to read it like this:

For what else could hide our sins but *the clean slate* of that one? How could we who were lawless and impious be made upright (that is, given *a clean slate*) except by the Son of God alone? Oh the sweet exchange!... That the lawless deeds of many should be hidden by the one who was upright (that is, had *a clean slate*), and *the clean slate* of one should make upright (that is, give *a clean slate* to) the many who were lawless!

But I do not think so!

¹⁶ Although Johann Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575) was probably the first to publish a work containing the concept, Kaspar Olevianus (1536-1587) was the inventor of covenant theology in Germany, when he and Zacharias Ursinus (1534-1583) drafted the final version of the Heidelberg Catechism (1562). William Ames (1576-1633) was the leading British exponent of covenant theology, which dominated the Westminster Confession of the Presbyterians (1643-1646) and the Savoy Declaration of the Independents (1661). Particular Baptists today, using the 1689 Confession, get as close as they can to covenant theology.

¹⁷ Quoted from the 'Epistle of Mathetes (that is, a disciple) to Diognetus'.

Observations on a Colloquy

An Invaluable Insight from Richard Dawkins

It is not often that I can quote with approval something written by Richard Dawkins,¹ but I am delighted to be able to do so now, and use it to produce this very short article.²

Serendipity, or, as I would put it, God's providence: running my eye along the shelf of books in the charity shop,³ I spied Richard Dawkins' book: *An Appetite for Wonder*.⁴ This book is, more or less, his life story thus far. Intrigued to know what earth-shattering event had turned Dawkins from the religious experience of his early life into becoming an aggressive atheist, I willingly forked out the princely sum demanded by the charity shop, and, after plonking my money down on the counter, walked out with my prize tucked under my arm. Alas, to my utter amazement – disappointment, let down, would be better ways of expressing it – I found Dawkins' explanation of his lurch into militant atheism so trite, so feeble... words fail. Ho, hum! Another duff⁵ purchase! But... no! Skimming through the

¹ 'Clinton Richard Dawkins FRS FRSL is an English ethologist [that is, a scientist who studies behaviour], evolutionary biologist and author. He is an emeritus fellow of New College, Oxford, and was the University of Oxford's Professor for Public Understanding of Science from 1995 until 2008' (Wikipedia). He is a militant atheist.

² I have changed his punctuation a little, without altering the sense.

³ For non-UK readers, a charity shop sells second-hand goods – including books – which have been donated by people who wish to support various good causes; or, in some cases, to get rid of what they regard as junk!

⁴ Richard Dawkins: *An Appetite for Wonder*, Bantam Press, London, 2013.

⁵ That is, wasted, poor quality.

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work, I came across what I consider to be a gem. Hence my title: ‘An Invaluable Insight from Dawkins’ – invaluable in two respects, one far more important than the other.

Let me explain. At the time, I was in process of publishing *Preaching Today: Food for Action as well as Thought*, and the words I discovered in Dawkins’ work⁶ leapt off the page, gripping my mind. So much so, I felt that I had to include them in my own work. But, on reflection, I decided against it, since it would have introduced an unnecessary confusion for my readers, and involved me in a somewhat convoluted explanation.

What am I talking about?

In my *Preaching Today*, I don’t have a good word to say about those preachers (of whom, it seems to me, there is no shortage today) who lecture instead of preaching. In his book, Dawkins gave us his experience of lectures from both ends: receiving (as a student) and giving (as a lecturer). And what he said was rattling good stuff!

But that, of course, was not the main thing that struck me. No! Rather, I saw at once that I could accommodate Dawkins’ remarks and use them to drive home what I feel about (and feel so strongly about) preaching, and what I was trying to set out in my book.

Even so, let me deal, first of all, with lectures, and attendance at lectures, in the sense which Dawkins intended. He showed, to put it mildly, that he is pretty disgruntled with what often goes on at lectures. His words on that score merit close attention – and action! I empathise very much with him, for what he said on the subject chimes in with my experience as a student, virtually word for word.

You see, my own higher education (1956-1961) – at A level and university – consisted almost entirely of attendance at lectures and consequent note-taking. I spent hours and hours at it! Hopeless! The fact is, nobody taught me how to learn;

⁶ Dawkins pp155-156.

indeed, nobody taught me what ‘learning’ was. I duly attended lectures, listened attentively to every phrase, diligently copied every syllable. I might almost go so far as to say that if the lecturer sneezed, ‘Atishoo!’ would appear in my notes! Making notes, then copying them up in neat – that was my education. Education, my foot! Years later, when I was a schoolmaster, I had a colleague whose educational method consisted in giving her pupils (that is what they were known as in those antediluvian days) exercises which they did in rough (that is, in draft). After correction, the pupils then religiously copied the ‘perfect’ answers in pristine neatness into their ‘best’ books, which were in due course duly presented to the parents, all suitably ticked in the regulation manner. Such was her understanding of education! Thinking parents should have been up in arms! Ah well...

What has all this to do with the serious business of preaching the gospel? Read on. All will become clear. But it is high time I quoted Dawkins. Here is the extract that struck me so forcibly:

Some lectures were good, some were bad, but it scarcely made any difference to me because I hadn’t yet worked out the point of going to a lecture.

So confessed Dawkins. Having thought about it, what did Dawkins think is ‘the point of going to a lecture’? First a negative, and a very important negative at that:

It is not to imbibe information...

Wow! Now, there’s a thought!

And so to the consequences of getting this wrong. The purpose of going to a lecture, Dawkins declared, ‘is not to imbibe information’. Consequently:

...there is therefore no point in doing what I did (and what virtually all undergraduates do), which was to take notes so slavishly that there was no attention [span] left over for thinking. The only time I departed from this habit was once when I had forgotten to bring a pen. I was much too shy to borrow a pen from the girl sitting next to me... So, for that one lecture I took no notes and just listened – and thought. It was

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not an unusually good lecture, but I got more out of it than from other lectures – some of them much better ones – because my lack of pen freed me to listen and think. But I didn't have the sense to learn my lesson and refrain from taking notes at subsequent lectures.

Theoretically the idea was to use your lecture notes in revision, but I never looked at mine ever again,⁷ and I suspect that most of my colleagues didn't either. The purpose of a lecture should not be to impart information. There are books, libraries, nowadays the internet, for that.

So what is the purpose of a lecture? And, in connection with that, what are the qualities of a good lecturer? Dawkins:

A lecturer should inspire and provoke thought. You watch a good lecturer thinking aloud in front of you, reaching for a thought, sometimes grabbing it out of the air like the celebrated historian A.J.P.Taylor. A good lecturer thinking aloud, reflecting, musing, rephrasing for clarity, hesitating and then grasping, varying the pace, pausing for thought, can be a role

⁷ In this, I part company with Dawkins. For I did use my notes for revision, virtually committing them to memory. My degree was nominally in Physics and Mathematics. As far as the Physics goes, it would be nearer the truth to say my degree reflected my ability to regurgitate notes.

model in how to think about a subject⁸ and how to be transmit a passion for it. If a lecturer drones information as though reading it, the audience might as well read it – possibly in the lecturer’s own book.

Dawkins went on:

I exaggerate a little when I advise never to take notes. If a lecturer produces an original thought, something striking that makes you think, then by all means write yourself a memo to think again about it later, or look something up. But struggling to record a piece of every sentence the lecturer utters – which is what I tried to do – is pointless for the student and demoralising for the lecturer. When lecturing to a student audience today, all I notice is a sea of tops of heads, bowed over notebooks. I prefer lay [that is, non-expert] audiences, literary festivals, memorial lectures, guest lectures at universities where, if the students come, it is because they want to, and not because it is on their syllabus. At such public lectures, the lecturer sees not bowed heads and scribbling hands, but alert faces, smiling, registering comprehension – or the reverse. When lecturing in America, I get quite cross if I

⁸ When I was responsible for teaching Mathematics at A level, in the Spring term of their final year, revision was the order of the day for the candidates I was preparing for the approaching examinations. And that revision, for a start, involved them in attempting for themselves every question in all the past papers of recent years. I told my class that I would solve any question they couldn’t cope with (and take the opportunity to explain further) – as long as they had tried it for themselves first. Moreover, I would do it off the cuff, in front of them. Which meant, of course, that occasionally I got stuck. At which point, I would pause, telling the class that this was good, warning them that they would find the same themselves. I told them to watch, to see how I got out of the bind, how I cracked this particular nut, how I unravelled the tangle, and reached the solution, doing it all in front of them, both audibly and on the board. I wanted them to learn from the way I reasoned my way out of the problem, and thus master the principles for themselves. This, I was convinced, was far more valuable for them than me giving them a pristine solution, prepared beforehand, one which avoided all the difficulties and pitfalls. My reputation was strong enough to bear this system, but, in any case, what did my reputation matter, as long as those I was teaching profited?

hear that some professor has *required* students to attend my lecture for ‘credit’. I’m not keen on the idea of ‘credit’ at the best of times, and I actively hate the idea that students are getting credit for listening to me.⁹

Very good! Very good, indeed!

But in this article I am not concerned with education methods. I am thinking of preaching. Much of what Dawkins said about *lecturing* makes invaluable sense when applied to *preaching*. By accommodating Dawkins’ words, I want to make a very serious point, one I try to make in my aforesaid *Preaching Today*. A friend, to whom I gave Dawkins’ book, and who kindly met my request by sending me a scan of the relevant pages, knowing that I saw in them an application to preaching, commented:

This resonated with me too. I’ll never forget a lecture I had as an undergraduate, from a visiting Oxford professor... He said: ‘Why are you all taking notes? Do that later in the library. Lectures are for opening the mind and expanding your horizons!’ Or words to that effect.

As you suggest, I can see that this has relevance for preaching!

So, here goes...

The purpose of listening to a preacher:

...is not to imbibe information, and there is therefore no point in mentally (and some actually do) taking notes so slavishly that there is no attention span left over for thinking.

The purpose of a sermon should not be to impart information. There are books, libraries, nowadays the internet, for that.

So what is the purpose of preaching? And, in connection with that, what are the qualities of a good preacher? In part – and a good part at that – this:

A preacher should inspire and provoke thought. You watch a good preacher thinking aloud in front of you, reaching for a thought, sometimes grabbing it out of the air. A good preacher thinking aloud, reflecting, musing, rephrasing for clarity, hesitating and then grasping, varying the pace, pausing for

⁹ Dawkins pp155-156, emphasis his.

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thought, can be a role model in how to think about a subject¹⁰ and how to be transmit a passion¹¹ for it. If a preacher drones information as though reading it – increasingly, he *will be* reading it, using PowerPoint and handing out notes – the congregation might as well read it – possibly in the preacher’s own notes or book.

Of course:

If a preacher produces an original thought, something striking that makes you think, then by all means write yourself a memo to think again about it later, or look something up. But struggling to get information is pointless for the hearer and demoralising for the preacher. A preacher wants to see alert faces, registering comprehension – or the reverse.

If I were restricted to certain words from the above, I would choose:

Drone – avoid it!

Read – don’t read your sermons to your hearers!

Passion – have it, aim for it and try to stimulate it!

Information – this is not the main purpose of preaching!

Face – both preacher and hearer should look at each other!

So thank you Richard Dawkins for what you said about lectures. I know you won’t be much concerned about my accommodation of your remarks, and my application of them to preaching, but I hope that the readers for whom I write will find this resulting article both profitable and thought-provoking. More, in

¹⁰ I deplore the appalling lack of curiosity among contemporary believers in general, especially among those who say they want to be preachers. I do all I can to stimulate a spirit of enquiry, urging study of the Scriptures by the Spirit for illumination. Of course, I realise many will think this far too radical, far too subversive: stimulating people to think! Why, they might even think outside the box! And then where would we be?

¹¹ Passion! Now there’s a word! See my *Preaching*.

conjunction with my *Preaching Today*, I hope it might lead to action. There certainly is need for it – desperate need.

Postscript

Since writing the above, I have come across a passage from Alister McGrath on C.S.Lewis which is so apposite I must include it. As with Dawkins, Lewis' stance on delivering a lecture has a corresponding application to preaching. Alister McGrath:

Lectures that were simply read out to their audiences, [Lewis] explained to his father, tend to 'send people to sleep'. He would have to learn to talk with his audiences, not to recite his lectures to them. He had to engage their attention, not merely discharge information.¹²

¹² Alister McGrath: *C.S.Lewis. A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet*, Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, 2016, p167.

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Progressive Sanctification: A Matter of Eternal Life or Death

‘A bit OTT isn’t it? Progressive sanctification a matter of eternal life or death? Some believers argue there is no such thing as progressive sanctification – and yet you say that it is a matter of eternal life or death?’

No! *I* don’t say it. Well, I do. But the writer of the letter to the Hebrews says it, and says it bluntly, with no possibility of mistaking his meaning. Listen to him:

Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord (Heb. 12:14, ESV).

Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord (Heb. 12:14, NASB).

As the writer declares, there is a holiness or sanctification which is essential – a matter of eternal life or death. Without it, no one – NO ONE – will see the Lord. Bearing in mind John 3:3-8, it means there is a holiness or sanctification without which no one will be saved.

That much is as plain as the nose on your face. If you don’t have this holiness, you will never be saved. You may be religious, sincere, respectable, Bible-learned, church member, theologian, and all the rest, but if you don’t have this holiness or sanctification you will damned for ever.

So, if I can demonstrate that the sanctification in question is progressive sanctification, my title – Progressive Sanctification: A Matter of Eternal Life or Death – is far from being OTT. It is the unvarnished truth!

The question is, of course, does Hebrews 12:14 speak of progressive sanctification? There are those who deny it. They say it speaks of positional sanctification.

Let me explain the terms. Since I want to keep this article brief, I will not set out the underlying scriptural arguments for positional and progressive sanctification, having done so in two

previous works: *Fivefold Sanctification* and *Positional Sanctification: Two Consequences*. But briefly...

Sanctification. The root meaning of the word is ‘separation’ leading to ‘holiness’. The New Testament teaches us that in eternity, God decreed to sanctify his elect in Christ. It also teaches us that Christ accomplished the sanctification of the elect in his death. It further teaches us that the moment the elect sinner trusts Christ he is perfectly sanctified. It further teaches us that the converted sinner (the believer) must live a sanctified life. Finally, it teaches us that at the return of Christ the believer will be absolutely sanctified. Moreover, according to the New Testament, the believer’s appreciation of all this plays a vital role in his assurance and his practical godliness, and thus leads to his absolute sanctification or glorification.

Bible translators have had some difficulty over the words ‘sanctification’ and ‘holiness’. To put it simply, while ‘sanctification’ is probably best reserved for those places where the New Testament speaks of God’s activity in producing the status of sanctification within the believer, the effect of that sanctification in the ongoing life of the believer is probably best captured by the word ‘holiness’. If this scheme had been adopted by the translators, not only would the final version have been more faithful to the Greek, but it would have set out more clearly the doctrine of sanctification in the new covenant, and much of the present confusion over this topic would have been prevented. The fact is, believers are sanctified (they are perfect in Christ before God), they must be sanctified (they must be holy in life, they must live out their standing before God), they will be sanctified (they will, absolutely, at the return of Christ, be made absolutely perfect).¹

Taking full account of this resolves the seeming contradiction between certain biblical statements. Just one example must suffice. The writer to the Hebrews declared: ‘By a

¹ Having registered my complaint against the unfortunate translators (whom I admire immensely), even so it is true to say that we have to get used to words taking different meanings and nuances. The context is king.

single offering [Christ] has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified' (Heb. 10:14), and yet Paul could say: 'Not that I... am already perfect' (Phil. 3:12). Yet again, the writer to the Hebrews said, and said just before the statement just quoted: 'We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all' (Heb. 10:10)! And all three are right! Indeed, the believer can say that when Christ comes he will be made perfect! The fact is, the believer can say: 'I am perfect; I am not yet perfect, but I am being perfected; and one day I will be perfect', which is the same as saying: 'I am sanctified; I am being sanctified; and I will be sanctified'. How can this be? Once we grasp the doctrine of the believer's fivefold sanctification, these statements become perfectly² consistent and comprehensible. More! Our hearts are warmed and our spirits are stirred as we think about one of the glorious works of the triune God in the new covenant, and especially once we realise that all this is true of all who are in Christ. We shall be more strongly assured and more dedicated to live a life of holiness to the glory of God, shining more brightly as lights in this dark world which constitutes Satan's realm.

But to get back to Hebrews 12:14.

Hebrews 12:14 is a vital text. It is located in a letter in which, with majestic cogency, its inspired writer establishes the believer's positional sanctification (the climax coming in Hebrews 10:14), and his absolute sanctification (Heb. 11:40; 12:23) in Christ. It is in light of these two sanctifications that the writer calls so definitely for the believer to live out his status in Christ and show it by his progressive sanctification or holiness (Heb. 12:10,14; see also, for instance, Heb. 13:15-25).

The New Testament declares that every believer, following conversion, is obliged to live out his positional sanctification, make spiritual progress, and grow in practical godliness.³ In this way he shows his positional sanctification to others. Indeed,

² Pun intended.

³ Take the last three chapters of Ephesians, for instance.

under the provisions of the new covenant, the believer will be moved to show, by his life, his sanctified status in Christ.⁴ In other words, the believer will be moved to demonstrate his positional sanctification – which cannot be seen by men – by his progressive sanctification – which must be seen by men – as evidence of his change of status before God.

The question is: Does Hebrews 12:14 speak of positional or progressive sanctification?

Take the context. No! Don't skip it! The context:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? 'My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives'. It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace

⁴ See my *Christ, Believers*.

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of God; that no ‘root of bitterness’ springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears (Heb. 12:1-17).

The passage from first to last is all about the believer’s life after conversion, about his running the Christian race, fighting the spiritual fight, enduring trouble, difficulty and hardship under God his Father’s discipline, being encouraged in such trials, striving to live out the life of Christ, watching himself, learning from scriptural records of those who have stumbled, and so on. It is in that context that the writer to the Hebrews urges, exhorts, insists, demands that his believing readers live a sanctified, godly, spiritual life, warning them in no uncertain terms of the consequences if they do not.

Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

By the way, if you go on with the chapter, you will see that the writer is urging and warning like this in the context of the glorious liberty of the new covenant. Don’t think that because believers are in the new covenant and have liberty that this exempts them from such exhortations and such warnings! That’s a myth! Worse, it is a delusion of Satan. No, those who are most definite about new-covenant theology will the more earnestly press the need – the writer to the Hebrews says it is essential – for the believer to give practical, day by day, definite and determined obedience to Christ in his law and so live a life of progressive sanctification.

In all this I am not denying the glorious provisions of the new covenant – the new heart and the indwelling Spirit to motivate and empower the believer to do this work, to live his life to the glory of God, and so on, but I am stressing the other side of the biblical coin. As Paul told the Philippians:

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God

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who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure (Phil. 2:12-13).⁵

Just one more word. There are those who say that Hebrews 12:14 is all about positional sanctification and not progressive sanctification.⁶ Let me point out the redundancy in their argument.

No believer has to strive to be positionally sanctified! Every elect sinner, at the point of trusting Christ, is, by God's grace, by God's Spirit, positionally sanctified – at once and for ever. He does not have to strive for it! But he does have to strive to be progressively sanctified.

And while it is true that if a man is not positionally sanctified he will never be saved – of course that is true! – at this stage in the letter to the Hebrews, to think that the writer – getting near to the punch line, tells his readers that unless they are converted they will never be saved, seems, to put it mildly, a bit of an anti-climax. It is a truth, of course. It is more than that! It is a truism! I cannot accept such a weak position. No, the context of the chapter (before and after), the context of the entire book (see, especially, Hebrews 2:1-3; 6:1-12; 10:19-39; 11:1-40; 12:12-29; 13:1-25), all cry out that Hebrews 12:14 says what it means, and means what it says: Unless a professing believer lives a life of holiness, growing in grace and the knowledge of Christ (progressive sanctification), he may profess all he wants, but he is not saved!

And look how the writer closes his letter:

Through [Christ] then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to

⁵ Once again, for the arguments behind all this, I respectfully ask that you consult my two books already noted.

⁶ As I have observed, some of them say that progressive sanctification does not exist!

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you. Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honourably in all things. I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner.

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon. Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings. Grace be with all of you (Heb. 13:15-25).

It is all about progressive sanctification. The fact is, as I said – more important, as the writer to the Hebrews said – progressive sanctification *is* a matter of eternal life or death.

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Silence Is Golden?

It all depends. As we are told, there is ‘a time to keep silence, and a time to speak’ (Eccles. 3:7). And, of course, it needs wisdom to distinguish the two. In this article, I want to address when it is right to speak. To put it another way: when it is culpable to remain silent. I have in mind one who is trying to set out the doctrine of the gospel. In those circumstances, I assert that what a teacher fails to say can be more important than what he does say. I am not alone.

D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones:

We must... ask about any man: ‘What then does he say?’ This includes noting what he does *not* say; *i.e.*, we must take note of his consistent omissions.

Lloyd-Jones went on:

[A man] betrays himself by his silence or equivocation at just those points where the Bible calls for fearless precision.¹

In other words, guilty silence.

Calvin wrote several letters to Melancthon concerning the Lord’s supper, that issue which was causing open and bitter disagreement between Luther, Zwingli and Calvin, and wreaking havoc among the Reformed Churches. While he warned against placing confidence in men, Calvin urged Melancthon to speak out clearly. First the warning:

In the church we must always be on our guard, lest we pay too great a deference to men.²

Having made that clear, he went on:

¹ D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones: *Maintaining The Evangelical Faith Today*, Inter-Varsity Press, London, second edition, 1968, p20.

² Calvin: *Letters of John Calvin*, Bonnet Edition (1855-1857), The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1980, p74.

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Let us therefore bewail the calamity of the church, and not devour our grief in silence, but venture boldly to groan for freedom.³

Calvin, of course, was not urging Melanchthon literally to groan; he wanted him to speak out:

Consider, besides, whether the Lord may not have permitted you to be reduced to these straits,⁴ in order that you may be brought to a yet fuller confession upon this very article [that is, the Lord's supper]. It is indeed most true, as I acknowledge it to be, that which you teach, and also that hitherto by a kindly method of instruction, you have studiously endeavoured to recall the minds of men from strife and contention. I applaud your prudence and moderation. While, however, you dread, as you would some hidden rock, to meddle with this question for fear of giving offence, you are leaving in perplexity and suspense very many persons who require from you somewhat of a more certain sound, on which they can repose; and besides, as I remember I have sometimes said to you, it is not over-creditable to us that we refuse to sign, even with ink, that very doctrine which many saints have not hesitated to leave witnessed with their blood. Perhaps, therefore, it is now the will of God thus to open up the way for a full and satisfactory declaration of your own mind, that those who look up to your authority may not be brought to a stand [that is, to a standstill], and kept in state of perpetual doubt and hesitation.⁵

In another letter, Calvin pressed Melanchthon again on the issue, telling him that his silence or ambiguity was encouraging those who were fighting against what he saw as the truth:

All good men lament and complain that those same individuals [those whom Calvin called 'illiterate and turbulent men'] are encouraged by your silence. For however audacious ignorance is, still nobody doubts [the favourable results] if you could bring your mind to speak out openly what you think... Are you ignorant today what numbers are held floating in doubts in

³ Calvin: *Letters* p74.

⁴ Melanchthon grieved over the disturbances.

⁵ Calvin: *Letters* pp74-75.

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consequence of the ambiguous manner of teaching to which you too timidly adhere?⁶

Again, in a further letter:

Our duties by no means depend on our hopes of success, but that it behoves us to accomplish what God requires of us, even when we are in the greatest despair respecting the results... Should you have to fear the worst extremes, still it is necessary that you should determine once for all what you owe to Christ, lest, by suppressing a candid confession of the truth, you should lend to wicked men a kind of implied patronage to oppress the church. That I might restrain their tumults, I have again comprised the summary of our doctrine in a short compendium. All the Swiss churches have subscribed to it. Those of Zurich gave it their unqualified approbation. Now I long to have your opinion; what also the rest of your countrymen think and say I am very desirous to know.⁷

So speak out, Melanchthon!

C.H.Spurgeon had quite a bit to say about guilty silence during the Downgrade.⁸ He warned of what he called:

...that complicity which will be involved in a conspiracy of silence... [when] even the most godly abide in cowardly silence; courage shall fail from the brave, and decision from the

⁶ Calvin: *Letters* p161.

⁷ Calvin: *Letters* p169.

⁸ The Downgrade was Spurgeon's battle with the Baptist Union over the infallibility of Scripture, the substitutionary nature of the atonement, and the eternal punishment of the wicked. It culminated in 1887-1888. Spurgeon set it out thus: 'Believers in Christ's atonement are now in declared union with those who make light of it; believers in Holy Scripture are in confederacy with those who deny plenary inspiration; those who hold evangelical doctrine are in open alliance with those who call the fall [of mankind in Adam] a fable, who deny the personality of the Holy Ghost, who call justification by faith immoral, and hold that there is another probation after death... It is our solemn conviction that there should be no pretence of fellowship. Fellowship with known and vital error is participation in sin'.

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instructed... The religious papers have united in a conspiracy of silence; or else they have culled from their correspondence letters unfavourable to the truth, and have printed them, while those which were on the right side have been excluded... Although the policy of silence is again adopted by the Loose School in the matter of the Downgrade, it is happily the case that it is impossible to apply the pitch-plaster⁹ to all mouths; there are yet men and papers which cannot be suppressed¹⁰ or bought... Has the body of Baptists... become so easy-going and docile that it will by its silence endorse the action of its President?¹¹

Gresham Machen, commenting on the Auburn Affirmation,¹² declared:

A document which would affirm the resurrection but will not say that our Lord rose from the dead with the same body in which he suffered – this is simply one more manifestation of that destructive Modernism which is the deadliest enemy of the Christian religion in practically all the larger churches in the world at the present day.¹³

A.W.Tozer also spoke of the matter:

Under the law of Moses, a man could incur guilt by keeping still [that is, silent] about some evil he knew was present in the

⁹ A dressing made with the viscous resin of the Norway spruce.

¹⁰ Spurgeon had ‘burked’. To burke means to smother. It comes from W.Burke who was hanged in 1829 for murder on this count.

¹¹ C.H.Spurgeon: *The Downgrade Controversy*.

¹² The Auburn Affirmation was signed in 1924 by 1293 clergymen of the Presbyterian Church of the USA. It rejected the imposition of five points on the Presbyterian Church, one of which asserted that the bodily resurrection of Christ meant that Christ rose with the same body as he had died.

¹³ Gresham Machen: *Modernism and the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the USA*, 1933, pp23-24, quoted by Iain Murray: ‘The Benefits and Dangers of Controversy’ in *Evangelical Holiness...*, The Banner of truth Trust, Edinburgh, 2013, p118.

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camp of the Lord, and, in the New Testament, James tells us bluntly: ‘Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins’ (Jas. 4:17). Is it not a serious thought that many clean-living, decent persons, against whom no overt act of wrongdoing can be charged, may yet be deeply guilty and inwardly stained with the sin that does not show [itself; namely,] the sin of silence and inaction? There are moral situations when it is immoral to say nothing, and basely immoral to do nothing...

The fear [or the folly or the neglect – DG] that keeps us quiet when faith and love and loyalty cry out for us to speak is surely evil and must be judged as evil before the bar of eternal justice...

The sinfulness of silence and inaction is more than academic; it is sharply practical and may impinge upon the soul of any one of us at any time. Let a moral situation shape itself so that righteousness demands speech and action, and theory becomes practical fact instantly. We have but to keep still and sit tight to become guilty of real sin.

The world situation today is such that sin by silence may be more widespread than at any other time in the history of the world...

There is something more serious still. It is the failure to take sides to speak up when the enemy stalks into the very sanctuary, and pollutes the holy place...

Could it be that too many of God’s true children, and especially the preachers, are sinning against God by guilty silence? When those whose eyes are opened by the touch of Christ become vocal and active, God may begin to fight again on the side of truth. I for one am waiting to hear the loud voices of the prophets and reformers sounding once more over a sluggish and drowsy church. They’ll pay a price for their boldness, but the results will be worth it.¹⁴

John R.W.Stott wrote a book with the title *Our Guilty Silence*.

And, in another field altogether, as Albert Einstein confessed: ‘If I were to remain silent, I’d be guilty of complicity’.

¹⁴ A.W.Tozer: *God Tells The Man Who Cares*, OM Publishing, 1996, pp176-180.

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Or as Martin Luther King, on April 4th, 1967, in New York, declared: 'A time comes when silence is betrayal'.

* * *

But I have in mind those of us who want to teach, explain and apply the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Should that not be every believer?) Narrowing it down, I have in mind those of us who go into print on the gospel. Although stated discourses and ordinary conversation are not exempt from what I say, in this article I concentrate on the written word.

But before I go on, let me say a little more about sermons. Sermons should be biased – they should come from the text, the passage, the word, before us, and that should not adjusted to turn every sermon into a bland discourse. Of course, the preacher should make it clear that he is driving home the teaching of this particular passage, confining his remarks to that, and that the balance will come as he continues his discourses. In saying this, I am showing that I regard expository preaching as best. Preaching on isolated texts exacerbates the problem I have in mind. Finally on this point, since I believe preaching without notes is best, I concede that in gaining liberty by this method, there might be some loss of accuracy. It is a compromise I am willing to strike. Leaving that to one side, however, it is the printed word that I am especially concerned with here.

Of course, I am not saying that every atom of truth has to be stated in every piece of writing, nor am I condemning a man for failing in this respect. For a start, I would be shooting myself in the foot! The point I am trying to make is that we must always do what we can to make sure that those who read our work do not run away with the wrong impression – the wrong impression, that is, as we see it. Let me take that a little further. We must do what we can to *prevent* anybody running away with the wrong idea. Moreover, we have to take special care when we know that some are already doing it.

What about the suggestion that if a reader does not understand, or has doubts, he should ask the author? Well, of course, in theory, very nice! But living as we do in the real world, we all know that this will rarely happen. Moreover, this

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is passing the buck. I agree that the reader has his responsibility to verify things by Scripture (Isa. 8:20; Acts 17:11), but the responsibility I am addressing is that which rests squarely on the teacher. When I taught Mathematics, I could have blamed examination failures on my students for not asking me the right questions, and so giving me the chance to clear matters up for them. But, I have to confess, I never thought along those lines. It never entered my mind. Rather, I invented those ‘chances’ for myself; I did not leave it to them. I bent over backwards to make sure they understood what I was teaching them *as I was teaching them*, and did all I could to point out where the pitfalls were. I tried to anticipate all difficulties – real and imaginary – and meet them before they became a problem. I instinctively felt this duty of care was an integral part of my job.

Here I am concerned with gospel teachers who leave something unsaid which should have been said, who omit necessary correctives which would prevent wrong deductions, especially when misunderstanding, not to say error, is abroad.

Let me use a real-life medical example to illustrate. I know of a man who was diagnosed with a potentially very serious heart condition. But he was supplied with medication that would give him a very high level of protection, *as long as he took the medication in the right way*. The prescribing nurse told him of this, but, later, his consultant went out of his way to stress the point emphatically. I deliberately use the tautology. If the man did not take the medication as prescribed, it would not work, and he would remain dangerously exposed to risk. So he was clearly warned. My point is that if the medical staff had stressed the benefits of the medication, its high protection factor, and all the rest, but failed to warn explicitly of the importance of taking it in the right way, they would have been culpable.

How much more in the spiritual realm. Let me speak personally.

I can say that justification is by faith. Excellent! So it is. But any Church Father, any Papist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Federal Vision man, New Perspective advocate, Baptist Sacramentalist... could say ‘Amen’ to it. What I have left out is key. What have I omitted to say? Justification is by faith *alone*. Luther felt the

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point so keenly, he actually distorted his translation of Romans 3:28 into German to include the ‘alone’, though it is not in Greek. He had no need to do this since the apostle goes on to make the case very clearly, ruling out any contribution from circumcision or law.¹⁵ Even so, Luther was right to say:

Whoever would speak plainly and clearly about this rejection of works will have to say: ‘Faith alone justifies and not works’.

Silence when men are thinking salvation is by faith and... is guilty silence. Plain speaking, leaving no room for doubt, is essential under such conditions.

Paul, of course, had set the pattern, long before Luther. He had recognised the problem I am talking about. Writing to the Ephesian believers, he told them:

By grace you have been saved through faith (Eph. 2:8).

Nuff said? No! He did not leave it there:

¹⁵ As Luther himself saw. Commenting on his use of ‘alone’, and the criticism he met for it, he said: ‘The text itself, and... Paul’s meaning, urgently require and demand it. For in that passage he is dealing with the main point of Christian doctrine; namely, that we are justified by faith in Christ without any works of the law. Paul excludes all works so completely as to say that the works of the law, though it is God’s law and word, do not aid us in justification. Using Abraham as an example, he argues that Abraham was so justified without works that even the highest work, which had been commanded by God, over and above all others, namely circumcision, did not aid him in justification. Rather, Abraham was justified without circumcision and without any works, but by faith, as he says in chapter 4: “If Abraham were justified by works, he may boast, but not before God”. So, when all works are so completely rejected – which must mean faith alone justifies – whoever would speak plainly and clearly about this rejection of works will have to say: “Faith alone justifies and not works”. The matter itself and the nature of language requires it’. In his ‘Open Letter on Translating’, Luther stated: ‘Furthermore, I am not the only one, nor the first, to say that faith alone makes one righteous. There was Ambrose, Augustine and many others who said it before me’. For my contribution to this issue, see my ‘The “But” of John 1:17: Absent but Vital’.

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By grace you have been saved through faith... not a result of works, so that no one may boast (Eph. 2:8-9).

Why did the apostle not stop at 'faith'? Why the negative? Why did he state the case from the opposite point of view? Why did he add 'through faith... not a result of works'? Is it not obvious that Paul spotted the danger that some might think that their works – even thinking of their faith as a work – might contribute to their salvation? I am convinced of it. Plenty of people do think in terms of 'faith and...' – and that, despite the apostle's demolition of the claim! Consequently, he took the necessary steps to close the loophole. He was thinking of his readers, was he not? He did not want them to run away with a wrong impression. So he did all he could to make sure they couldn't.

And he did not leave it even there! For he went on immediately to add:

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:10).

Paul, having stopped one danger, knew he had, at once, to correct yet another! Having removed the notion that a sinner's work could contribute to his salvation, having stressed the sovereign and free grace of God in salvation without the sinner's works, the apostle saw the risk that his readers might run away with the idea that works don't count at all! 'Out of frying pan into the fire'! So he stopped it before it could start. A sinner cannot work for his salvation, but once he is saved he is duty-bound, under apostolic command, to work out the salvation that God has already worked in:

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure (Phil. 2:12-13).

And this is why Paul hammered home all these points to the Ephesians, making sure he established salvation by faith alone, without works, but also making it clear that once a sinner is

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saved he will inevitably go on to produce good works, that it is his duty¹⁶ so to do:

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:8-10).

The fact is, if Paul had not painted the full picture, he would have failed, and worse; he would have been cavalier, acting irresponsibly. But he, having a true pastoral heart, was not confining his thinking to the theoretical; he had his readers and their eternal welfare in mind, and so he took steps to make sure they got the right message, the complete message, and thus prevented any possible misunderstanding.

I say we must show the same spirit. I try to take my own medicine. I will continue so to do. I am convinced that when we know certain wrong deductions are possible from what we are teaching – or even that there is evidence that some are already making such deductions – if we do not make sure that we fully spell out what we are saying – both positively and negatively – when we know of lurking dangers, then we are blameworthy. Silence is golden? Not in such circumstances.

I know that I can – and must – call sinners to believe. I urge, exhort, seek to persuade, plead with them, command, invite them to believe. So far so good! But I know that Sandemanianism – especially, incipient Sandemanianism – is rampant.¹⁷ So unless I make it clear that mental assent is not enough, but sinners must trust Christ, rely upon him – and that from the heart and not simply with the mind – then I know that I am culpable. It is not enough to let my readers go away thinking all they need to do is believe. They might well think they are saved if they believe – accept – the facts of the gospel. They are not! Heart trust is essential. If I don't make this clear, I am guilty.

¹⁶ Do not miss the 'should'.

¹⁷ See my *Secret, Seeking*.

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Take another case. I am utterly persuaded of the glories of the new covenant, and I do all I can to set forth those glories for the salvation of sinners and edification of saints. Say I am stressing the liberty the believer has in Christ, his perfection before God because of his union with Christ, his death to the law of Moses, and so on. Now if I know, or suspect, that some who read my works are listening to teaching that pushes this liberty to the extent that they think there is no law for believers, that the believer is under no law, that words like ‘duty’ and ‘obligation’ are taboo, since I am persuaded that this is a grievous mistake, I would be guilty if I left my words uncorrected.

Again, I know that every believer has the Spirit, that the Spirit moves and enables believers to love and obey Christ, that God writes his law – the law of Christ – in the heart of every believer, giving him a sense of that law and a love of it, and so on. But if I also know or suspect that some of my readers are listening to teachers who push this to the extent that they deny that the Scriptures (as nuanced by Christ and his apostles) are the written law of Christ, and thus are in danger of repeating the error made time and again in the history of the church and elevating the Spirit above Scripture, I would be culpable if I did not do all I can to correct it.¹⁸

Say I speak of the importance of baptism, but fail to make it clear that baptism is the dipping, the plunging, the immersing of believers, and believers only, and that infants have no right to it, even though I know that some of my readers have the mistaken notion that infant sprinkling constitutes baptism, am I not culpable? What is more, there is the ever-present sacramentalism leading to sacerdotalism and baptismal regeneration to be thought of. Indeed, sacramentalism has arisen among contemporary Baptists – of all people! Silence at this point, therefore, is irresponsible and worse. Clarity is essential. It is as important to disabuse error as to establish truth. Silence is far from golden in such circumstances.

¹⁸ See my *Believers; Liberty*.

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Then again, say I keep stressing the believer's perfect positional sanctification in Christ, but neglect to say anything at all about the essential doctrine of progressive sanctification, especially when I suspect that some of my readers are listening to teachers who deny the very existence of progressive sanctification, might I not risk leaving my readers with an imbalanced view of sanctification? And not only in a theoretical, doctrinal sense. As I have just said, the doctrine of the believer's progressive sanctification is essential.¹⁹

And so on.

Finally, for my part, I can see how God's warning to the prophets plays into this positive and negative aspect of my teaching. God, addressing Jeremiah, declared:

Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant (Jer. 1:9-10).

And to Ezekiel he said:

If I say to the wicked: 'You shall surely die', and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, in order to save his life, that wicked person shall die for his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, or from his wicked way, he shall die for his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul. Again, if a righteous person turns from his righteousness and commits injustice, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die. Because you have not warned him, he shall die for his sin, and his righteous deeds that he has done shall not be remembered, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the righteous person not to sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live, because he took warning, and you will have delivered your soul (Ezek. 3:18-21).

The word of the Lord came to me: 'Son of man, speak to your people and say to them, If I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take a man from among them, and make

¹⁹ See my 'Progressive Sanctification: A Matter of Eternal Life or Death'. See also my *Fivefold; Positional*.

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him their watchman, and if he sees the sword coming upon the land and blows the trumpet and warns the people, then if anyone who hears the sound of the trumpet does not take warning, and the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet and did not take warning; his blood shall be upon himself. But if he had taken warning, he would have saved his life. But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, so that the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any one of them, that person is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand. So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul (Ezek. 33:1-9).

While – and I hope this goes without saying – I do not claim the authority, gift or commission of a prophet or apostle, even so, I am convinced there is a principle here. As James said: ‘Whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin’ (Jas. 4:17).

So I close this article as I began. What a teacher fails to say can be more important than what he does say. At least, this is the medicine I myself am in the habit of taking.

And who of us has not failed in this? What encouragement, therefore, can we draw from Jonah's example! How miserably he failed in this respect, failed by silence – even to the extent of trying to run away from God himself! But he was restored, and though he still had his hang-ups, he retraced his steps, opened his mouth, and broke his silence. And God used him mightily for his glory and the good of the Ninevites. This, surely, is recorded on the sacred page for our learning or instruction (1 Cor. 10:11). But this ‘learning’, *nouthesia*, let us remember, includes admonition, warning and exhortation!

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Words Have Power

How The Spirit/Scripture Balance Can Be Threatened

In several of my works I have raised the issue of the balance between the Spirit and the Scriptures. I have tried to make the case that it is not either/or; it is both. I have taken the trouble to argue this because I am convinced that it is a vital question; a contemporary, vital question at that. Alas, as so often in the history of the church, the balance between the Spirit and the Scriptures is under threat today.

On the one hand, there are those who so emphasise the Scriptures (usually whittled down to the so-called moral law) at the expense of the Spirit that they are in danger – to put it no stronger – of becoming legalists.

On the other hand, with the recovery of the theology of the new covenant – something which I applaud wholeheartedly – there is a risk that an old danger might rear its head, an old mistake might be repeated. Some have so stressed the inward glories of the new covenant that they have given the impression that the inward Spirit trumps the outward Scripture. This – once again, to put it no stronger – can give the impression of licence being mistaken for liberty.

In this article, I am concerned with the latter danger. It is not that the former is not important, but I confine my present remarks to the latter danger. For a long time, I was Reformed and carried the first risk. Now, as a new-covenant theologian, I am faced with some who teach in a way that might well lead to the second.

Let me be set out what I am talking about by asking a few questions. Is the law of Christ external, internal or both? Indeed, is there such a thing as ‘the law of Christ’? Again, is there such a thing as progressive sanctification? If there is, is it, to use the technical terms, monergistic or synergistic? Monergistic sanctification states that the believer’s progressive sanctification

is the work of God through the Holy Spirit alone, as opposed to synergistic sanctification, which argues that the human will cooperates with the Spirit. In other words, is the believer passive or active in progressive sanctification, assuming it exists?

Scripture teaches that the believer is positionally sanctified in Christ, immediately perfect at the point of faith by virtue of his union with Christ, but that he must live this out in a life of progressive sanctification, growing in grace and Christ-likeness. This not an option; it is essential. However, he can do this only because he has died to the law and been united to Christ, being now under new ownership, with a new Lord, and married to a new husband – Christ. The believer’s progressive sanctification comes through the power of the Spirit within, the one who gives him a new heart to love and obey, with determination, the law of Christ written throughout the Scriptures. I will not stop to argue all this, having done so at length in several works.¹

As I say, some new-covenant theologians are challenging these claims.

OK! But why am I getting all steamed up about it now?

My first concern, of course, is for the maintenance of the authority of Scripture. But not in an arid way. My concern in engaging in this debate is pastoral. That is to say, I am thinking of those who are watching, and yet fail to see the point of all the hair-splitting (as it seems to them) that appears to be going on. The fact is, of course, nothing of the kind is happening, however it may look. As far as I am concerned, this is no ‘angels on the head of a pin’ argument! Vital issues are at stake. And I am not thinking of the next two weeks. I have 20 to 50 years in mind.

As I said when tackling infant baptism,² that which might appear to be good today will, if you take it up, come back to bite you, and bite you hard. Infant baptism is unscriptural. Adopting it, therefore, carries a heavy price tag, the cost of which, as in

¹ See, in particular, my *Believers; Liberty; Fivefold Sanctification; Positional Sanctification; Christ*.

² See my *Infant*.

times past, will be borne in succeeding generations. I gave historical evidence to support my assertion.

And herein lies my sense of foreboding in this present issue. I am thinking of those who have come to see – or who are coming to see – the glories of the liberty which believers have in Christ in the new covenant. Might they be attracted by teaching which so stresses that liberty, so stresses the inward work of the Spirit, that there is a risk of diminishing the role of Scripture? Are they being captivated by the notion that there is no such thing as progressive sanctification, that the believer's sanctification is entirely at once complete and perfect,³ that Christ is so formed in him that he is free from all law? Well... look before you leap is my advice. Before you go down that route, make sure of its biblical ground. Get the theology sorted out now; now, before you buy into it. And you know the way to verify such things. Isaiah 8:20 and Acts 17:11 still stand!

As I say, I am not arguing my corner here. All I want to do in this article is give an example of the sort of thing that is being said, in order to show what it might lead to. I have taken what follows from a recent (September 2017) thread on a Facebook group,⁴ some of whose members resolutely promote the view I contest.

The question was raised:

Could the Holy Spirit still accomplish his mission without the written word of God as we now have it?

Note the question: 'Could... still...?' 'Could the Holy Spirit still accomplish his mission without the written word of God as we now have it?'

This was posted by a member in response:

³ Positionally speaking the believer is in Christ perfect and free of all condemnation. But progressive sanctification – which is never perfect in this life – is equally scriptural.

⁴ A Facebook thread has an opening post under which members can make comments.

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Yes, because he will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of... judgment.

When this was challenged, the correspondent replied thus:

There are places and times where Scripture was not available. The Holy Spirit was their only hope of hearing the gospel, so yes – the Holy Spirit could still accomplish his mission without the written word.

This illustrates what I want to say.

I admit at once that God can do whatever he wills. No question about it! If he had decreed that a man would recite the entire AV in 1500 (even though the KJV was only produced 1604-1611), then that man would have done that very thing. But if we were to make this the basis for our theology and practice, we should need our head examined! What God can do, what God might do, is of no concern to us; indeed, we have no business prying into it. Deuteronomy 29:29 deals with that! Let's nail that point once and for all! This should signal the end of the thread, a thread which should never have been started in the first place. The question should never have been posed!

Coming closer to home, it is true that in the days immediately following Pentecost, the gospel advanced in the world without the apostolic Scriptures. Of course. But the apostles were still alive and active, giving their authoritative guidance, receiving revelation of truth which they were writing down, and so turning it into Scripture, all in accordance with Christ's promise that they would be led into all truth by the Spirit (John 16:12-15). In addition, the early church had new-covenant prophets who, with the apostles, were foundational, Christ being the real foundation (1 Cor. 3:9-10; Eph. 2:20). And, of course, people could verify what they were hearing by the Old Testament Scriptures, as did the Bereans (Acts 17:11). Even so, I admit that in those early days, the Spirit did work without the written apostolic scriptures.

Nevertheless, as before, noting the uniqueness of the transitional circumstances of the time, is it right to speculate about whether or not the Spirit might work in the same special manner today, now that we have the complete Scriptures? And even granting that he might, what we need to concentrate on is

not what *God might do*, but *what he has revealed*. Indeed, why are people asking about what God might do? What purpose will such a question serve? Especially when it raises the possibility of a gap between the Spirit and the Scriptures?

The real question is not: Can the Spirit give us God's mind independently of Scripture?, but: Is this the way we should be thinking in the first place? What is more, since the sum total of saving truth is now revealed in written Scripture, it can only be that the Spirit will reveal the same truth in a direct way, even if he does speak independent of the written word today. Unless, of course, some people want to claim that God gives new truth independent of, and additional to, Scripture. Which I certainly do not!

But my main concern lies not in this speculation – for that is what it is. It is the danger inherent in such speculation. Having such a public debate as this – what can it lead to? What good purpose is it intended to serve? Putting it another way: What evil consequences might come from it? What will happen if people listen to this kind of talk, if this seed now sown actually germinates? Large oaks come from small acorns. In this kind of talk, I see a gap (oh, so slight a gap) being prised (oh, so gently prised) between the Spirit and Scripture, and, for what it's worth, I want to register my protest. If enough people keep tapping the wedge that is being nestled ever-so innocently into the gap, that gap will widen. As sure as eggs are eggs, that gap will widen.

The correspondent cited John 16:8-11. I think we should look at the entire section, up to and including verse 15:

And when [the Holy Spirit] comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the

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Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you (John 16:8-15).

As Christ said, the Spirit convinces sinners of sin, righteousness and judgment, and all in connection with Christ himself. Granted that for a little while, in unique circumstances, the Spirit did this without the apostolic Scriptures, nevertheless, he was doing it even as he was producing those very Scriptures through the apostles. Moreover, as Christ immediately went on to explain, the gospel age (after those initial extraordinary days) is to be marked by the presence and power of the Spirit, the Spirit and the Scriptures in tandem. After all, the Spirit's work of conviction is in connection with Christ. But which Christ? The Christ of men's imagination? The Christ of Christendom? The Christ of Christmas? The Christ of Scripture! And only the Christ of Scripture. There are many Christs in the world (Matt. 24:24), but only one saving Christ – the Christ of Scripture. As Joseph Hart put it:

*The Scriptures and the Lord
Bear one tremendous name;
The written and the incarnate Word
In all things are the same.*

So the Spirit, convincing sinners in connection with Christ, will be using Scripture to do it.⁵

Just now I used the word 'innocently'. I did so advisedly. I accept that the correspondent may well deplore the suggestion of any such dangerous construction as I have set out being placed on what he/she wrote. Very well. But this is precisely what I am trying to tease out. Immense care is needed in such things. It is what people take away from what we say, not merely what we say, that matters. And it is not only what we say. What we do *not* say has an impact, too. In other words, we have

⁵ Indeed, his usual method is by using believers to preach the Scriptures, supremely the gospel, taking 'preaching' in its widest new-covenant sense. See Rom. 1:14-17; 1 Cor. 1:17 – 2:16; 9:16; 2 Cor. 4:5-6.

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a responsibility to do all we can to prevent people drawing the wrong conclusion from what we say.

And so that no-one can misunderstand my position, I assert categorically that the believer is under the law of Christ, that that law is written in all Scripture, and that the believer is responsible to obey it, moved and enabled by the power of the Spirit. I say there is not the slightest hint of a gap between the Spirit and the Scriptures. It is both. Not either/or. Both.

I close as I often do, and appeal to all to search the Scriptures on these things (Acts 17:11).

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*Peter Masters’
Muddle over the Covenants
Part 1*

In this short piece,¹ I want to engage with the first of two articles by Peter Masters in the *Sword and Trowel* 2016: Issue 2: ‘God’s Parallel Covenants’. The second, ‘Sinai Was Not An Administration Of The Covenant Of Grace’, which had been ‘first published in 1983 [in the *Sword and Trowel*], was abridged and adapted from John Owen’s *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*’, and which Masters republished to support his case in the first. Both articles, in turn, were ‘drawn from the 2016 Tabernacle School of Theology’.²

I will set out my response in two parts, in two articles of my own. In the first, I will deal with Masters’ article in general terms, while in the second I will deal with a specific, significant issue he raises.

Let me say at once, in his article Masters makes some good and important points. I especially commend the fact that he draws attention to the vital doctrine of the covenants. In this, he has done believers a good service. So strongly do I feel about this matter, let me repeat a question I have asked in other works: the doctrine of the covenants – do you ever think about it? If John Bunyan was right – and, alas, I am sure he has put his finger on the spot – many contemporary believers never think about the covenants at all. As he said:

¹ I have also published this and the following article as a booklet (*Peter*).

² *Sword and Trowel* 2016: Issue 2, pp3-10,33-37. It can also be found online.

Peter Masters' Muddle over the Covenants Part 1

If³ one should ask you what time you spend, what pains you take, to the end you may understand the nature and difference of these two covenants [old and new], would you not say, if you should speak the truth, that you did not so much as regard whether there were two or more? Would you not say: 'I did not think of covenants, or study the nature of them'?⁴

For most believers, sadly, too right! And yet, as God has made plain in Scripture, the doctrine of the covenants is one of the most important matters the Bible deals with.

So far, so good. Masters raises a subject that demands serious thought. I am afraid, however, that he displays considerable muddle over it. And this, alas, makes for serious confusion.

He gets off to a bad start by his willingness to accept some of the fundamental tenets of covenant theology, doing so without scriptural justification (except by way of few proof texts for part of what he claims). In fact, of course, he is left with no choice; the fundamentals of covenant theology are beyond scriptural justification, in that they are philosophical concepts imposed on Scripture. I refer to such things as 'the covenant of works', 'the covenant of grace', 'the covenant of grace in the Godhead in eternity past', 'the moral law', and so on. None of these can be justly established from Scripture.⁵ What is more, the covenant theology of the Confessions – full-blown in the Westminster, somewhat muted in the 1689 Particular Baptist – is never far beneath the surface of his article. It is not without significance that we get a considerable way through his article before we come across the telling: 'Turning to the pages of Scripture'. None too soon, is my response! Theology – both covenant and systematic – undergirds everything. But Masters knows he is treading on thin ice: he gives the game away when he uses such phrases as 'the so-called covenant of works', revealing that,

³ Bunyan had 'set the case'.

⁴ John Bunyan: *The Doctrine of Law and Grace Unfolded*. See my *Bunyan*.

⁵ See my 'Covenant Theology Tested'.

while he himself is not happy with the terminology, he is willing to go along with it. Indeed, he is not shy about giving us his reason for this: 'Because it has become most generally known as...'. Here he echoes the abject words of the Westminster Confession with its 'commonly called the covenant of grace... this law, commonly called moral'.⁶ See also the 1689 Particular Baptist Confession for similarly weak language. All this clearly displays covenant-theologians' (past and present) admission of the signal lack of scriptural support for what they assert with such confidence in both Confessions with regard to the covenants. The same applies to Masters.

Masters also wrongly believes that Adam was given the law of Moses.⁷ But how weakly he makes his claim! He says: 'Although the word "covenant" first appears in Genesis 6:18... the Bible shows that... [the covenant] of works [was] characterised by the great command and warning of... Eden, and subsequently in the time of Moses by the law'. Leaving aside 'covenant of works', what about 'characterised'? Masters' use of this word exposes yet again his justified lack of confidence about what he asserts. A little later he says: 'In the time of Moses, at Sinai, the covenant of works [by which Masters means the Mosaic covenant, the law] would be reiterated by God'. No! It would not! It would not be reiterated.⁸ It was given to Israel at that time, and given uniquely to Israel at that time. It had not been given to Adam. I simply cannot understand how men can go on making such wild – though dogmatic – claims,

⁶ Let me explain my use of 'abject'. When justifying a point, we ought to be given Scripture, not the views of theologians. For that is what is being said here. These things are 'generally known' by covenant theologians. This is not only a circular argument, but the wrong basis altogether for the fundamentals of such a far-reaching system!

⁷ See my 'The Covenant That Never Was'.

⁸ It was reinstated at Sinai (Horeb) (Ex. 34) after Moses smashed the tables following Israel's breaking of the law even before they had been given it, and repeated at Moab (Deut. 5, 29 and 30) before Israel entered the land. But it was not reiterated in Ex. 20! As for Deut. 29 and 30, an examination of that passage will form Part 2 of this article.

when we know that the law, the Mosaic covenant, was given uniquely – uniquely, I stress, as does Scripture – to Israel in order to separate them from all other people (Deut. 4:1 – 5:33; 7:8-12; Ps. 147:19-20; Rom. 2:12-14; 9:4; 1 Cor. 9:20-21). And we know that the sabbath, which played a pivotal role in the law, the Mosaic covenant, and the life of Israel, was a distinguishing sign separating Israel from all others (Ex. 31:13-17; Ezek. 20:12-24). As I say, in light of such evidence, I fail to see how any covenant theologian – of whatever stripe – can continue to say that the law (including the sabbath) was given to all men in Adam in Eden. To assert it makes a nonsense of plain Scripture. Masters repeats this fundamental mistake.

Nevertheless, he is excellent when he rejects the one-covenant-in-two-administrations theory so beloved of many covenant theologians.⁹ Speaking scripturally, there are two covenants in this debate; on the one hand, the old, Mosaic covenant, and, on the other, the new covenant. And Scripture contrasts these two. It simply does not allow any wriggle room for saying that they are but one covenant dressed in different frocks. Masters gets this right. And it is important.

Further, Masters is right to call attention to the 17th-century Baptists who resolutely stood against the covenant theology of the Puritans. I am delighted he does so. I myself have written on these men, and others.¹⁰ They were, and in some quarters still are, dismissed as heretics – antinomians – because of their views on the covenants and the law, but the boot is on the other foot, in that covenant theologians play ducks and drakes with the Mosaic law. Although they did not get it all right,¹¹ these so-called antinomian writers produced plenty of valuable material

⁹ See my 'Covenant Theology Tested'.

¹⁰ See my work Robert Purnell, Thomas Collier, John Bunyan in my *Purnell on the New Covenant; Collier on the New Covenant; Exalting Christ: Thomas Collier on the New Covenant; Bunyan*. See also my work on Tobias Crisp, William Dell, John Eaton, John Saltmarsh in my *Four*.

¹¹ See my *Exalting; Collier; Bunyan*.

on the covenants, much of which is yet to be presented in an accessible form to this and succeeding generations. I place a premium on this task. It would do much good in the present theological climate. Just as the Anabaptists and their works have been brought in from the cold, to the great advantage of the cause of Christ, so the same would be said of the 17th-century Baptists, if only their work were better known.

The first issue for Masters is to argue that the Mosaic covenant was the covenant of works and not the covenant of grace. He also wants to maintain that the two covenants (of law and of grace) are in contrast, 'opposites'. I am allowing his use of covenant-theology terminology. Now the truth is, Scripture makes it as plain as a pikestaff that the Mosaic covenant was a works covenant, whereas the new covenant is a grace, a gospel, covenant. John put it succinctly: 'The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ' (John 1:17). End of debate! Or should be! So, allowing his faulty terminology, Masters is right to distinguish the two covenants, law and grace, old and new.

But, alas, because he has bought into covenant theology, he does not understand that the two covenants in Scripture are not, as he would have it, the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, but the old, Mosaic, covenant and the new covenant established by Christ. And this is not just a question of words. The Mosaic covenant was certainly a works covenant, but covenant theology's terminology clouds the issue, with dire consequences, some of which Masters recognises, and wants to avoid. For instance, not maintaining the contrast between the old and new covenants, combining them into one, leads to infant baptism and unregenerate church membership.¹²

So far then, the verdict on Masters' article must be, alas, like the curate's egg, good in parts.¹³ Let me explain. In covenant

¹² See my *Infant*.

¹³ A *Punch* cartoon in 1895 when the bishop apologises that the curate's egg is bad. The obsequious curate replies that it is good in parts.

theology, 'the covenant of works' was the so-called covenant made with all men in Adam. As I have already said, this is a myth.¹⁴ And by 'the covenant of grace', covenant theologians mean the so-called covenant made in the Godhead in eternity, restated at various stages in human history. This, again, is not what Scripture teaches. What I have set out, of course, is simplistic; covenant theology consists of a spectrum of views.¹⁵ But it shows the essential stance of covenant theology. Masters takes a hybrid position on this. But, as I say, he does see the inherent danger of covenant theology. Hence, my assessment of good in parts.

Now for the crux of Masters' muddle.

Masters wants to establish that 'these two covenants, in a way, run parallel with each other throughout history', starting in Eden. Do not miss Masters' self-confessed insecurity at this point. What does he mean with his 'in a way'? He is convinced that from Eden the covenant of works and the covenant of grace have run, and are running, in parallel. So why 'in a way'?

The truth is, dropping the terminology of covenant theology, the two covenants, of law and of grace, have not run in parallel throughout history. As I have shown elsewhere,¹⁶ all men are under law. The natural man is under the rudimentary law of Romans 2:12-16; Israel was under the law of Moses; believers are under the law of Christ. Only Israel was under the old covenant, the law of Moses, that covenant having been added as a supplementary measure and kept in place for Israel until Christ, the Seed of the Abrahamic covenant, came and fulfilled it, rendering it obsolete, setting up the new covenant (Gal. 3:19-29).¹⁷ Since Calvary (or thereabouts – see below), men are either under that rudimentary law or under Christ in the new

¹⁴ See my 'The Covenant That Never was'.

¹⁵ See my 'Covenant Theology Tested'.

¹⁶ See my *Believers*; 'All Men Under Law'.

¹⁷ See my *Three*.

covenant, in which case they are under the law of Christ.¹⁸ The old and new covenants have never existed in parallel. They never could exist in parallel.

Of course, sinners were saved during the days of the old covenant and before. None of the above must be construed as saying anything different. Sinners were saved before the new covenant was established by Christ, yes. They were saved by looking ahead to Christ, and trusting him, even though they saw him only in shadows and types. See, for instance, John 8:56 with Genesis 22:13. But the new covenant itself was not established until Christ came and set it up in his fulfilment of the old covenant in his obedience to the law, thus rendering the old covenant obsolete. The two covenants have not run parallel throughout history, existing at the same time. That would have been an impossibility. The Mosaic covenant began at Sinai and ended at Calvary when the new covenant was brought in.¹⁹

The truth is, if Masters is right, and the two covenants – works (old) and grace (new) – have run parallel as he claims, then this represents a severe assault on the scriptural need for Christ, in the fullness of time, at the right, God-appointed time, to be born under the law (Gal. 4:4), fulfil the law (Matt. 5:17-18), and so become its end – that is, its goal and terminus (Rom. 10:4) – by establishing the new covenant.²⁰ For if Masters is right, and the old and new covenant have been in existence from Eden, the new covenant is not new at all; it has always been in existence. It could never be called 'new'. It is as

¹⁸ As before, see my *Believers*. Nevertheless, it is true that when speaking of the natural man, Paul does, on occasion, use 'law' to cover both the rudimentary law and the Mosaic law. See, for instance, Rom. 7:1-6. For more on this see my *Christ*.

¹⁹ I say 'Calvary', but there is evidence that the new covenant was brought in just before that time (Matt. 26:28). But, perhaps, Christ's *tetelestai* (John 19:30), 'it is accomplished', with the torn veil of the temple (Matt. 27:51), signals it. But I am sure the resurrection and Pentecost also play a part in this.

²⁰ I am indebted to my friend Steve Guest for drawing my attention to this.

old as eternity past, was known to Adam, and has been known ever since. Yet Jeremiah predicted the coming of a *new* covenant, specifically unlike the old, Mosaic covenant (Jer. 31:31-34), which new covenant would come about only in and through Christ's person, life, death and resurrection (Heb. 8:6-13). Masters must be wrong, therefore.

And, make no mistake about it, the new covenant really is new; it is not an ongoing covenant which has always existed; certainly not a time-worn covenant which has been buffed up.²¹ The word 'new' is a precious word which, in and of itself, destroys Masters' case.

Hence it is that I say that Masters, though he raises a telling point – the distinction and contrast of the old and new covenants – is muddled about them. He is still a covenant theologian – not quite mainstream, but still firmly in that camp. He wrongly thinks that the two covenants, of law and of gospel, have run parallel to each other throughout history. They have not.

To try to make his point, Masters turns to Deuteronomy chapters 29 and 30. He argues that Sinai (Horeb) (Ex. 20 and Ex. 34) and Moab (Deut. 5) speak of the covenant of law, the works covenant, whereas Moab (Deut. 29 and Deut. 30) is the covenant of the gospel, the grace covenant, of which he says: 'It has long been known as the "evangelical covenant", and so it is'.²² As a consequence, the two covenants, of law and of grace, run side by side. It has always been thus. So says Masters. I strongly deny it.

This brings the first part of my response to Masters to a close. I leave the remaining key issue for the next part; namely,

²¹ See my *Christ*.

²² I have been unable to verify Masters' claim about the use of 'evangelical covenant'. Indeed, I have been unable to find any historical use of the phrase. I did come across it, however, in one modern book; apart from that, Masters' use is the sole example I have found. I am not saying he is wrong, but I have been unable to verify its use, let alone as applied to Deuteronomy 30.

Peter Masters' Muddle over the Covenants Part 1

Deuteronomy 29 and 30. What was the covenant of Deuteronomy 29 and 30? Law or grace?

*Peter Masters’
Muddle over the Covenants
Part 2*

This piece¹ is Part 2 of my response to the first of two articles by Peter Masters in the *Sword and Trowel* 2016: Issue 2: ‘God’s Parallel Covenants’, ‘drawn from the 2016 Tabernacle School of Theology’.²

In my previous article I dealt with Masters’ work in general terms. I have to confess that my reply in that piece was not so clear as I would have liked, but I found myself constantly having to sort out Masters’ confusing use of the terminology of covenant theology; in particular, ‘the covenant of works’ and ‘the covenant of grace’, or their equivalent. If only he had used scriptural terms! We would be talking about the old covenant (the Mosaic) and the new. Ah, well!

This article, however, should be more straightforward. There is one remaining issue, one issue only. Was the covenant of Deuteronomy 29 and 30, made by God through Moses with Israel at Moab just before the nation entered the land, the old covenant or the new? Masters says it was the new. I deny it categorically.

Before I look at Deuteronomy 30, however, we need to get to grips with Romans 10. For when he deals with justification in Romans 10, Paul turns to Deuteronomy 30. This is highly significant. I refer to:

Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. But the righteousness based on faith says:

¹ I have also published this and the previous article as a booklet (*Peter*).

² *Sword and Trowel* 2016: Issue 2, pp3-10. It can also be found online.

Peter Masters' Muddle over the Covenants Part 2

‘Do not say in your heart, “Who will ascend into heaven?”’ (that is, to bring Christ down) ‘or “Who will descend into the abyss?”’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says: ‘Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame’. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’ (Rom. 10:4-13).

Homing in, the essential passage, in which Paul draws on Deuteronomy 30, is this:

But the righteousness based on faith says: ‘Do not say in your heart, “Who will ascend into heaven?”’ (that is, to bring Christ down) ‘or “Who will descend into the abyss?”’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim)...

Let us take it slowly. When Paul speaks of ‘the righteousness of faith’, he is clearly referring to the gospel, justification by faith. And he is contrasting that with attempted justification by the law (Rom. 10:5), which is futile, impossible to any sinner (Rom. 7:10; 9:30 – 10:3). So, in prosecuting his argument, in expounding the gospel, Paul turns to Deuteronomy 30:12-14. Does this mean that in Deuteronomy 29 – 30 Moses, himself, was setting out the gospel, the new covenant, justification by faith? Is this what Paul is telling us? Not at all! Notice what Paul does not do. He does not *quote* Deuteronomy 30; he *accommodates* it to suit his purpose. There is a big difference. He does not say: ‘As Moses said, as Moses made clear, as

Moses declared to Israel...'. I am not nit-picking. I am being precise.³

I am not alone in making this point. Albert Barnes:

Paul regards this [passage in Deuteronomy 30] as appropriately describing the language of Christian faith; but [he uses the passage] without affirming that Moses himself had any reference in the passage to the faith of the gospel.

M.R.Vincent:

The quotation in Romans 10:6-8 is a *free citation* from Deuteronomy 30:11-14. Paul recognises [something he can adapt]⁴ in Moses' words, and thus changes the original expressions so as to apply them to the Christian faith-system. His object in the change is indicated by the explanatory words which he adds. He does not formally declare that Moses describes the righteousness of faith in these words, but *appropriates* the words of Moses, putting them into the mouth of the personified faith-righteousness.⁵

C.H.Spurgeon:

I want to call your special attention to the fact that Paul *borrow*s the words of Moses.⁶

Yes, Paul finds Moses' words 'appropriate', he makes 'a free citation' of them, he 'appropriates' them, 'borrows' them. That is as much as can be said about Paul's use of Deuteronomy 30 in Romans 10. One thing is certain. Paul does not quote Moses to support what he is saying about justification by faith, on the grounds that this is what Moses taught.

Let me summarise what is happening in Romans 10:

³ Another nickname for 'Puritan' was 'Precisionist'. When John Rogers was asked why he was so precise, he replied that he served a precise God. See my *Battle*.

⁴ Vincent had 'a secondary meaning'. This is too strong.

⁵ Emphasis mine.

⁶ Spurgeon sermon 1700, emphasis mine.

1. Paul uses the words of Deuteronomy 30 merely as a vehicle to set out his own doctrine. We must also remember that he loves wordplay.⁷ Fascinated by language, and skilful at using language to make a point, he calls on that ability here. Most definitely, he is not saying that Moses taught justification by faith. Moses does not teach it in Deuteronomy 30. Paul is not saying he did, nor is he implying it. It is impossible to infer it. The apostle is simply using Moses' words for his own purpose. Masters' far-reaching claim on this passage is preposterous.

2. Moreover, in accommodating Moses' words, Paul makes a highly significant change.⁸ Moses said:

For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say: 'Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring *it* to us, that we may hear *it* and *do it*?' Neither is *it* beyond the sea, that you should say: 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring *it* to us, that we may hear *it* and *do it*?' But the word is very near you. *It* is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can *do it*.

In his free use of Moses' words, Paul said:

But the righteousness based on faith says: 'Do not say in your heart, "Who will ascend into heaven?"' (that is, to bring *Christ* down) 'or "Who will descend into the abyss?"' (that is, to bring *Christ* up from the dead). But what does it say? 'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart' (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

⁷ In addition to Gal. 3:24 with 5:18, see Rom. 8:2-4; 9:6; 1 Cor. 9:19-23; 11:3-16; Gal. 6:2,16; Phil. 3:3; 2 Thess. 3:11 (NIV); Philem. 10-11.

⁸ I am indebted to George Platt of Highgate Baptist church for this vital observation.

Moses was speaking about 'it' – God's commandment, God's law – which Israel had to 'do'. Paul is speaking about 'Christ' with no talk of 'do'. These are momentous changes. They alter the whole thrust of the passage. Moses was speaking of obedience to law. Paul is speaking of Christ. And it is all about justification and nothing but justification.⁹ And as he goes on to say, the sinner has to believe – trust – Christ for righteousness. This is the apostle's teaching in this very passage, Roman 10:4-5, the culmination of Romans 3:21 – 8:39. Christ has done the necessary doing, having come under the law, he kept it, thereby earning righteousness for his people, and, by his triumphant death, accomplished their redemption. So that, as Paul puts it: 'Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes' (Rom. 10:4). And by 'end', *telos*, Paul means the end, the goal, the purpose and the terminus of the law. The law foreshadowed, pictured Christ, and Christ has rendered the shadow-covenant obsolete by fulfilling it. He himself, he and his work, are the reality of the shadows.

3. Furthermore, Paul is not contradicting himself by using Deuteronomy 30, which is securely fixed in the book of the law:

For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. But the righteousness based on faith...

There is no justification for any sinner through his own works under the law. Paul has said so already in Romans: 'God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do' (Rom. 8:3). How? 'By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin he condemned sin in the flesh, 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'

⁹ It is important to assert this. Paul is not talking about a believer's progressive sanctification here. He is not saying the law and Christ are equivalents for believers. He is not saying that in the new covenant the law of Christ is Christ himself in the sense that this means there are no written commands which the believer has to obey. Paul is not conflating Christ and law. These are vital negatives. See my *Believers*.

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(Rom. 8:3-4). As he told the Galatians (before he wrote to the Romans):

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... I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose (Gal. 2:16-21).

Paul was soon driving on even stronger:

For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written: 'Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them'. Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for 'The righteous shall live by faith'. But the law is not of faith, rather 'The one who does them shall live by them'. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree' – so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith (Gal. 3:10-14).

Incidentally, in both passages, Romans 10 and Galatians 3, Paul quotes – quotes, not alludes to – Leviticus 18:5: 'You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the Lord' (Lev. 18:5). This is the unmistakable doctrine of the old covenant. Nowhere is this more clearly brought out than in the Jewish lawyer's confrontation of Christ:

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put [Christ] to the test, saying: 'Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' He said to him: 'What is written in the law? How do you read it?' And he answered: 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself'. And he said to him: 'You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live' (Luke 10:25-28).

And the lawyer was left with Christ's 'You go, and do...' (Luke 10:37) ringing in his ears. Go and do! So thundered the law!

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And let us not forget:

For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it (Jas. 2:10).

Getting back to Israel's history, just before or during the captivity, as God reminded the people through the prophet:

I gave them my statutes and made known to them my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live. Moreover, I gave them my sabbaths, as a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them. But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness. They did not walk in my statutes but rejected my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live; and my sabbaths they greatly profaned... They did not walk in my statutes and were not careful to obey my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live; they profaned my sabbaths (Ezek. 20:11-13,21).

And then, at the restoration, when the Israelites were assembled, and the Levites 'read from the book of the law of the Lord their God', they addressed the people, and confessed to God:

You warned [the Israelites] in order to turn them back to your law. Yet they acted presumptuously and did not obey your commandments, but sinned against your rules, which if a person does them, he shall live by them, and they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck and would not obey (Neh. 9: 3,29).

In short, as Paul, as an Israelite, admitted:

The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me (Rom. 7:10).

Clearly, Deuteronomy 30, in Paul's estimation, lies securely in the realm of the Mosaic law, the old covenant.

4. In any case, Deuteronomy 30 is, in itself, clear. It is full of commandment, law, with promises of life as reward for obedience. This covenant is not the gospel! It is the law! Listen to Moses:

And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind

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among all the nations where the Lord your God has driven you, and return to the Lord your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have mercy on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you... And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

In other words, if you return and obey, then I will circumcise your hearts and you will live. In other words, regeneration would follow obedience. Which is precisely what the law says: 'Do and live'. But the new covenant says: 'Live and you will do'. In the old covenant, life followed obedience; in the new, obedience follows life. Deuteronomy 30 is the exact opposite of the gospel; it is pure old covenant. Blessing follows obedience. And so on.

Let me bring this section to a close by setting out the full context of Paul's glorious words on justification by faith and not law, contrasting Israel under the old covenant with sinners coming to faith in Christ in the new:

What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written: 'Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame'. Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. But the righteousness based on faith says: 'Do not say in your heart, "Who will ascend into heaven?"'

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(that is, to bring Christ down) 'or "Who will descend into the abyss?"' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? 'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart' (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says: 'Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame'. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved' (Rom. 9:30 – 10:13).

But the time has come to let Masters set out his stall:

The biblical narrative says he made this covenant in the land of Moab 'beside' the covenant which he made with them in Horeb. The Hebrew means 'separately, distinctively'. It was not a reiteration of Sinai, but something different and very special. It has long been known as the 'evangelical covenant'...¹⁰ In other words, the Sinaitic law covenant is works, but the covenant presented in Deuteronomy 29 – 30 (in the plains of Moab) is grace... only a passing reference to law. It is all about circumcision of the heart. It is all about grace. It is all about evangelical experience, and loving the Lord with all our being... No wonder Moses completed his preaching of this covenant of grace with the stirring appeal... [of] Deuteronomy 30:15-16.

I agree that Deuteronomy is not a mere reiteration of the covenant at Sinai (Horeb) (Ex. 20 and Ex. 34) and Moab (Deut. 5), all of which referred to the old covenant, the Mosaic covenant, the works covenant. But the question is whether or not the opening of Deuteronomy 29 can bear the weight Masters puts upon it. Here are those opening words:

These are the words of the covenant that the Lord commanded Moses to make with the people of Israel in the land of Moab,

¹⁰ In Part 1, I noted that I have been unable to verify Masters' claim that this covenant 'has long been known as the "evangelical covenant"'.

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besides the covenant that he had made with them at Horeb (Deut. 29:1).

Masters is unequivocal that this justifies regarding the covenant in these two chapters as totally different to the Mosaic covenant, the old covenant, the works covenant:

The Hebrew means 'separately, distinctively'. It [the covenant in question] was not a reiteration of Sinai, but something different and very special.

So I repeat that I agree that the covenant in question was not a reiteration of the Sinai covenant. The earlier three (Sinai/Horeb/Moab), were virtual carbon copies of each other, the second and third being restatements of the original, the Sinai covenant; this one is not. But is it altogether different? This is the material point. Is it totally, radically, new? So much so, is it so new that is the new covenant and not the old? What if the word 'besides' should be taken to mean 'in addition to', 'alongside of', 'with another purpose'? Worthy commentators take such a line, (inadvertently, as it were) rejecting Masters' categorical stance.

Charles Ellicott, for one:

It should be carefully noted that the formal repetition of the law in Moses' second great discourse in this book opens with these words: 'The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb'. There is no real break in Deuteronomy from Deuteronomy 5:1 to the end of Deuteronomy 26, and Deuteronomy 27 – 28 are the 'sanction' of that covenant.

Consider Jamieson-Fausset-Brown:

It was substantially the same [covenant as Sinai/Horeb/Moab]; but it was renewed now, in different circumstances. They had violated its conditions. Moses rehearses these, that they might have a better knowledge of its conditions and be more disposed to comply with them. The manifold works and mercies of God are a motive to obedience. Moses solemnly engages them to keep covenant with God. Unbelief, careless contempt, and breach of covenant shall be severely punished. [He also speaks of] the end and use of the revealed will of God [Deut. 29:29].

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This was not a new covenant in addition to that made at Sinai, but simply a renewal and reaffirmation of that covenant. At Sinai the covenant was, properly speaking, made; sacrifices were then offered, and the people were sprinkled with the sacrificial blood, whereby the covenant was ratified; but on the occasion here referred to, no sacrifices were offered, for this was merely the recognition of the covenant formerly made as still subsisting.

And Peter J.Gentry:

The instruction in Deuteronomy reshapes the covenant at Sinai for life in the land. There is a whole new context and situation even though it is the same covenant... In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses is adding something in continuity with the covenant at Sinai. Moses is making a covenant to keep the covenant at Sinai... Deuteronomy is best seen as a renewal and expansion of the Sinai covenant. The exposition given here of Deuteronomy 30:11-14 coheres completely with Deuteronomy 4:25-31 and Leviticus 26:39-45 where even the idea of uncircumcised heart is found and repentance in exile. This, then, best explains the relation of Deuteronomy 1 – 30 to Exodus 19 – 24.¹¹

These, and other writers, take the view that Deuteronomy 29 – 30 is ‘substantially the same’ covenant as Sinai/Horeb/Moab, ‘not a new covenant in addition to that made at Sinai, but simply a renewal and reaffirmation of that covenant’, so that ‘the instruction in Deuteronomy reshapes the covenant at Sinai for life in the land. There is a whole new context and situation even though it is the same covenant’. This is my position in a nutshell. The essential point is that Deuteronomy 29 – 30 is securely based on the old covenant, firmly fixed within that covenant. It is the old covenant, which Moses takes and, as it were, preaches to Israel, exhorts Israel, encourages Israel, warns Israel that when they enter the land they must stick to the Sinai covenant, treasure it, but above all, obey it. If they do, massive material benefits will be theirs. If they do not...

¹¹ Peter J.Gentry: ‘The Relationship of Deuteronomy to the Covenant at Sinai’.

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Deuteronomy 30 must not be taken out of context, in isolation. Certainly a couple of verses must not be pushed beyond measure. I am afraid Masters fails in this respect. Read the entire section from Deuteronomy 27:1 – 34:12. It represents Moses' last attempt to try to set Israel on the right path in the old covenant, and keep Israel there: duties, curses, blessings, all enforced by verbal and written teaching both in discourse and song. *It is old covenant through and through.*

Let me quote the entire chapter, and set out what I am talking about:

And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God has driven you, and return to the Lord your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have mercy on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you. If your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there he will take you. And the Lord your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed, that you may possess it. And he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers.

Let me pause there. Note the presupposition of Israel's failure to keep the covenant and obey the law. Note the consequent judgment. Note the heavily conditional nature of what is being said. God promises to bless Israel – not only the adults, but their children – with earthly blessings if – and what an 'if' – they return to him with all their heart and soul, and obey his commandments, all of them. Is this the new covenant? Earthly blessing for a man and his child if the man obeys all God's commandments? For a start, the new covenant promise is spiritual. If Masters sticks to his position on Deuteronomy 30, I fail to see how he can avoid encouraging some to capitulate to

the prosperity gospel.¹² And what a disaster that would prove to be! In addition, the new covenant is concerned with the believer; the promise is for the one who believes – not the believer and his child. Moreover, the necessary believer's obedience in the new covenant under the law of Christ, obedience both expected and guaranteed by the terms of that covenant, follows God's work in the soul, not the other way round. Yet in Deuteronomy 29 – 30 all this is the other way about. There is only one explanation: these chapters are old covenant, not new.

To continue:

And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live. And the Lord your God will put all these curses on your foes and enemies who persecuted you. And you shall again obey the voice of the Lord and keep all his commandments that I command you today.

I break in again. Here we reach the crux in this debate, as far as Masters is concerned. He is certainly exhilarated about it:

There is only a passing reference to law. It is all about circumcision of the heart. It is all about grace. It is all about evangelical experience, and loving the Lord with all our being.

Only a passing reference to law? It seems to me that the passage in question, the chapters we are discussing – as all the book of Deuteronomy – all of it is full of the notion of law! No wonder since the very name of the book means 'second giving, copy, statement, of the law'. Did Moses switch horses as he came to conclude his work? And what of Masters' 'all about grace'? The word is not used in the entire book, let alone Deuteronomy 30! All about circumcision of the heart? The word 'circumcision' or its derivative is used only once in forty-nine verses in Deuteronomy 29 – 30. Indeed, in the entire book, it is used only

¹² The mistaken view that, in the days of the new covenant, obedience to God brings material reward, prosperity in health and financially. But that was precisely the nature of the old covenant. See, for instance, Ex. 23:25-27; Deut. 4:40; 5:16; 7:12-15; Ps. 1:3; 128:3; Jer. 23:3.

twice – here in Deuteronomy 30:6 and earlier in Deuteronomy 10:16 – when God commands Israel:

And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord, which I am commanding you today for your good? Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. Yet the Lord set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day. Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn. For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. You shall fear the Lord your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him, and by his name you shall swear. He is your praise. He is your God, who has done for you these great and terrifying things that your eyes have seen. Your fathers went down to Egypt seventy persons, and now the Lord your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven (Deut. 10:12-22).

I quote the passage in full to give the sense. Do not miss the command to Israel, calling upon them to circumcise their hearts.¹³

Returning to Deuteronomy 30, not only does Masters go off *piste* by saying the chapter 'is all about circumcision of heart', with 'only a passing reference to law', the facts of the case are precisely the opposite. He could not be more wide of the mark! The difference between Deuteronomy 10 and Deuteronomy 30 is that heart circumcision is a requirement in the former passage, and a promise in the latter. God promises circumcision of heart upon obedience, and he requires obedience leading to heart circumcision.

Moreover, since circumcision of heart speaks of regeneration, I am staggered that Masters can even think of

¹³ See also Lev. 26:41; Jer. 4:4; 9:26; Acts 7:51.

writing in such a way as might lead any reader to think that the author is suggesting that in the new covenant sinners will be regenerated if they keep God's commandments! The merest whiff of such a doctrine in the days of the gospel should be abhorred. God rewards law-keeping with life? This is old covenant!¹⁴ And, of course, the old covenant promised life for perfect obedience. But the least offence ruined all, as Paul found: 'The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me' (Rom. 7:10). For, as I have already quoted, 'whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it' (Jas. 2:10).

To continue: given Israel's obedience, and God's circumcision of their heart consequent on their obedience, God, through Moses, promises earthly blessing to Israel, consequent yet again upon their obedience. Do not miss the reinforcement of this point:

The Lord your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your cattle and in the fruit of your ground. For the Lord will again take delight in prospering you, as he took delight in your fathers, when you obey the voice of the Lord your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes that are written in this book of the law, when you turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

Moses then urges the children of Israel to obedience, exhorts them to it, spelling out that they know full-well what they have to do. They have no excuse! The law of the covenant has been set before them on repeated occasions, laid out in fullest detail, with both its curses and blessings:

For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say: 'Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say: 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' But the word is very

¹⁴ As I have already noted.

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near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you may do it.¹⁵

And so to the final plea, still full of earthly blessing utterly conditional on obedience to the law:

See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you today, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them (Deut. 30:1-20).

Do not miss the curse as well as the blessing. Is this new-covenant language? Really?

As I have said, in Deuteronomy 29 – 30 Moses, grasping his last chance, is exhorting Israel on the basis of the Sinai covenant, preaching to them to live up to it. Just as Joshua, when he came to die, did:

¹⁵ Moses is not asserting that the natural man can keep God's law ('so that you can do it', ESV). That would be a lie! 'The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot' (Rom. 8:7) knocks the suggestion on the head! Rather, Moses is telling the people they have no excuse. It is not like their fathers in Egypt. They do not have to make bricks without straw, hunting here, there and everywhere for the material before they can start. The law is before their very eyes – literally on their forehead and wrists, written on their doorposts, and constantly in the hearts and on their lips (Ex. 13:16; Deut. 6:6-9; 11:18-21, for instance).

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But Joshua said to the people: 'You are not able to serve the Lord, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm and consume you, after having done you good'. And the people said to Joshua: 'No, but we will serve the Lord'. Then Joshua said to the people: 'You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the Lord, to serve him'. And they said: 'We are witnesses'. He said: 'Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your heart to the Lord, the God of Israel'. And the people said to Joshua: 'The Lord our God we will serve, and his voice we will obey'. So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and put in place statutes and rules for them at Shechem. And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God. And he took a large stone and set it up there under the terebinth that was by the sanctuary of the Lord. And Joshua said to all the people: 'Behold, this stone shall be a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of the Lord that he spoke to us. Therefore it shall be a witness against you, lest you deal falsely with your God'. So Joshua sent the people away, every man to his inheritance (Josh. 24:19-28).

The prophet Ezekiel repeated God's word to Israel:

If a man is righteous and does what is just and right – if he does not eat upon the mountains or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, does not defile his neighbour's wife or approach a woman in her time of menstrual impurity, does not oppress anyone, but restores to the debtor his pledge, commits no robbery, gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment, does not lend at interest or take any profit, withholds his hand from injustice, executes true justice between man and man, walks in my statutes, and keeps my rules by acting faithfully – he is righteous; he shall surely live, declares the Lord God... I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, declares the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God; so turn, and live (Ezek. 18:5-9,30-32).

All this is old covenant, law, works from start to finish. Masters gets this wrong.

I do not say that nowadays, in the era of the new covenant, believers have no use for any of this. It is a part of Scripture and, as such, is profitable for believers for their progressive sanctification (John 17:17; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). The law of Christ uses all Scripture as nuanced through Christ and laid out in the post-Pentecost Scriptures by the apostles.¹⁶ As a gospel preacher, with even more assurance than Moses under the law could press the law upon Israel, I can, therefore, press the gospel equivalent upon sinners. I can declare to them, warn them, that they do not have to go looking for the gospel; it is right before their eyes; it is simple, clear, plain, direct, categorical. Salvation will be theirs if they trust the Saviour. Condemnation will be their lot if they refuse. Obey the gospel! Submit to Christ! Repent! Believe! Now! And so on. See John 3:14-36; Acts 16:30-31; 17:30; 2 Corinthians 5:19 – 6:2, for instance.

But none of this detracts from the point at issue. Deuteronomy is old covenant! Masters is wrong!

Now compare all the old-covenant material above to the actual prophecies of the new covenant. I say 'compare', but 'contrast' is more like it:

Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me,

¹⁶ See my *Believers; Christ*; 'NCT Made Simple: Separation Essential: No Mixture! Deut. 22:9-11'. Believers use the law as a paradigm, pattern or typical example. See, for instance, 1 Cor. 5:6-13; 9:8-14; 10:1-11,18; 14:21; 2 Cor. 6:14 – 7:1; 8:15; 13:1.

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from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jer. 31:31-34).

And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God (Ezek. 11:19-20).

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules (Ezek. 36:25-27).¹⁷

In the new covenant, regeneration is not consequent upon obedience.¹⁸ Quite the reverse. Regeneration by the free and sovereign grace of the Spirit of God, trust in Christ, union to Christ, leads to obedience. The blessings of the gospel are not presented to sinners as a reward for their obedience. Rather, gospel blessing – the person and work of Christ, in particular – by the Spirit are the motive and moving power of the believer's obedience.¹⁹ Indeed, the new covenant is a resounding assertion

¹⁷ Masters speaks of 'the covenant of grace' – by which means the new covenant – 'being increasingly revealed... approaching a climax in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel'. I see it rather as an explosion in the prophecy in Jeremiah with the actual explosion taking place in Luke 1 – 2. Hear my series of discourses on that passage, 'Watershed Of The Ages'.

¹⁸ This does not do away with duty faith; that is, the biblical doctrine that it is the duty, the obligation, the responsibility of all sinners to trust Christ, even though they have no ability to comply. The gospel preacher must command all sinners to believe. I have written several books on this issue. See my *Offer; Septimus; Revisited; No Safety; Eternal*. But the old-covenant principle of blessing as reward for obedience is entirely absent. For a start, saving faith is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8). See also John 6:37,40,44-48.

¹⁹ See my *Christ*.

of what God will do, and the effect his Spirit will have as he works in the elect.

Why have I got steamed up about all this? I have not been indulging myself in a theological knockabout. It is not an academic nicety that I want to argue over. It is not a question of bickering over words and phrases for the fun of it. The salvation of sinners and the assurance of saints is at stake here.²⁰ Let us be clear about it! There is no salvation by works, but only on the basis of grace through faith:

By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast (Eph. 2:8-9).

Consequently any teaching which encourages anyone to take passages of Scripture which refer to the old covenant, and literally apply them as gospel statements, is doing untold damage. If people believe such doctrine, they will end up holding to salvation by works, and salvation defined as the prosperity gospel. I am not accusing Masters of this, of course, but I am saying words have power – for good or for ill.²¹

Let me draw this towards a close with one of Masters' predecessors at the Metropolitan Tabernacle. I am glad to say that C.H.Spurgeon saw things very differently to Peter Masters. Spurgeon, preaching on Romans 10:5-9, spoke of Moses and his role in the passage; that is, the doctrine of the law, the old covenant:

'Moses describes the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which does those things shall live by them'. This is a clear statement. There is no mystery or obscurity about it. You need not go to the universities and earn a degree of D.D. in order to understand this declaration: it is as plain as words can make it. If you wish to be saved by the law you must do its

²⁰ See my *Assurance*.

²¹ See my 'Words Have Power'.

commands and you shall live...²² It will not suffice for you to learn those commands by heart, or to write them up in your churches, or to read them over and say: 'Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law': all that may be well enough, but it is not to the point. If you are to be saved by the commandments you must do them: that is clear. Moses does not allow any person to dream that under the law he can be saved in any other way than by perfect obedience thereto. 'For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified'. Whatever it is that God has commanded, you must do; whatever he forbids, you must avoid; for by such obedience alone can you live.

Mark you, Moses does not tone down the law to suit our fallen state, or talk of our doing our best and God's being satisfied with our imperfect obedience. No, he says only: 'He that does those things shall live by them'. He demands perfect and entire obedience, if life is to come of it. He does not say that if you have broken the law you may still live by some other means. No, if the law is once broken it is all over with you as to salvation thereby: one single fault takes away the possibility of your ever being justified by the law. 'He that does those things'; that is, always, without exception, with all his heart and soul and strength – 'he shall live by them'; but nobody else. Be he Jew or be he Gentile, his only righteousness by law must come through the doing of the law.

Spurgeon then turned to the gospel, the new covenant:

Now observe, first, that the gospel claims to be like the law in its clearness. Moses claimed for the law which God had given to the people through him that it was clear, and within the range of their knowledge and understanding. I will read his exact words to you. Turn to Deuteronomy 30:11. 'For this commandment which I command you this day, it is not hidden from you, neither is it far off...'. Now Paul here very adroitly takes these words out of the mouth of Moses, alters them somewhat, and as good as says: 'It was the boast of the law that it was clear, known, and accessible to the people; but much more is this the glory of the gospel'. Did not I show you just now that when Moses spoke he did not mystify the matter, but put it plainly: 'The man that does those things shall live by

²² Spurgeon spoke of the ten commandments, but the law had over 600!

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them'. So also the gospel by no means involves itself in obscurity, but says: 'Believe and live', quite as distinctly as Moses said: 'Do and live'. Here you have it: 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved'...

I want to call your special attention to the fact that Paul borrows the words of Moses; for his intent was the ending of all fears. No man among us doubts that if he had performed the law of God the Lord would give him life; but it is equally certain that if we have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ we have eternal life. No trembling sinner doubts but that by the breaking of the law we are condemned: be you equally sure of it, that by not believing you are condemned. As no keeper of the law would have been lost on any ground whatever, so no believer in Christ shall be lost on any ground whatever; as no breaker of the law could escape punishment, so no unbeliever in Christ can be saved. The gospel states its message as clearly as the law. As positively as the law utters its promise and threat, so positively and unalterably does the gospel deliver its decree. The believer in Jesus shall be saved because he is a believer; and Christ's veracity is staked thereon: 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believes on me has everlasting life'.²³

And let Isaac Watts, who based his hymn on Hebrews 12:18-24, remind us all of the contrast between the two covenants, the old and the new:

*Curs'd be the man, for ever curs'd,
That does one wilful sin commit;
Death and damnation for the first,
Without relief, and infinite.*

*Thus Sinai roars, and round the earth
Thunder, and fire, and vengeance flings;
But Jesus, your dear gasping breath
And Calvary, say gentler things:*

*'Pardon and grace, and boundless love,
Streaming along a Saviour's blood;
And life, and joy, and crowns above,
Obtained by a dear bleeding God'.*

²³ Spurgeon sermon 1700. I commend the entire sermon to your attention.

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*Hark! How he prays (the charming sound
Dwells on his dying lips): 'Forgive!'
And every groan and gaping wound
Cries: 'Father, let the rebels live!'*

*Go, you that rest upon the law,
And toil and seek salvation there,
Look to the flame that Moses saw,
And shrink, and tremble, and despair.*

*But I'll retire beneath the cross;
Saviour, at your dear feet I'll lie!
And the keen sword that justice draws,
Flaming and red, shall pass me by.*

And that, reader, is my hope for all of us, including you.

The Believer and the Law of Christ in Deuteronomy 30, Romans 10?

Please note the question mark. It is all important.

This article stems directly from my ‘Peter Masters’ Muddle over the Covenants, Part 2’. As I was completing that piece, someone posted a comment on a Facebook thread of mine, a comment with which I strongly disagreed. Although in several of my works¹ I had addressed the fundamental issue my correspondent was raising, I knew I had to deal with its particular twist in that Facebook comment.

The work I was completing – the second part of my response to Masters – was concerned with the latter’s mistaken view that in Deuteronomy 29 – 30 Moses was setting out the new covenant. He was not. Rather, in face of his approaching death, and Israel’s entrance into the land, Moses was exhorting Israel on the basis of the Sinai covenant. These two chapters speak of the works covenant, the law covenant for Israel. Masters, however, pressed his claim – that Moses was setting out the new covenant – on the basis of Paul’s use of Deuteronomy 30:11-14 in Romans 10:6-8. Now, it is true that in Romans 9:30 – 10:13 Paul is clearly setting out the new-covenant doctrine of justification by faith as opposed to the old-covenant doctrine of justification by works, yes, and it is also true that he turned to Deuteronomy, but do not miss my careful, deliberate, ‘Paul’s use of Deuteronomy’. For Masters to make his case, he has to show that Paul directly quotes Moses because Moses was teaching the very doctrine that Paul himself is now teaching; namely, justification by faith. But Paul does not do what Masters wanted, for the simple reason that Moses was not teaching justification by faith, but justification by law. The truth is, Paul accommodates Moses’ words, and uses them – uses

¹ See my *Believers*, in particular.

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them, I stress – to make his own point. Let me set out the relevant argument from my article to make all this clear.

When he deals with justification in Romans 10, Paul turns to Deuteronomy 30. This is highly significant. I refer to:

Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. But the righteousness based on faith says: ‘Do not say in your heart, “Who will ascend into heaven?”’ (that is, to bring Christ down) ‘or “Who will descend into the abyss?”’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says: ‘Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame’. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’ (Rom. 10:4-13).

Homing in, the essential passage, in which Paul draws on Deuteronomy 30, is this:

But the righteousness based on faith says: ‘Do not say in your heart, “Who will ascend into heaven?”’ (that is, to bring Christ down) ‘or “Who will descend into the abyss?”’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim)...

Let us take it slowly. When Paul speaks of ‘the righteousness of faith’, he is clearly referring to the gospel, justification by faith. And he is contrasting that with attempted justification by the law (Rom. 10:5), which is futile, impossible to any sinner (Rom. 7:10; 9:30 – 10:3). So, in prosecuting his argument, in expounding the gospel, Paul turns to Deuteronomy 30:12-14. Does this mean that in Deuteronomy 29 – 30 Moses, himself, was setting out the gospel, the new covenant, justification by faith? Is this what Paul is telling us? Not at all! Notice what Paul

does not do. He does not *quote* Deuteronomy 30; he *accommodates* it to suit his purpose. There is a big difference. He does not say: ‘As Moses said, as Moses made clear, as Moses declared to Israel...’. I am not nit-picking. I am being precise.²

I am not alone in making this point. Albert Barnes:

Paul regards this [passage in Deuteronomy 30] as appropriately describing the language of Christian faith; but [he uses the passage] without affirming that Moses himself had any reference in the passage to the faith of the gospel.

M.R.Vincent:

The quotation in Romans 10:6-8 is a *free citation* from Deuteronomy 30:11-14. Paul recognises [something he can adapt]³ in Moses’ words, and thus changes the original expressions so as to apply them to the Christian faith-system. His object in the change is indicated by the explanatory words which he adds. He does not formally declare that Moses describes the righteousness of faith in these words, but *appropriates* the words of Moses, putting them into the mouth of the personified faith-righteousness.⁴

C.H.Spurgeon:

I want to call your special attention to the fact that Paul *borrow*s the words of Moses.⁵

Yes, Paul finds Moses’ words ‘appropriate’, he makes ‘a free citation’ of them, he ‘appropriates’ them, ‘borrows’ them. That is as much as can be said about Paul’s use of Deuteronomy 30 in Romans 10. One thing is certain. Paul does not quote Moses to

² Another nickname for ‘Puritan’ was ‘Precisionist’. When John Rogers was asked why he was so precise, he replied that he served a precise God. See my *Battle*.

³ Vincent had ‘a secondary meaning’. This is too strong.

⁴ Emphasis mine.

⁵ Spurgeon sermon 1700, emphasis mine.

support what he is saying about justification by faith, on the grounds that this is what Moses taught.

Let me summarise what is happening in Romans 10:

1. Paul uses the words of Deuteronomy 30 merely as a vehicle to set out his own doctrine. We must also remember that he loves wordplay.⁶ Fascinated by language, and skilful at using language to make a point, he calls on that ability here. Most definitely, he is not saying that Moses taught justification by faith. Moses does not teach it in Deuteronomy 30. Paul is not saying he did, nor is he implying it. It is impossible to infer it. The apostle is simply using Moses' words for his own purpose. Masters' far-reaching claim on this passage is preposterous.

2. Moreover, in accommodating Moses' words, Paul makes a highly significant change.⁷ Moses said:

For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say: 'Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring **it** to us, that we may hear **it** and **do it**?' Neither is **it** beyond the sea, that you should say: 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring **it** to us, that we may hear **it** and **do it**?' But the word is very near you. **It** is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can **do it**.

In his free use of Moses' words, Paul said:

But the righteousness based on faith says: 'Do not say in your heart, "Who will ascend into heaven?"' (that is, to bring **Christ** down) 'or "Who will descend into the abyss?"' (that is, to bring **Christ** up from the dead). But what does it say? 'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart' (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart

⁶ In addition to Gal. 3:24 with 5:18, see Rom. 8:2-4; 9:6; 1 Cor. 9:19-23; 11:3-16; Gal. 6:2,16; Phil. 3:3; 2 Thess. 3:11 (NIV); Philem. 10-11.

⁷ I am indebted to George Platt of Highgate Baptist church for this vital observation.

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one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

Moses was speaking about 'it' – God's commandment, God's law – which Israel had to 'do'. Paul is speaking about 'Christ' with no talk of 'do'. These are momentous changes. They alter the whole thrust of the passage. Moses was speaking of obedience to law. Paul is speaking of Christ. And it is all about justification and nothing but justification. And as he goes on to say, the sinner has to believe – trust – Christ for righteousness. This is the apostle's teaching in this very passage, Roman 10:4-5, the culmination of Romans 3:21 – 8:39. Christ has done the necessary doing, having come under the law, he kept it, thereby earning righteousness for his people, and, by his triumphant death, accomplished their redemption. So that, as Paul puts it: 'Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes' (Rom. 10:4). And by 'end', *telos*, Paul means the end, the goal, the purpose and the terminus of the law. The law foreshadowed, pictured Christ, and Christ has rendered the shadow-covenant obsolete by fulfilling it. He himself, he and his work, are the reality of the shadows.

And so on. I said much more than this in my 'Peter Masters' Muddle over the Covenants, Part 2', but I leave it there; we have reached the relevant point.

And what is that point? As you can see Paul, 'replaces' Moses' use of 'law' with his own use of 'Christ', and he 'replaces' Moses' 'doing' with 'faith' or 'trust'. Moreover, it is all, from start to finish, to do with the justification of the sinner. Under the old covenant, justification was by works, by obedience to law (which was impossible); under the new covenant, justification is by faith in Christ. So far so good. But...

At this point I need to fill in the background. As I have explained, in several works I have engaged with those new-covenant theologians who argue that the believer is under no law. I disagree very strongly with them, and have said so in no uncertain terms. One of the issues which cluster round this is their claim that Christ himself is the law of Christ. Now, I readily agree that the 'the law of Christ', as a phrase, appears

only once in Scripture (Gal. 6:2), but it is, as I have argued, also present in 1 Corinthians 9:20-21. Even so, I grant that the phrase is rare in Scripture. Having allowed that, it is, none the less, a scriptural phrase, let us not forget! But what is this ‘law of Christ’? As I have confessed,⁸ while this may appear a simple question, it is far from simple to answer it in specific detail. But this is not a weakness. Rather, it marks one of the glorious differences which make the new covenant better or superior to the old (Heb. 7:18-19,22; 8:6-13).

Is Christ the believer’s law? In some sense, yes, but... while I myself have argued that Christ himself is the believer’s law,⁹ the law of Christ also involves a written law for the believer – the whole of Scripture (John 17:17; 2 Tim. 3:16-17) as seen and nuanced through Christ by his apostles, especially passages such as, for instance, Matthew 5 – 7 and John 12:48 – 16:33 fleshed out by the apostles in the post-Pentecost Scriptures in accordance with Christ’s promise (John 15:16-17;16:12-15).¹⁰ I refute the view that Christ himself has replaced the concept of law for the believer. And although I vigorously proclaim the undoubted truth that the believer has the Spirit to enable and motivate him to submit to Christ, I proclaim with equal vigour that the believer’s submission to Christ involves determined obedience to the external Scriptures.

That is the background.

It is now time to look at the Facebook post that stirred me to write this article. Let me quote the relevant words my correspondent posted:

⁸ See my *Christ*.

⁹ See my ‘The Law of Christ Is Christ Himself’; ‘Christ the Covenant?’

¹⁰ See my *Christ, Believers*.

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Paul... identified the singular law-commandment [given by Christ to believers (John 13:34)]¹¹ as having fulfilment. Not as new laws, but as the person of Jesus Christ. See how he interprets Deuteronomy 30:11-14 very clearly in Romans 10:5-13. The law commandment has been replaced by Jesus... Watch how Paul explicitly interprets the law word, the commandment of Deuteronomy, when he quotes it: 'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved' (Rom 10:8-9). Jesus is our new law... written on our hearts!

This can be disposed of very quickly.

For a start, as I have shown, Paul did not *quote* Moses; he *used* his words, *accommodated* them, *appropriated* them, *borrowed* them, and did so for his own very different purpose. He did not *interpret* Moses' use of 'law', let alone *explicitly interpret* it. He uses Moses' words as a vehicle to contrast attempted justification by works with justification by faith.

And that is the point! From Romans 9:30, Paul has been concerned with justification, *and nothing else*. To talk, as my correspondent does, of 'the singular law commandment [given by Christ to believers (John 13:34)] as having fulfilment', asserting that that is what Paul is teaching in Romans 10, means he (that is, my correspondent) is reading his presupposition into the text, and then reading it out – pure eisegesis. To claim that Paul is teaching that Christ in the heart – with nothing external, you see – is the believer's law, is foreign to the passage. (More, it is foreign to Scripture). Paul is saying nothing of the sort! There's not a word about it! The Romans passage speaks of the unbeliever wanting justification. He has a choice of two ways. He can try to be justified by works, by perfect obedience to the law. That way, he is doomed to failure. Or he can trust the perfect person and work of Christ, his blood sacrifice at Calvary, and receive the imputation of Christ's righteousness – his

¹¹ As I have explained elsewhere, this one new commandment is an envelope for all Christ's commands, including those issued by the apostles. See my 'One Command or Many in One?'

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perfect obedience to the law – and be at once and forever justified, beyond condemnation or even accusation (Rom. 8:1,33-34). This is what Romans 10 is about. It is not remotely about what my correspondent alleged:

What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written: ‘Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame’. Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. But the righteousness based on faith says: ‘Do not say in your heart, “Who will ascend into heaven?”’ (that is, to bring Christ down) ‘or “Who will descend into the abyss?”’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says: ‘Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame’. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’ (Rom. 9:30 – 10:13).

Neither passage, Deuteronomy 30 or Romans 10, has anything to do with the believer and the law of Christ in his (the believer’s) Christian experience following conversion. Such a thing is not in Paul’s purview at all. To foist such a view on the passage, and then try to draw it out, is a totally unwarranted imposition on the text. Paul is not talking about a believer’s

progressive sanctification here. He is not saying the law and Christ are equivalents for believers. He is not saying that in the new covenant the law of Christ is Christ himself in the sense that this means there are no written commands which the believer has to obey. Paul is not conflating Christ and law. These are vital negatives.

So, that question mark in the title: it raises a question, the answer to which is a resounding ‘No!’

As I have said before when grappling with this issue, I have not been arguing about how many angels can squeeze onto the top of a pin. This is not a minor matter – as I have spelled out to the best of my ability in my aforesaid works. My correspondent’s mishandling of Scripture has enabled him to put forward a view which, if it catches on, will cause immense damage to believers. My hope and prayer is that God will use this little work to do something towards preventing such a calamity.

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What God Has Joined... Covenant and Law Inseparable

Let me begin with the old covenant; that is, the Mosaic covenant.

Covenant theologians take the Mosaic covenant and say that while believers are not under that covenant, nevertheless they are under the law of that covenant as their perfect rule of life. In addition, they divide the Mosaic law into three parts, say that more than 99% of it is abolished, leaving what they call ‘the moral law’, comprising the ten (or nine or nine and a half) commandments, as the believer’s perfect rule of life. I have fully documented this in my works. This, of course, is just the sort of conjuring trick or wastepaper basket covenant theologians have devised to get round plain biblical teaching.

Leaving aside, for the sake of this article, and only for the sake of this article, the tripartite division of the law, and sticking with the first point, I want to show the wrongness of trying to separate the Mosaic covenant and its law. The fact is, such a separation cannot be done biblically speaking. The Bible never allows such a practice. The Mosaic covenant and its law are intimately bound together – so much so, it is impossible to separate them. The terms ‘covenant’ and ‘law’ (or its equivalents) are almost interchangeable:

And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD... Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people... ‘Come up to me on the mountain and wait there, that I may give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction’ (Ex. 24:4,7,12).

And the LORD said to Moses: ‘Write these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel’... And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the ten commandments (Ex. 34:27-28).

You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the

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doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deut. 6:8-9; see also Deut. 11:18-20).

Take this book of the law and put it by the side of the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there for a witness against you (Deut. 31:26).

Hence the stone tablets, the book of the law, and the household and personal writing of the words of the law, were integral to the covenant.

This very point is made time and again. When Scripture speaks of the Mosaic ‘covenant’ and the Mosaic ‘law’, the two are bound together, virtually one and the same (Ex. 19:3-8; 24:4,7,12; 34:27-28; Deut. 4:13-14; 6:8-9; 9:9-17; 11:18-20; 31:26; 1 Chron. 16:15-17; 2 Chron. 34:31; Ps. 105:8-10; Isa. 24:5; Hos. 8:1; Mal. 2:8-9; Gal. 3:17-18). The Mosaic ‘covenant’ and ‘law’ cannot be divorced. So when the Reformed attempt to prise the law – at least, what they call ‘the moral law’ – away from the covenant, holding onto the rule of the law without its role in the covenant, they are acting contrary to Scripture.

Following the apostle’s example (Gal. 3:15), let us take an everyday example. If I buy a parcel of land, I have to agree to the covenant imposed on the land, and I have to keep the rule, law and ordinance integral to the covenant. I cannot pretend to keep the covenant and break its law, nor can the law be laid on me until I have agreed to the covenant. The covenant and its law are inseparable. They form but one instrument, one deed.¹ The same goes for the Mosaic covenant: the covenant and its law are inseparable.

I now want to take this a little further. Before I do, however, I need to deal with what I can only call a quibble. I assert that to try to say that ‘commandments’ do not form a ‘law’ is a quibble. If commandments do not make a law, and if a law does not consist of commandments, words have lost all meaning. More important, Scripture treats the two as virtually interchangeable. Consider:

¹ See J.C.Philpot’s illustration in my *Christ* p402.

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Now this is the commandment – the statutes and the rules [or decrees] – that the Lord your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, that you may fear the Lord your God, you and your son and your son’s son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long (Deut. 6:1-2).

According to Vine’s *Expository Dictionary*, ‘statute’ means ‘prescription, rule, law, regulation’. All four of these Hebrew words are used throughout the writings of Moses to refer to commands from God to be obeyed by Israel. Distinctions are sometimes made regarding one word from the other, yet the overall principle is one of obedience to all that the Lord commands, whether it is a general command, a prescribed law, a legal verdict, or a religious festival or ritual. Taking it for granted, then, that talking about ‘law’ is tantamount to talking about ‘commandment’, and *vice-versa*, let us go on.

Moreover, in talking about ‘sin’, ‘law’ is never far away. Sin, we know, is transgression of law (1 John 3:4).² Where there is no law, there is no transgression (Rom. 4:15). So when we are thinking about sin, we are thinking about breaking a covenant and transgressing its law.

The Mosaic covenant and law are virtually one and the same. That is my thesis. Let me demonstrate this by taking two examples from the book of Malachi. God, through the prophet, exposed the sin of the people.

First, the priests:

The lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. But you have turned aside from the way. You have caused many to stumble by your instruction. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the Lord of hosts (Mal. 2:7-8).

And then the husbands:

² See my *Believers* for my arguments refuting those who do not like this translation.

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The Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant... And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. 'For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the Lord, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless' (Mal. 2:14-16).

Is it not clear enough? The priests and the husbands were breaking their respective covenants; namely, the covenant of priesthood and the covenant of marriage. That is to say, they were breaking the law, the commands of God integral to each covenant. And by their action and by their instruction, they were causing many to stumble at the law – that is encouraging lawbreaking among the Israelites.

Of the breakdown of the covenant of priesthood, Nehemiah complained of the priests that:

They have desecrated the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites (Neh. 13:39).

As Malachi said, the priests by their instruction – by life and lip – were causing the people to stumble; in other words, causing them to sin by breaking the covenant and transgressing its law. As Isaiah long before had put it:

Those who guide this people have been leading them astray (Isa. 9:16).

If I may accommodate the words of Christ (Matt. 15:6):

For the sake of your [carnality] you have made void the word of God.

And, in accordance with some manuscripts, I could have written:

For the sake of your [carnality] you have made void the law of God.

As for marriage, we know that God complains that the adulteress 'forsakes the companion of her youth and forgets the

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covenant of her God' (Prov. 2:17). And adultery certainly is a transgression of the seventh of the ten commandments. So, transgression of the marriage law is a violation of the marriage covenant. The two, covenant and law, are intimately connected.

So what? So much for the Jews and the old covenant! The Mosaic covenant and the Mosaic law were inseparable. End of story!

Oh? So this is how we are treat the Bible? All the above shows the Mosaic covenant and its law were inseparable, and further shows how carnal the Jews were, and how draconian and killing the old covenant was – and that's all? A mere historical catastrophe? Nothing more, nothing less?

True enough, the old covenant was a killing covenant, 'the ministry of death' (2 Cor. 3:7), 'the ministry of condemnation' (2 Cor. 3:9); the law certainly brought wrath (Rom. 4:15), and death with it (Rom. 7:5), and a curse to all under it (Gal. 3:10). Of that there is no doubt!

But this is not the point I want to make here. Rather, I am trying to show the connection between – the inseparability of – the old covenant and the Mosaic law, the commandments of God to Israel though Moses. All I am saying is that a covenant and its law cannot be divided.³ Breaking the covenant was breaking the law; disobedience to the commandment was to break the covenant. That is the point.

I now want to take this a little further. Although I have been confining my remarks to the Mosaic covenant, the principle goes far wider than that. Indeed, as we have seen, Malachi complained of transgression of the marriage covenant. And this is highly suggestive. It suggests that the principle applies to every covenant – not merely the Mosaic. Covenant and law cannot be divided, whatever the covenant. And so we find it in Scripture. Covenants have their commandments or laws, and

³ Take the covenant made between David and Jonathan. It had its conditions and rules as well as promises, rules – law – which had to be kept (1 Sam. 18:1-4; 20:1-23,42; 23:15-18; 2 Sam. 9:1,7; 21:7).

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they cannot be divided. The marriage covenant and its law went hand in hand.

Take the Noahic covenant (Gen. 9). This covenant had glorious promises, but also contained commandments: man had to be fruitful, not to eat blood, not to shed blood.

The Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 12, 15 and 17). This covenant had glorious promises, but also contained commandments: Abraham had to leave his paganism, he had 'to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice' (Gen. 18:19), he had to obey God's word (Gen. 22:16-18). God was explicit:

I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly... You shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep... Any uncircumcised male... shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant (Gen. 17:1-2,9-10,14).

Take the Davidic covenant (2 Sam. 7). It is often said that the Davidic covenant was unconditional. Not so! This covenant had glorious promises, but also contained commandments: David and his sons had to walk before God and obey his commandments. As David, when he was dying, charged Solomon:

Keep the charge of the Lord your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his rules, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn, that the Lord may establish his word that he spoke concerning me, saying: 'If your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel' (1 Kings 2:3-4).

Do not miss the 'if'. As the psalmist records:

The Lord swore to David a sure oath from which he will not turn back: 'One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne. If your sons keep my covenant and my testimonies that I shall teach them, their sons also forever shall sit on your throne' (Ps. 132:11-12).

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Do not miss the 'if'. And as God himself charged Solomon:

If you will walk before me, as David your father walked, with integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you, and keeping my statutes and my rules, then I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father, saying: 'You shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel'. But if you turn aside from following me, you or your children, and do not keep my commandments and my statutes that I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land that I have given them, and the house that I have consecrated for my name I will cast out of my sight, and Israel will become a proverb and a byword among all peoples. And this house will become a heap of ruins. Everyone passing by it will be astonished and will hiss, and they will say: 'Why has the Lord done thus to this land and to this house?' Then they will say, 'Because they abandoned the Lord their God who brought their fathers out of the land of Egypt and laid hold on other gods and worshipped them and served them. Therefore the Lord has brought all this disaster on them' (1 Kings 9:4-9).

Grievously, Solomon failed to keep the covenant, and so the Lord carried out his word:

Since this has been your practice and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant. Yet for the sake of David your father I will not do it in your days, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son. However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son, for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem that I have chosen (1 Kings 11:11-13).

Even as God was carrying out his judgment, God gave his promise to Jeroboam son of Nebat:

If you will listen to all that I command you, and will walk in my ways, and do what is right in my eyes by keeping my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did, I will be with you and will build you a sure house, as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you (1 Kings 11:38).

Note the 'if'. Alas, Jeroboam sinned, broke the covenant, did not keep the law, and from then on the phrase 'Jeroboam son of

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Nebat' became a byword for sin and covenant breaking. After the division of the kingdom, a few kings of Judah were more righteous than others, but no king in Israel was ever righteous. In due time, of course, great David's greater Son (to adopt the poetic language of Isaac Watts) came into the world to fulfil the Mosaic covenant and bring the Davidic covenant to its culmination (Jer. 23:5-6; 33:21,25-26), doing so by obeying the law in every respect and fulfilling it (Matt. 5:17-18; Rom. 10:4; Heb. 8:13; 10:7) in accordance with David's prophecy (Ps. 40:7-8).

I have been speaking about the old covenant and its law, the Mosaic law, and about the Noahic, Abrahamic, Davidic and marriage covenants, and their laws.⁴ And in each case the principle of inseparability applies – a covenant and its law cannot be separated.

Now, are we to believe that this principle – which applied to every covenant in the Old Testament – has no relevance to us in the days of the new covenant? Of course not! The principle applies to the new covenant and its law. In particular, the old covenant had the Mosaic law; the new covenant has Christ's law. In both cases, the covenant and its law are inseparable.

That the new covenant is a new covenant, a covenant unlike the old covenant, is clear (Jer. 31:31-32; Heb. 8:8-9).⁵ We are talking about new wine in new wineskins (Matt. 9:17). Yes, all that is true. But, as I will now show, that same prophecy in Jeremiah spoke of the law of the new covenant (Jer. 31:33). Oh yes, the new covenant has its law; a new law, to be sure, but it has its law! As I say, the prophets foretold that it would have its law:

⁴ See my *Redemption*.

⁵ For much more on this, see my *Christ*.

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The Lord is our Judge; the Lord is our Lawgiver;
the Lord is our King; he will save us (Isa. 33:22).⁶

Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying: 'Know the Lord', for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jer. 31:31-34).

That this prophecy spoke of the coming of the new covenant, no-one can doubt (Heb. 8:6-13; 10:14-18).

The prophet Ezekiel:

And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God (Ezek. 11:19-20).

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules (Ezek. 36:25-27).

Thus the prophets predicted the new covenant with its full panoply of law and commandments.

And the apostle – in the days of the new covenant – was not shy of talking about being under the law of God:

⁶ I take this to be a prophecy of the new covenant. See my 'Thoughts on Isaiah 33:22'.

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For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all [men], that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings (1 Cor. 9:19-23, ESV).

Let me quote the pertinent words in other versions:

I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law (NIV).
Not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ (NASB).
Under the law to Christ (AV).

I am well aware of the escape routes which some use to avoid that which, according to virtually all the major versions, is translated 'under the law of or to Christ', but as I have argued elsewhere,⁷ the Greek – being 'in-lawed' to Christ – makes the point even stronger than the use of 'under'.

The truth is, Paul was not reticent about using the phrase 'the law of Christ' in connection with the new covenant (Gal. 6:2).

And when James spoke of 'the perfect law, the law of liberty' (Jas. 1:25), 'the royal law' (Jas. 2:8), and commanded believers to 'speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty' (Jas. 2:12), I have no doubt he was referring to the law of the new covenant. As James went on to declare:

Do not speak evil against one another, brothers [or brothers and sisters]. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbour? (Jas. 4:11-12).

Be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that

⁷ See my *Believers*.

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you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door (Jas. 5:8-9).

Oh yes, the new covenant has its law. See it spelled out, for instance, in Matthew 5 – 7, John 12:48 – 16:33, later fleshed out by the apostles in the post-Pentecost Scriptures in accordance with Christ's promise (John 15:16-17;16:12-15). See also Matthew 28:18-20.

Consider the series of commandments within Christ's final discourse before his crucifixion:

You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you... If you love me, you will keep my commandments... Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me... Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me... Abide in me... If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you... These things I command you, so that you will love one another (John 13:13-15; 14:15,21,24; 15:4,10-14,17).

If this is not the law of the new covenant, I should like to know what it is.

I say that the covenant/law principle applies in the New as well as the Old Testament. The covenants are different, the laws are different, but the inseparability principle abides.

On what grounds do I assert this? Well, on what grounds can it be denied? Let me deal with this by asking some questions: Do we not take it as a basic, if unwritten, principle that we can only understand the New Testament by grasping the Old? Is the God of the Old Testament not the God of the New? Has he changed? If the principle of the inseparability of a covenant and its law does not apply to the new covenant, I for one would

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expect to find this made very clear in the New Testament. But I do not find it written there at all! Rather, I do read the following, first in the Old Testament:

I the Lord do not change (Mal. 3:6).

Then, in the New, God is described as:

...the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change (Jas. 1:17).

Others must speak for themselves, but I find this conclusive. I am utterly convinced that the new covenant has its law, and that the two cannot be separated. God has joined them together. And what God has joined together, let no man try to put asunder.

Digressing slightly, but in order to further illustrate the point, we know that some want the Christian ethic without the gospel. It cannot be done. What God has joined together... According to Romans 7:4-6, there is no possibility of anyone living a godly life unless he or she is in union with Christ by faith. Consequently, to talk of the Christian ethic without the glories of the new covenant is utter madness.

So it is wrong to try to talk about the new covenant, and deny its law, or try to drive a wedge between the two. The principle that has run thus far throughout Scripture, runs here too. Covenant and law cannot be separated. To break the covenant is to break its law. To transgress its law is to break the covenant. And this applies to both old and new covenants.

I draw three conclusions.

1. I believe that what I have set out answers those who claim that believers are under the Mosaic law but not its covenant. The truth is, the two cannot be separated. Above all, believers have died to both the Mosaic covenant and its law, and are under neither.

2. I believe that what I have set out answers those who say that believers are in the new covenant but under no law. Believers are in the new covenant, and this inevitably means they are under the law of Christ.

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3. I believe that what I have set out answers those who dismiss new-covenant theology as antinomianism. Such an accusation is a travesty of the truth. How can a man be justly accused of antinomianism when he argues vigorously that believers are under the law of Christ?

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Thoughts on James 4:11-12

The passage reads:

Do not speak evil against one another, brothers [or brothers and sisters]. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbour?

Let us clear the decks. We know that James is writing to believers – Jewish believers, yes (Jas. 1:1) – but, most definitely, believers (Jas. 1:3; 2:1). They had been regenerated (Jas. 1:18), they were brother and sisters; James addresses them as such no less than fifteen times in his relatively short book (Jas. 1:2,16,19; 2:1,5,14; 3:1,10,12; 4:11; 5:7,9,10,12,19), even using the term ‘beloved brothers’ on occasion. They were justified by faith (Jas. 2:24), indwelt by the Spirit (Jas. 4:5),¹ church members (Jas. 1:9;² 2:1-2;³ 5:14), called or known by the name of Christ (Jas. 2:7), and were awaiting the Lord’s return (Jas. 5:7-9). Oh yes, they were believers.

So, then, James, addressing fellow-believers, tells them:

Do not speak evil against one another, brothers [or brothers and sisters]. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbour?

He virtually repeats his words a little later:

¹ Depending on ‘Spirit’ or ‘spirit’. Opinion seems divided.

² See NASB margin.

³ Synagogue here means assembly.

Thoughts on James 4:11-12

Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door (Jas. 5:9).

It is not my intention to expound these verses. As my title makes clear, in this very short article I am simply concerned with jotting down some ‘thoughts’ on James 4:11-12.

I notice that James talks to believers about ‘the law’ and ‘the Lawgiver’. Now I find this very interesting, very interesting indeed. More, I think it highly significant. I say this because some new-covenant theologians assert that believers are under no law at all. They want to avoid talk of ‘law’ with regard to believers.⁴ *But James has no such inhibition.*

Furthermore, it is also clear that James expects – he demands – that his readers – believers – keep the law in question. The passage pulsates with its sense of the believer’s accountability, duty, responsibility.

Above all, James lets his readers – believers – know that if they don’t keep the law in question, they are guilty of acting as a judge on that law, and that will get them into hot water! They need to bear in mind the One who gave the law and the fact that they are answerable to him. That is James’ unequivocal and repeated message in James 4 and 5. I know believers will never be condemned (Rom. 8:1,33-34). Even so, they will have to give an account, as Romans 14:12 tells us. Indeed, let me quote that passage in full; the parallel with James 4:11-12 is unmissable:

Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; for it is written: ‘As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God’. So then each of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother (Rom. 14:9-13; see also Matt. 16:27).

⁴ I will not stop to deal with that here since I have done so at length in several works. See, for instance, my *Believers; Liberty*; ‘Stop Press! No Law for Believers! Really?’

And we know how probing that judgment will be; it will take account of things down to 'every careless word' (Matt. 12:36).

Serious stuff!

Wait a minute! The believer has died to the law of Moses (Rom. 7:4-6). He is not under the law of Moses (Rom. 6:14).⁵ And yet, here is James, speaking so highly of law when writing to believers! How can this be?

Because it is the theology of the new covenant; that is, it is scriptural. True, the believer is not under the law of Moses. That is certain. True, he will never be condemned. But as James makes abundantly plain, the believer most definitely is under law, he has a Lawgiver, and he is answerable to his Lawgiver, the One who is also his Judge as well as his Saviour (Jas. 4:12; 5:9). The question is: What law is this? For the reasons I have just given, it cannot be the law of Moses.

Objection! But James is clearly quoting the law of Moses! Here is his source:

You shall not oppress your neighbour or rob him. The wages of a hired worker shall not remain with you all night until the morning. You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the Lord. You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbour. You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life of your neighbour: I am the Lord. You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbour, lest you incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord (Lev. 19:13-18).

This is a most interesting objection. Let me deal with it.

First of all, James is not *quoting* Leviticus 19; he is *alluding* to it. I am not nit-picking; I am sticking to the facts. *And this particular fact is very important.* The apostles time and again

⁵ See the previous note for references to find my arguments.

allude to the law of Moses, but they never quote it as a binding rule for the believer, but always as a paradigm or illustration of the point they are making.⁶ This is precisely what James is doing here. He is not imposing the law of Moses on believers. He is alluding to it.

What is more, let me take the objection back to the objector. I think I would be right to say that you are one of those who, with Calvin, claim that the so-called moral law is the perfect rule of life for the believer. Am I right? You also say, do you not, that all the rest of the more than 600 laws of Moses have been abolished by Christ, and are not part of the believer's rule. Very well. May I suggest that you try that argument on James' allusion to Leviticus? Leviticus 19 is not part of the so-called moral law, is it? So why, if you are right, does James allude to it? If, however, you insist that Leviticus 19 is binding on the believer as his perfect rule, what do you make of Leviticus 19:5-10, 19-25, and so on? Do you regard those laws as binding on the believer? Let me hasten to add that I treat those verses – as all the Mosaic commands – in precisely the same way as I do the passage in question; namely, as paradigms, nuanced by Christ and his apostles, for my behaviour as a believer. But you, if you are consistent, must insist on them as binding. Do you?

But, above all, the objection misses the point about Leviticus 19:18 altogether. *And it is a very **big point!*** Paul quotes the verse when he writes to the Galatians (Gal. 5:13). Why? Why this emphasis upon the 'love your neighbour' of Leviticus 19:18? This is noteworthy. Whereas before Christ's use of it, and Paul wrote his letters to the churches, there are no explicit references to the verse in Jewish writings, in clear contrast, in the New Testament this verse is the most frequently quoted passage from the Pentateuch (Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:14; Jas. 2:8, with an allusion here in Jas. 4:11-12). This can only mean that the emphasis on Leviticus 19:18 is particularly and specially a gospel or new-covenant emphasis, and must have come from Christ himself, who first used it in this way (Matt. 5:43; 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27). I will say no more about this now, having

⁶ See my *Christ* pp279-294, 528-542; *passim*; *Believers* pp291-303.

done so at length elsewhere.⁷ But the point is that James is not imposing the Mosaic law on believers. He is making a gospel – that is, a new-covenant – allusion to it.

So, I repeat, James cannot be saying that the believer’s law is the law of Moses.⁸

So what law is it? James does not tell us! I am bound to say that it strikes me that he takes it for granted! Leaving that to one side, the fact is, he does not, in so many words, tell us which law he is speaking about.

But all is not lost! Let me re-phrase my question: *Whose* law is it? James gives us more than enough information to answer *that* question. The believer’s Lawgiver is his Judge: ‘There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, he who is able to save and to destroy’. And whoever that person is, we are talking about his law.

Can there be any doubt who this Lawgiver and Judge is? The Lord Jesus Christ lays it on the line:

The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honour the Son, just as they honour the Father... He has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man (John 5:22-23,27).

Paul states it plainly:

⁷ See my *Christ* p285; *passim*; *Believers* pp96-106.

⁸ Of course, those who follow the Puritans and stretch the ten commandments to include everything from Genesis to Revelation and beyond, are not fazed by this. They think that every member of the human race from Adam to the end of time has been, is, and will be under the Mosaic law, usually whittled down to the so-called moral law. Indeed, some think angels are under it. Some think the Mosaic law will rule in eternity. It would not surprise me if they thought Martians are under it! And all the time, Scripture plainly tells us that the Mosaic law was introduced 430 years after the promise to Abraham (Gal. 3:17), was given to Israel only (Deut. 4:1 – 5:33; 7:8-12; Ps. 147:19-20; Rom. 2:12-14; 9:4; 1 Cor. 9:20-21), and was designed to last only until the coming of Christ, the Seed promised to Abraham (Gal. 3:16-25), who fulfilled it (Matt. 5:17-18) and thus rendered it obsolete (Rom. 10:4; 2 Cor. 3:6-11; Heb. 8:13).

Thoughts on James 4:11-12

God... has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead (Acts 17:30-31).

The believer's Lawgiver is Christ.⁹ Consequently, it can only be the law of Christ that James is talking about.

Let me sum up. The believer is not under the law of Moses, but he is under law, he is under a Lawgiver. The context makes it clear that that Lawgiver is Christ. The believer therefore can only be under Christ's law, the law of Christ, 'the law of liberty' of James 1:25; 2:12, 'the royal law' of James 2:8 – literally, 'the law of the King' (see NASB, margin),¹⁰ by which he will be judged (Jas. 2:12). As for Christ's law, see, for instance, Matthew 5 – 7, John 12:48 – 16:33, fleshed out by the apostles in the post-Pentecost Scriptures in accordance with Christ's promise (John 15:16-17; 16:12-15).

In short, although the believer is not under the law of Moses, he is not law-less; he is under the law of Christ. And he is obligated to keep it. The believer really is free – in particular, set free from sin (Rom. 6:22), and free from the law of Moses (Gal. 5:1), having died to it (Rom. 7:4-6). But liberty is not licence. There is a rule for believers to live by. They are 'under law towards Christ', that 'perfect law of liberty'. They are ruled by 'the law of Christ', following 'this rule', 'walk[ing] by the same rule', having taken Christ's 'easy yoke', being taught by the Spirit 'to observe all things' which Christ commanded (Matt. 11:28-30; 28:20; 1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2,16; Phil. 3:16; Jas. 1:25; 2:12). Obedience to that law is essential. Believers are accountable to their Lawgiver and Judge. The law of Christ is

⁹ Ultimately the LORD is the lawgiver (Isa. 33:22). The law of God for Israel was the law of Moses; the law of God for the believer is the law of Christ. See my article on Isa. 33:22.

¹⁰ Christ is the believer's King (Ps. 2:6; John 18:33-37; Acts 17:7; 1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 19:16, and so on).

Thoughts on James 4:11-12

more penetrating than the law of Moses.¹¹ The book of Hebrews, which speaks so powerfully of the new covenant, also contains the most serious warnings, and the writer issues those warnings in comparison with – rather, in contrast to – the old covenant. He stresses ‘how much more’ serious is disobedience to Christ than Moses (Heb. 9:14; 12:25). See Hebrews 2:1-3; 3:12-14; 4:1,11; 6:4-8; 10:26-39; 12:14-17,25-29.¹²

In conclusion, I address those new-covenant theologians who continue to insist that the believer is free of all law. I hope this brief look at James 4:11-12 will do something to cause you to think again. In addition, I hope this short article will help to explode that ill-informed prejudice which moves not a few to dismiss new-covenant theology as fuzzy and antinomian, and, I might add, usually do so without having given it serious thought. As John G.Reisinger said, when openly challenging R.C.Sproul over the issue:

Dr Sproul, please explain why your magazine labels new-covenant theology as antinomian when we not only affirm just as strongly as you that the Christian is not only under clear objective ethical commandments in the new covenant, but we also insist those new-covenant laws are even higher than those written on stone. How is it possible for our belief in a *higher* law to be turned into *anti* law? Your September [2002] issue of *Tabletalk* condemns us as heretics simply because we believe that our Lord Jesus Christ is a true Lawgiver in his own right and, as such, gives higher and more spiritual laws that anything Moses ever gave. Why do we deserve the odious label of ‘antinomian’ simply because we believe that Christ replaces Moses as the new Lawgiver in exactly the same way he replaces Aaron as high priest?¹³

Well?

¹¹ See my ‘The Penetrating Law of Christ’, *Believers*.

¹² See my *Christ* pp233-236.

¹³ John G.Reisinger: ‘An Open Letter to Dr R.C.Sproul’, *Sound of Grace*, Frederick, Vol.9 number 4, February 2003, p3, emphasis his.

Thoughts on James 4:11-12

Thoughts on Isaiah 24:5

Here is the verse:

The earth lies defiled under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant.

And here is the verse in its context:

Behold, the Lord will empty the earth and make it desolate, and he will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants. And it shall be, as with the people, so with the priest; as with the slave, so with his master; as with the maid, so with her mistress; as with the buyer, so with the seller; as with the lender, so with the borrower; as with the creditor, so with the debtor. The earth shall be utterly empty and utterly plundered; for the Lord has spoken this word. The earth mourns and withers; the world languishes and withers; the highest people of the earth languish. The earth lies defiled under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt; therefore the inhabitants of the earth are scorched, and few men are left (Isa. 24:1-6).

And so it goes on...

All I want to do in this article is to underline certain facts which, it seems to me, stand out in this prophecy.¹

Clearly, God through the prophet is addressing ‘the world’, ‘the earth’, ‘the inhabitants of the earth’; that is, all men without

¹ As for the ‘everlasting covenant’, this cannot be the so-called covenant of works, since that it does not exist; it is nothing but an invention of covenant theologians – see my ‘The Covenant That Never Was’. The phrase ‘everlasting covenant’ is used in regard to the Noahic covenant (Gen. 9:16), the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 17:7), the Mosaic covenant (Lev. 24:8; 1 Chron. 16:17; Ps. 105:10), the Davidic covenant (2 Sam. 23:5) and the new covenant (Heb. 13:20-21). I am not convinced Isa. 24:5 refers to any of these, but if I had to choose one, it would be the Noahic.

Thoughts on Isaiah 24:5

exception. Moreover, God is speaking graphically of his judgment upon all men, all men without exception. And this – although the word is not used – is because of sin, can only be because of sin. Because all men have sinned, because all men are sinners, God visits his wrath and condemnation on all men. This is what the verse tells us. It is as Paul explained to the Romans:

All, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: ‘None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one’... There is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:9-23).

And because all men are sinners, all men are under the wrath of God:

The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men (Rom. 1:18). [Even] you [believers] were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience – among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind (Eph. 2:1-3).

This wretched state of affairs – that all men are sinners and under the wrath of God – arises from two sources.

First, all men sinned in Adam:

Sin came into the world through one man [that is, Adam], and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned... Many died through one man’s trespass... Because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man... One trespass led to condemnation for all men (Rom. 5:12-18).
In Adam all die (1 Cor. 15:22).

Secondly, all men are actual sinners in their own right, as the passage from Romans 3 proves. Indeed, that extract could have begun at Romans 1:18.

Thoughts on Isaiah 24:5

In Isaiah 24:5, God speaks of all men without exception breaking law – literally ‘laws’: ‘The earth lies defiled under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, *violated the statutes*’. ‘Laws’ and ‘law’ here are virtually interchangeable.² What law is this? What law have all men without exception broken, and thus, as sinners, stand guilty before God?

This law cannot be the law of Moses, since God did not give that law to all men. He gave the Mosaic law uniquely to Israel (Deut. 4:1 – 5:33; 7:8-12; Ps. 147:19-20; Rom. 2:12-14; 9:4; 1 Cor. 9:20-21). It was not given to Adam. It was not given to Abraham (Gal. 3:17). It was given to Israel – and only Israel – through Moses on Mount Sinai. Yet in Romans 5:17, Paul speaks of sin in the human race – sin in all men – in terms of trespass: ‘Because of one man’s *trespass*, death reigned through that one man’ (Rom. 5:17). To trespass or transgress is to break a law:

Through the law comes knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:20).

Where there is no law there is no transgression (Rom. 4:15).

In addition, see Romans 2:1 – 3:29. Clearly, sin, law, trespass and transgression are inextricably linked in Scripture. These passages tell us that where there is no law there can be no sin – transgression being sin more precisely defined. At the very least, there can be no sin that can be objectively defined. This, it is clear, must not be confined to the Mosaic law. Why, even before Sinai, men died because of sin, their sin in Adam and their actual sin. And yet, as Paul declared:

² God foretold the new covenant: ‘I will put my *law* within them, and I will write it on their hearts’ (Jer. 31:33), and the writer to the Hebrews quoted the prophet thus: ‘I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts’ (Heb. 8:10). Whatever the explanation, there is no wedge to be driven between ‘law’ and ‘laws’. As for ‘statutes’, statutes, judgments, testimonies, commandments and law are interchangeable. See Gen. 26:5; Ex. 18:16; Lev. 26:3,46; 1 Kings 2:3; Neh. 9:34; Ezra 7:10; Jer. 44:23; and dozens more.

Thoughts on Isaiah 24:5

To be sure, sin was in the world before the law [of Moses] was given, but sin is not charged against anyone's account where there is no law (Rom. 5:13).

And as John put it:

Sin is breaking of law (1 John 3:4, Holman Christian Standard).

All this leads to one inevitable conclusion. All men are sinners because all men are law-breakers. All men, therefore, are under law.³

Adam sinned because he broke God's command – God's law to him (Gen. 3). Israel sinned by breaking God's law – the Mosaic law given to Israel. So what about pagans?

Pagans are under law:

For all who have sinned without the law [that is, the law of Moses – pagans] will also perish without the law [of Moses], and all who have sinned under the law [that is, Jews] will be judged by the law [of Moses]. For it is not the hearers of the law [of Moses] who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law [of Moses] who will be justified. For when Gentiles, who do not have the law [of Moses], by nature do what the law [of Moses] requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law [of Moses]. They show that the work of the law [of Moses] is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus (Rom. 2:12-16).

Consequently, pagans sin when they break the law of conscience (Rom. 2:12-15) and, supremely, when they refuse to obey God's command to repent and trust Christ (John 3:18-19,36; Acts 17:30).

Isaiah 24:5 is not the easiest verse in the Bible to understand. But I am convinced that it teaches us that all men are born under

³ Believers are under the law of Christ, and when they break that law they sin. For more on this, see my *Believers*.

Thoughts on Isaiah 24:5

law, and they are sinners both in Adam and because they have broken the law that they are under.

Thoughts on Isaiah 24:5

Thoughts on Isaiah 33:22

I recently published an article on this passage in James 4:

Do not speak evil against one another, brothers [or brothers and sisters]. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbour? (Jas. 4:11-12).¹

Here is the verse which I want to concentrate on in this article:

The Lord is our Judge; the Lord is our Lawgiver;
the Lord is our King; he will save us (Isa. 33:22).

The similarity between the two is unmissable. Indeed, I take the Isaiah passage to be nothing less than a prophecy of the new covenant, played out in the passage from James.

Let me say why. Isaiah had already spoken in terms which resonate with his words in Isaiah 33:22 when he had declared:

It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths'. For out of Zion shall go forth the law [or teaching], and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples... O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord (Isa. 2:2-5).

And when he had insisted:

To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn [no light] (Isa. 8:20).

¹ See my 'Thoughts on James 4:11-12'.

And so on. There are scores and scores of Isaiah passages which are quoted in the New Testament. See for instance, Isaiah 7:14; 8:14,17-18; 9:1,6; 11:10; 22:22; 28:16; 40:6; 42:1,4,6; 45:23; 52:7,11; 53:1-12; 54:1; 55:3; 59:20; 61:1; 65:1 and so on. Oh yes, the new covenant is certainly prophesied in Isaiah. We have a classic example of it to demonstrate the point. Isaiah prophesied:

All your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children (Isa. 54:13).

Which, as Jesus explained, was a new-covenant prophecy:

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the prophets: 'And they will all be taught by God'. Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me (John 6:44-45).

Of course, the prophet's words had relevance first to the Israel and Judah of his day. He was, in this respect, a preacher as well as a prophet; he was a preacher to his own people in his own time. But he was also a prophet for Israel, one who addressed the restoration after the captivity. Above all, however – and I mean, above all, speaking of the full import of the prophet's words – in keeping with Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36 (to mention but two chapters in two prophets), Isaiah was looking forward to the coming of Christ, his establishment of the new covenant, with his ultimate return in glory as Judge. Isaiah, in company with all the prophets, spoke of gospel days (1 Pet. 1:10-12).² Christ, himself – and, therefore, his covenant, the new covenant – is in all the Scriptures. Addressing the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, Christ put that beyond doubt:

Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, [Christ] interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself (Luke 24:27).

Peter, as we have seen (1 Pet. 1:10-12), certainly got the message. Furthermore, as he had declared to the Jews:

² See my *Christ* pp299-321,543-555.

Thoughts on Isaiah 33:22

All the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days (Acts 3:24).

And as he had told Cornelius and those gathered with him:

To [Christ] all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name (Acts 10:43).

And so Isaiah 33:22:

The Lord is our Judge; the Lord is our Lawgiver;
the Lord is our King; he will save us.

The issue I want to address is this: What we are to understand by ‘the law’ and ‘the Lawgiver’ in the days of the new covenant? This is a matter of the utmost significance. But can there be any doubt about it? Starting with the latter, ‘the Lawgiver’ must be God, and the ‘the law’ must be his law, ‘the law of God’. So far, so good. But it is at this point that we must take full account of the biblical contrast between the two covenants – the old, Mosaic covenant, and the superior, better, new covenant established by Christ. The old covenant had its law, the old, Mosaic law; the new covenant has its law, the new law. A covenant and its law are intimately bound together – so much so, it is impossible to separate them. Take the old covenant:

And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD... Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people... ‘Come up to me on the mountain and wait there, that I may give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction’ (Ex. 24:4,7,12).

And the LORD said to Moses: ‘Write these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel’... And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the ten commandments (Ex. 34:27-28).

You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deut. 6:8-9; see also Deut. 11:18-20).

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Take this book of the law and put it by the side of the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there for a witness against you (Deut. 31:26).³

Hence the stone tablets, the book of the law, and the household and personal writing of the words of the law, were integral to the old covenant. Much the same can be said of the new covenant and its law, with the proviso that the new covenant and its law are superior to, better than,⁴ the old:

Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying: 'Know the Lord', for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jer. 31:31-34).

And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God (Ezek. 11:19-20).

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules (Ezek. 36:25-27).

³ See also Ex. 19:3-8; 1 Chron. 16:15-17; Ps. 105:8-10; Isa. 24:5; Hos. 8:1; Mal. 2:8-9; Gal. 3:17-18.

⁴ 'Better' is the key word in Hebrews.

Thoughts on Isaiah 33:22

And we know from Hebrews what the prophets were referring to when they spoke of a superior, better, new covenant:

[The] former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God... This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant (Heb. 7:18-22).

Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. For he finds fault with them when he says: 'Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach, each one his neighbour and each one his brother, saying: "Know the Lord", for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more'. In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away (Heb. 8:6-13).

When Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying: 'This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds', then he adds: 'I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more'. Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin (Heb. 10:12-18).

As with covenant, so with law: better covenant, better law.

The question is, what is ‘the law of God’ in all this? Israel and Judah, listening to Isaiah in the days of the old covenant, would naturally think of the law of Moses. Quite right! The law of God for Israel was the law of Moses.

But in the days of the new covenant? New covenant, new law. Better covenant, better law. Let me draw attention to the relevant words: in the days of the new covenant, God’s people will have his law, but that law will be written on their hearts by the Spirit who will give them a love for it, and who will move and enable them to obey it with care and determination.⁵

So the question is, what is ‘the law of God’ in the new covenant? In other words, what is the law of God for the believer? We know it cannot be the law of Moses. The believer has died to that law (Rom. 7:4-6). He is not under it (Rom. 6:14).⁶ Consequently, the believer’s Lawgiver cannot be Moses; the believer’s law cannot be the law of Moses.

So, whose law can it be? Well, when I read passages such as these, I have no doubt as to the answer:

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers – it is to him you shall listen – just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said: ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die’. And the Lord said to me: ‘They are right in what they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him’ (Deut. 18:15-19; see Matt. 21:11; Luke 7:16; 24:19).

Peter, addressing the Jews, quoted Moses:

The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you.

⁵ Not perfectly, alas, hence the need for progressive sanctification.

⁶ I have set out my arguments in many works. See, in particular, my *Christ*.

Thoughts on Isaiah 33:22

And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.

After which, he went on:

And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham: ‘And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed’. God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness (Acts 3:22-26).

I am left with only one conclusion. Although the actual phrase appears only once in Scripture (Gal. 6:2; but see 1 Cor. 9:20-21), we must be talking about Christ as the believer’s Lawgiver, and his law, ‘the law of Christ’, the believer’s law.

Now as we have seen from the extracts from Jeremiah and Ezekiel, in the new covenant Christ writes his law on his people’s hearts. That is, he gives his people a love of the Lawgiver – Christ – and a love for his law. More, he gives his people the Spirit to move and enable them to obey that law, and to do so with care and diligence, as well as delight.⁷

So far, so good. But the question is: Where are we to find that law? *It cannot be confined to the internal.* As Isaiah says:

To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn [no light] (Isa. 8:20).

Israel and Judah, of course, in the days of the old covenant, would go to the law of Moses – written on the tables and in the book of the law. And this, as Isaiah clearly implies, was verifiable. The prophets could – and frequently did – denounce Israel for breaking the law, the written law of God.

But what about the new covenant? According to the above passages in Isaiah, believers have a law, the law of their Lawgiver, Christ; they have to obey that law, and their obedience is verifiable. If the law of Christ, as some argue, is

⁷ Take Ps. 1:2; 119:14,16,35, and so on. David was a prophet, speaking of the believer in the days of the new covenant.

entirely inward and subjective, then there can be no possibility of any verification of obedience, with no possibility of discipline for failure. Hence, at a stroke, a massive amount of post-Pentecost Scripture has been rendered virtually otiose.⁸ Which is patent nonsense! The law of Christ, therefore, must be written externally. And that can only be Scripture. See, for instance, Matthew 5 – 7, John 12:48 – 16:33, fleshed out by the apostles in the post-Pentecost Scriptures in accordance with Christ’s promise (John 15:16-17;16:12-15). In other words, believers read Christ’s law written in Scripture. Inwardly, they have the Spirit who gives them a love for that law, and who moves and empowers them to obey it, the inward law always being calibrated by the outward. Moreover, as I have shown elsewhere,⁹ the law of Christ is more penetrating than the law of Moses (see, for instance Matt. 5:21-48).

And this is what Isaiah 8:20 is concerned with. Believers are always searching Scripture (Acts 17:11) to find the law of Christ – to know it and obey it.

John Gill, linking Isaiah 8:20 with John 5:39: ‘You search the Scriptures’ or ‘Search the Scriptures’,¹⁰ commented on the Isaiah verse:

It is a direction of Christ’s to his disciples to attend to the writings of Moses and the prophets, to search the Scriptures, as in John 5:39 and particularly what is before said in this prophecy concerning himself...

The written word... the Scriptures, and the evangelical doctrine in them, and the testimony they give concerning Christ... according to the word of God, and testimony of Jesus.

He further commented on Isaiah 33:22:

[God] has enacted wholesome laws for his church, writes them on [his people’s] hearts, and puts his Spirit within them, to

⁸ It would inform the believer, but not rule him as law.

⁹ See my *Christ*, ‘The Penetrating Law of Christ’.

¹⁰ Whether the mood is imperative or indicative is debateable, but the upshot is not.

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enable them to keep them. The Lord is our King, King of saints, King of Zion, made so by his Father.

And this is what C.H.Spurgeon saw in Isaiah 33:22:

And what is to be the end of it all? Our text ascribes glory to a triune God. The church is, after all her attacks, and all her salvations, to ascribe glory to the Three-in-One Jehovah. Read the verse, dear friends, 'For the Lord is our Judge. The Lord is our Lawgiver. The Lord is our King' – Three, yet One. O Lord, be you exalted! Our Father who is in heaven, you sit on the throne and you are Judge! Jesus, son of Mary, and Son of God, you, by your holy life, have set us such an example that you are our Lawgiver! And you, indwelling Spirit, you are with us, and therefore the shout of a King is in the midst of our camps.¹¹

Yes, Christ is his people's Lawgiver and King. But Christ's law is more than the example of Christ's life. There is more to the law of the new covenant than that! As Spurgeon well knew! Preaching on Isaiah 8:20, he declared:

Permit me to urge upon you the bringing of certain things 'to the law and to the testimony'... I would have you bring the ideas engendered in you by your early training, to the test of the book of God... Remember, also, to bring the preachers of the gospel to this standard... It is God's word that breaks the fetters and sets the prisoner free; it is God's word instrumentally that saves souls; and therefore let us bring everything to the touchstone. 'To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them'...

And now I charge you that are now present to read your Bibles, for one thing. Read your Bibles to know what the Bible says about you; and some of you when you turn the leaves over, will find the Bible says: 'You are in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity'. If that startles you, turn over another page, and read this verse: 'Come unto me, all you that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest'; and when you have read that, turn to another and read: 'Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord'. I pray you, put not away your Bibles till their dust condemns you; but take them out, bend your knees, seek for the Spirit of

¹¹ Spurgeon sermon 489.

Thoughts on Isaiah 33:22

divine teaching, and turn these pages with diligent search, and see if you can find there the salvation of your souls, through our Lord Jesus Christ. May the blessing of God rest upon you in so doing, through Jesus Christ. Amen.¹²

To sum up, let me remind you of the verse we have been looking at:

The Lord is our Judge; the Lord is our Lawgiver;
the Lord is our King; he will save us (Isa. 33:22).

Coupled with the other passages which have appeared in this article, we can see that the believer is under law, the law of Christ. He has the Spirit who gives him a new heart to love Christ and his law. But this inward work is calibrated by the written word, which is, therefore, the law of Christ to him. Thus, by the Spirit, the believer is careful to obey Christ's law – all that God has commanded in his word, as seen through Christ and the apostles.

I close by making two applications, expressing them negatively.

First, I do not see how anybody can maintain that the believer is not under the rule, the governance, of the law of Christ, and that this law is written in Scripture.

Secondly, I do not see how anybody can dismiss new-covenant theology – for that is what I have been setting out – as antinomianism. How can new-covenant theologians be antinomian when they assert that believers are under the law of Christ, and that that law is spelled out in all Scripture as nuanced by Christ and his apostles? What is more, how can they be antinomian when they assert, as does Scripture, that the law of Christ is more penetrating than the law of Moses?

¹² Spurgeon sermon 172. In this sermon, Spurgeon kept on urging the people to 'read their Bible'.

A Lesson from William Tyndale

In this brief article, I want to make one simple – but vital – point. I want to draw a contemporary parallel with something that happened five hundred years ago. Not an exact parallel, I hasten to add. Nevertheless, the parallel exists.

Five hundred years ago, historic – tectonic – events were underway, events which gave millions of men and women the opportunity to read the New Testament in their mother tongue, and to read it for themselves.¹ In 1516, Desiderius Erasmus produced his original Greek version of the New Testament. In 1522, Martin Luther produced his German version out of Erasmus' Greek. And, in 1526, William Tyndale did the same for the English.² Within ten years, three momentous publications! I will not set out the history here, having done so elsewhere.³ Rather, I want to concentrate on the work of William Tyndale in order to draw a very important lesson for believers today.

We know why Tyndale produced his translation. Discussions – heated, furious discussions – with papists at Little Sodbury, where he was tutor in Sir John Walsh's household, had convinced Tyndale that unless the common people – the ploughboy and his ilk – could have the Bible in English, they would never break free from Rome. Rome had kept the truth from the common man, burying it deep in vaults locked in Latin, and had buttressed their grip on the people by masking the truth with a thousand years of dogma, tradition, Councils, and all the rest. Tyndale knew that liberty for the common man, liberty by

¹ Or have it read to them.

² As for the English, nearly 150 years before, in the last quarter of the 14th century, John Wycliffe had led others to translate the Bible into Middle English out of the Latin Vulgate. Tyndale's version was from the Greek into Modern English.

³ See my *Battle*.

Jesus Christ in the gospel, even eternal salvation itself, was only possible if the common man could read the Bible for himself, unfiltered by Rome. And so he set about translating, printing and bring the precious volume – the Scriptures in the vernacular English – into England. It cost him his life – both in labour and its very existence. But he did it. Or at least, he translated the New Testament, and made a good start on the Old.

The parallel I want to draw in this article – not an exact parallel, I repeat, but even so a real parallel – is this: unless the believer reads the Bible unfettered by Reformed Confessions or covenant theology, he is very unlikely to come to the truth about the two covenants, the law and the believer. And the cost to him will be immense.⁴ This is no trivial matter. It is not to be reserved to the confines of academe. It is not to be left to those who enjoy nothing more than a theological knockabout. I am concerned for the souls of men and women, their enjoyment of Christ now, even their eternal welfare. Yes, the stakes are that high!⁵

The sad fact is, whatever the howls of disbelief, many believers do not read their Bible for themselves; they read it through the eyes of their particular Confession and their theology (or rather, in most cases, the theology handed down to them from the pulpit). And as a direct result, many are kept in ignorance of the doctrine of the covenants. Some are even scared off listening to those who have the audacity to challenge ‘received wisdom’ on the subject. And this, I say again, carries a heavy price tag for those so deprived. If only they would take their Bible and read it for themselves...

Tyndale saw the principle five hundred years ago. He wanted the people to be able to read the Bible unfiltered. He wanted men to be able to read the Bible and think for themselves, not to be told what to accept, not to be told what was what by priests.

On this matter of the two covenants and the law, I say the same. Roman control in Tyndale’s day was enforced by law and

⁴ See, for instance, my *Assurance; Infant*.

⁵ See, especially, my *Infant*.

a thousand years of tradition. But Reformed influence over – control of – men’s reading today, though far more benign, is none the less real. Don’t forget John Milton’s presbyter as priest writ large. I appeal to all: read the Bible for yourself!

On this matter of the two covenants, the believer and the law, let me suggest a brief reading list. Read Galatians. Read Hebrews. Read Romans 6, 7 and 8. Read 2 Corinthians 3. Read Philippians 3. And that’s just for starters! Read them aloud. Read them in more than one version. And let God speak to you out of his word by his Spirit, and follow him and not the theologians.

Of course, I am well aware of all the talk about treating the Confessions as ‘subsidiary standards’, and all that, but it will not wash. Time and again, I meet covenant theologians arguing, not from Scripture, but from a Confession, and hunting for proof texts to bolster their claims.⁶ No wonder – since one of the inherent faults of Confessions is that they are necessarily based on theology and rely on proof texts, proof texts which, not infrequently, have no bearing on the point being made.⁷

Contrary to how it may seem, I am not decrying Confessions. They have their place. But I am uplifting Scripture; Scripture unfiltered, that is. And while Confessions have their place, unfiltered Scripture has pride of place:

To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no light in them (Isa. 8:20).
Search the Scriptures (John 5:39).
[The Bereans] received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so (Acts 17:11).

The Bible does not say:

To the Confession and covenant theology! If they do not speak according to the Confession and covenant theology, it is because they have no light in them.
Search the Confession.

⁶ See, for instance, my ‘Misleading, Sad, Revealing: “Relevant Today” by Jeremy Brooks’; ‘No Confession? Nothing to Debate!’

⁷ See my *Infant*.

A Lesson from William Tyndale

[The Bereans] received the word with all eagerness, examining the Confession daily to see if these things were so.

So... does Tyndale speak – in this respect – to you today, speak to you across five centuries?

Tyndale was dismissed as a heretic for doing what he did, and for the reason he did it. I am not remotely in the same class, of course, but I know the sort of label that will stuck on me for writing this article. Why have I written it? I am not interested in bandying words, but I am determined to battle for the liberty of believers and the saving of sinners. That is why I say: do not let anyone lock your Bible in a cage of man's devising. Let it free! Read it for yourself, without the Confession.

C.H.Spurgeon:

It looks as though [the Bible] needed to be defended by human wisdom. Brethren, the word of the Lord can stand alone, without the propping which many are giving it. These props come down, and then our adversaries think that the book is down too. The word of God can take care of itself, and will do so if we preach it, and cease defending it. See that lion? They have caged him for his preservation; shut him up behind iron bars to secure him from his foes! See how a band of armed men have gathered together to protect the lion. What a clatter they make with their swords and spears! These mighty men are intent upon defending a lion. O fools and slow of heart! Open that door! Let the lord of the forest come forth free. Who will dare to encounter him? What does he want with your guardian care? Let the pure gospel go forth in all its lion-like majesty, and it will soon clear its own way and ease itself of its adversaries.⁸

⁸ Spurgeon sermon 2004.

The Unbeliever's Lament

These poems speak for themselves. Both Matthew Arnold and Thomas Hardy lacked a living trust in Christ.

Matthew Arnold in his 'Dover Beach' confessed:

*The sea is calm tonight.
The tide is full, the moon lies fair
Upon the straits; on the French coast the light
Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.
Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!
Only, from the long line of spray
Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land,
Listen! you hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
At their return, up the high strand,
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
The eternal note of sadness in.*

*Sophocles long ago
Heard it on the Ægean, and it brought
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
Of human misery; we
Find also in the sound a thought,
Hearing it by this distant northern sea.*

*The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.*

*Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,*

The Unbeliever's Lament

*Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.*

Thomas Hardy, in his poem 'The Respectable Burgher on "The Higher Criticism"', graphically set out the consequences, for many, of that attack on Scripture:

*Since Reverend Doctors now declare
That clerks and people must prepare
To doubt if Adam ever were;
To hold the flood a local scare;
To argue, though the stolid stare,
That everything had happened ere
The prophets to its happening sware;
That David was no giant-slayer,
Nor one to call a God-obeyer
In certain details we could spare,
But rather was a debonair
Shrewd bandit, skilled as banjo-player:
That Solomon sang the fleshly Fair;
And gave the Church no thought whate'er,
That Esther with her royal wear,
And Mordecai, the son of Jair,
And Joshua's triumphs, Job's despair,
And Balaam's ass's bitter blare;
Nebuchadnezzar's furnace-flare,
And Daniel and the den affair;
And other stories rich and rare,
Were writ to make old doctrine wear
Something of a romantic air:
That the Nain widow's only heir,
And Lazarus with cadaverous glare
(As done in oils by Piombo's care)
Did not return from Sheol's lair:
That Jael set a fiendish snare,
That Pontius Pilate acted square,
That never a sword cut Malchus' ear;
And (but for shame I must forbear)
That -- did not reappear!...*

The Unbeliever's Lament

*Since thus they hint, nor turn a hair,
All churchgoing will I forswear,
And sit on Sundays in my chair,
And read that moderate man Voltaire.*

Thomas Hardy's poem 'The Oxen':

*Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock.
'Now they are all on their knees',
An elder said as we sat in a flock
By the embers in hearthside ease.*

*We pictured the meek mild creatures where
They dwelt in their strawy pen,
Nor did it occur to one of us there
To doubt they were kneeling then.*

*So fair a fancy few would weave
In these years! Yet, I feel,
If someone said on Christmas Eve,
'Come; see the oxen kneel,
In the lonely barton¹ by yonder coomb
Our childhood used to know',
I should go with him in the gloom,
Hoping it might be so.*

Thomas Hardy's poem 'God's Funeral':

*I saw a slowly-stepping train –
Lined on the brows, scoop-eyed and bent and hoar –
Following in files across a twilit plain
A strange and mystic form the foremost bore.*

*And by contagious throbs of thought
Or latent knowledge that within me lay
And had already stirred me, I was wrought
To consciousness of sorrow even as they.*

*The fore-borne shape, to my blurred eyes,
At first seemed man-like, and anon to change
To an amorphous cloud of marvellous size,
At times endowed with wings of glorious range.*

¹ A farmyard.

The Unbeliever's Lament

*And this phantasmal variousness
Ever possessed it as they drew along:
Yet throughout all it symbolled none the less
Potency vast and loving-kindness strong.*

*Almost before I knew I bent
Towards the moving columns without a word;
They, growing in bulk and numbers as they went,
Struck out sick thoughts that could be overheard:*

*'O man-projected Figure, of late
Imaged as we, thy knell who shall survive?
Whence came it we were tempted to create
One whom we can no longer keep alive?
Framing him jealous, fierce, at first,
We gave him justice as the ages rolled,
Will to bless those by circumstance accurst,
And longsuffering, and mercies manifold.
And, tricked by our own early dream
And need of solace, we grew self-deceived,
Our making soon our maker did we deem,
And what we had imagined we believed,
Till, in Time's stayless stealthy swing,
Uncompromising rude reality
Mangled the Monarch of our fashioning,
Who quavered, sank; and now has ceased to be.
So, toward our myth's oblivion,
Darkling, and languid-lipped, we creep and grope
Sadlier than those who wept in Babylon,
Whose Zion was a still abiding hope.
How sweet it was in years far hied²
To start the wheels of day with trustful prayer,
To lie down liegely³ at the eventide
And feel a blest assurance he was there!
And who or what shall fill his place?
Whither will wanderers turn distracted eyes
For some fixed star to stimulate their pace
Towards the goal of their enterprise? '...
Some in the background then I saw,*

² Gone or fled away.

³ As subjects of the king.

The Unbeliever's Lament

*Sweet women, youths, men, all incredulous,
Who chimed as one: 'This figure is of straw,
This requiem mockery! Still he lives to us!'*

*I could not prop their faith: and yet
Many I had known: with all I sympathised;
And though struck speechless, I did not forget
That what was mourned for, I, too, once had prized.*

*Still, how to bear such loss I deemed
The insistent question for each animate mind,
And gazing, to my growing sight there seemed
A pale yet positive gleam low down behind,
Whereof, to lift the general night,
A certain few who stood aloof had said,
'See you upon the horizon that small light –
Swelling somewhat?' Each mourner shook his head.*

*And they composed a crowd of whom
Some were right good, and many nigh the best...
Thus dazed and puzzled 'twixt the gleam and gloom
Mechanically I followed with the rest.*

Thomas Hardy's poem 'God-Forgotten':

*I towered far, and lo! I stood within
The presence of the Lord Most High,
Sent thither by the sons of earth, to win
Some answer to their cry.*

*'The Earth, say'st thou? The Human race?
By Me created? Sad its lot?
Nay: I have no remembrance of such place:
Such world I fashioned not'.*

*'O Lord, forgive me when I say
Thou spak'st the word, and mad'st it all'.*

*'The Earth of men – let me bethink me... Yea!
I dimly do recall
Some tiny sphere I built long back
(Mid millions of such shapes of mine)
So named... It perished, surely – not a wrack⁴*

⁴ A remnant, a scrap, a trace.

The Unbeliever's Lament

*Remaining, or a sign?
It lost my interest from the first,
My aims therefor succeeding ill;
Haply it died of doing as it durst?'*

'Lord, it existeth still'.

*'Dark, then, its life! For not a cry
Of aught it bears do I now hear;
Of its own act the threads were snapt whereby
Its plaints had reached mine ear.
It used to ask for gifts of good,
Till came its severance self-entailed,
When sudden silence on that side ensued,
And has till now prevailed.
All other orbs have kept in touch;
Their voicings reach me speedily:
Thy people took upon them overmuch
In sundering them from me!
And it is strange – though sad enough –
Earth's race should think that one whose call
Frames, daily, shining spheres of flawless stuff
Must heed their tainted ball!...
But say'st thou 'tis by pangs distraught,
And strife, and silent suffering?
Deep grieved am I that injury should be wrought
Even on so poor a thing!
Thou should'st have learnt that Not to Mend
For Me could mean but Not to Know:
Hence, Messengers! and straightway put an end
To what men undergo'...*

*Homing at dawn, I thought to see
One of the Messengers standing by.*

*Oh, childish thought!...
Yet oft it comes to me
When trouble hovers nigh.*

The Unbeliever's Lament

Thomas Hardy's poem 'The Darkling Thrush':

*I leant upon a coppice gate
When Frost was spectre-grey,
And Winter's dregs made desolate
The weakening eye of day.
The tangled bine-stems⁵ scored the sky
Like strings of broken lyres,
And all mankind that haunted nigh
Had sought their household fires.*

*The land's sharp features seemed to be
The Century's corpse outleant,
His crypt the cloudy canopy,
The wind his death-lament.
The ancient pulse of germ and birth
Was shrunken hard and dry,
And every spirit upon earth
Seemed fervourless as I.*

*At once a voice arose among
The bleak twigs overhead
In a full-hearted evensong
Of joy illimited;
An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small,
In blast-beruffled plume,
Had chosen thus to fling his soul
Upon the growing gloom.*

*So little cause for carolings
Of such ecstatic sound
Was written on terrestrial things
Afar or nigh around,
That I could think there trembled through
His happy good-night air
Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew
And I was unaware.*

⁵ Long, twisting stems of vines or similar plants.

The Unbeliever's Lament

Arrogant Atheism Answered

In his poem, 'Invictus' ('Unconquered'), William Ernest Henley bragged:

*Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.*

*In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.*

*Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.*

*It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.*

Arrogant Atheism Answered

In her poem, 'Conquered', Dorothy Day replied:

*Out of the light that dazzles me,
Bright as the sun from pole to pole,
I thank the God I know to be,
For Christ – the Conqueror of my soul.*

*Since his the sway of circumstance,
I would not wince nor cry aloud.
Under the rule which men call chance,
My head, with joy, is humbly bowed.*

*Beyond this place of sin and tears,
That life with him and his the aid,
That, spite the menace of the years,
Keeps, and will keep me unafraid.*

*I have no fear though straight the gate:
He cleared from punishment the scroll.
Christ is the Master of my fate!*

Christ is the Captain of my soul!

Arrogant Atheism Answered

Arrogant Atheism Answered