

NEW-COVENANT ARTICLES  
VOLUME NINE

Books by David H.J. Gay referred to in this volume:

*Assurance in the New Covenant.*

*Baptist Sacramentalism: A Warning to Baptists.*

*Battle for the Church: 1517-1644 (second edition).*

*Believers Under the Law of Christ.*

*Christ is All: No Sanctification by the Law.*

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*The Glorious New-Covenant Ministry.*

*The Gospel Offer is Free (second edition).*





# **New-Covenant Articles**

*Volume Nine*

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

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## *Note to the Reader*

This is the ninth 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 I hope to reach 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, 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 the time of Adam to Pentecost, and redeemed Jews and Gentiles from that time until the end of the age.



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We are talking about England in the 1570's.<sup>1</sup>

From the 3rd century, through the machinations of the Roman Emperor Constantine, the Church and the State had been forged into one organisation – Christendom. It did not take long for the Papacy to rise and take control of this monstrous conglomeration, and, by the 1570s, it had for more than a 1000 years exercised a cruel domination over Western Europe, enforcing its will on the people by means both political and physical, including sword and stake. Although opposition to papal claims had broken out from time to time down the centuries, Rome had crushed it all. But in 1517, Luther, by nailing his theses to the door at Wittenberg, had opened a front against Rome; the Reformation had begun. And in 1525, in Zurich, the Anabaptists had initiated a second front, this time against both Rome and the Reformed.

And what of England? Because of his determination to secure a divorce from Catherine of Aragon, Henry VIII, in the 1530s, had broken with Rome to become his own pope and impose his will on the new-fangled Church of England. In the reign of Edward VI (1547-1553), this State Church had been moved closer to Geneva, but in the reign of Mary (1553-1558) it had been dragged back – with horrendous cruelty – to Rome. Now, in the 1570s, Elizabeth, who had begun her long reign in 1558, was exerting her all-dominant will, seeking to enforce a middle-of-the road uniformity on the Church, but with a decided leaning towards Rome. However, she was being resisted on all sides – by Papists, Puritans and Anabaptists.

The result was that by the 1570s the Church of England was nothing less than a shambles. In a state of abysmal disorder, it was a corrupt and apostate Church, and it had become an

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<sup>1</sup> For this article, I have lightly edited ‘The Secret Churches’, taken from my *Battle* pp149-161.

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atrocious monstrosity; grotesque, it bore little or no resemblance to the New Testament pattern.

It is fair to say that, in the fifty years since Luther had nailed his theses to the door at Wittenberg, much progress had been made in England, much ground had been fought over and conquered in the spiritual battle to recover New Testament church life. Though the gospel sun did not yet shine in its full glory, the long dark night of Popery had given way to the light of opening day. The cruel grip of the Papacy no longer held the people in its power. The Church of England, as well as the nation as a whole, was free of papal rule, and the government of England was in English hands. The effort had been costly, however, and the struggle long and bitter, with a terrible price exacted in blood.

Yet, despite the obvious gains, the Church of England was in a dreadful spiritual plight, locked into the doctrine of Constantine. Consequently, the Church and State persisted in their thoroughly mixed up condition, with diabolical results. For one thing, the combined civil and religious authorities remained deeply wedded to the long-loved idea of executing so-called heretics for their refusal to conform to the uniform Church. Another mark of the degenerate condition of the Church of England was evidenced by the way in which the people became its members. This was by means of infant baptism – just about universal in extent – a rite which amounted to baptismal regeneration at the hands of a priest who solemnly asserted that every infant he sprinkled was thereby ‘regenerate and grafted into the body of Christ’s Church’. After which appalling statement, the priest was obliged to thank God ‘that it hath pleased thee to regenerate this infant with thy Holy Spirit, to receive him for thine own child by adoption, and to incorporate him into thy holy Church’. This papist drivel was enforced in the Act of Uniformity of 1559, and every citizen was bound by law to go through with it. What is more, though the compulsion element has long since been removed, this remains the debased practice of the Church of England to this very day. Although changes are afoot, the trend is Romeward. The eternal consequences have been horrific for millions. They still are.

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By this system, the Church of England had become a veritable mongrel by the 1570s. Some of its members were regenerate, but the vast majority were not. It lumped together four disparate groups, joined into one State Church.

*First*, the profane, unbelieving, ungodly multitude, who were convinced that they were the children of God because some priest had apparently made them so in their infancy when he sprinkled them and had repeated the appropriate formula.

*Secondly*, the various denominations of Papists and associated semi-Papists, who wanted a return to full-blown Romanism.

*Thirdly*, the Anglicans, who loved showy ceremony, the ancient traditions, the customs and superstitions of the Fathers, but hated everything that was precisely built upon Scripture.

*Fourthly*, the Puritans, who demanded reform of the Church and its purification according to the New Testament but who, nevertheless, were prepared to give a grudging conformity to the Prayer Book, while trying to keep up a guerrilla warfare against its many corruptions.

How could this hotchpotch survive, with its jumble of belief and unbelief? After all, the opinions held by the various factions were mutually contradictory and should have blown the whole monstrosity apart. But hold together it did. Why? The Church of England managed to survive this abysmal state of affairs for one reason only – the rigid determination of Queen Elizabeth, its Supreme Governor. She simply imposed her will upon it.

Nevertheless, there were some people in England who were prepared to obey God as he has revealed himself in his word, and who dared to follow conscience. They would settle for nothing less than church life according to the New Testament. It meant, of course, that they had to separate themselves from the State Church, a step totally forbidden by the civil law. The rigours of that law ensured that they suffered blood-chilling punishments for their disobedience. In spite of this, some were prepared to defy the queen and her bishops, even though the authorities were armed to the teeth with the full range of

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Constantine powers. It was these little bands of stalwart believers who carried on the fight against corruption in the Church of England in order to get back to the pattern of New Testament. Too often they have been passed over, despised and ridiculed.

Who were these people ‘of whom the world was not worthy’ (Heb. 11:38), men and women, who like the parents of Moses ‘were not afraid of the king’s command’ (Heb. 11:23) but defied the establishment to obey Christ? They acted as Moses himself, who ‘by faith... refused... choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God... esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing him who is invisible’ (Heb. 11:24-27). These determined men and women forsook the State Church, refusing to obey laws which contradicted Scripture, for they feared God and not Parliament. And God was with them.

Who were these brave believers?

First, there were the Anabaptists – mostly refugees from persecution on the Continent, but also those English men and women who had been persuaded to join them by the force of their arguments and sufferings. They would not conform to the Church of England, which was apostate in their judgment. For forty years, Anabaptists had been forming churches in England, ever since the days of Henry VIII. The fourteen Dutch Anabaptists burned at the stake as far back as 1535 were the first of a long line. Many more were put to death down the years under Henry, Edward and Mary. The same happened under Elizabeth. These four Sovereigns of England, aided and abetted by their bishops, hated the Anabaptists, and slaughtered them throughout the 16th century, sometimes in droves. Yet in spite of the horrors of prison, torture and death, and vicious laws framed against them, the ‘heretics’ survived. The measure of their influence and growth – as well as the hatred with which they were regarded – can be justly gauged by the fact that, out of the forty-two Articles drawn up by the Church of England in

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1553, seventeen were specifically anti-Anabaptist. The Church authorities, as well as many Puritans, realised who their real and most dangerous adversaries were. This point must be emphasised if we are to get a proper understanding of events. Many of the conforming Puritans – not only the Anglicans – hated the Anabaptists, regarding them as their enemies in battle. But it was not carnal weapons that the Anabaptists fought with – it was the force of their scriptural arguments which was so strong and so much feared. It has been justly said:

The Anabaptists were the most numerous, and for some time by far the most formidable, opponents of the Church. In the judgment of the Church party, and not a few of the Puritans, Anabaptists were heretics of the worst kind, and those who denied the necessity or validity of infant baptism, however orthodox on other points, [were] constantly classed... with... infidels and atheists.

Matthew Parker at one stage declined the invitation to become Archbishop of Canterbury, and in explaining himself he said that ‘the realm is full of Anabaptists’. Jewel wrote that ‘we found at the beginning of Elizabeth’s reign, large... crops of... Anabaptists, and other pests... As mushrooms spring up in the night and in darkness, so these sprang up in that darkness and unhappy night of Marian times’.

It is interesting to note that, according to these oblique testimonies from bitter opponents, the Anabaptists increased despite – or, perhaps, because of – severe persecution. And they were savagely dealt with. As an example of the sort of treatment they received under Elizabeth, think about the fate of the thirty Flemish Baptists who were discovered in 1575 at worship in Aldgate and arrested. At their trial and in their defence they said:

We are poor and despised strangers, who are persecuted for the testimony of Jesus... We seek no salvation in our works... but we hope to be saved alone through the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ. Nor do we boast that we are without sin... They also say, we refuse to hear the word of God, because we do not go to hear the preaching of the Church... To this charge we would say, that why we do not hear the preacher, is, that the word of

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God constrains us so to do; because they are people not fit to attend to the sacred callings of a gospel preacher... if the preachers were such as the apostles required, we should cheerfully hear them – we would be the first and the last in the church. We are also accused... because we do not baptise our infants... We do it out of fear to God, for Christ commands [only] believers to be baptised.

Five of the thirty recanted, and yet were still degraded in public; five were imprisoned and clamped in heavy irons, confined in a damp and dark dungeon which was infested with vermin; the rest were banished, simply thrown out of country, home and work, without a penny. The five prisoners were threatened with death. John Foxe, the martyrs' historian, wrote to the queen on their behalf. Two of them were released after much suffering, but another died in prison, while the remaining two were roasted alive at Smithfield at six in the morning, until their bodies were reduced to ashes. One of them had nine children. His first wife had been burned at the stake in Flanders. He had later married a widow whose husband had been burned likewise, and they had come to England in the hope that they might find liberty to worship in accordance with conscience. It proved a vain hope under Elizabeth. During his trial, the man promised the bishop that he and his family would quit the country if released; but to no avail. Blood was wanted. The other man who was burned to death was twenty-six years old, and had been married for only about two months when he was arrested.

Yet, despite the savage persecution, the Anabaptists would not give up their determination to serve Christ whatever the cost. Years later, the authorities deplored the fact that even after all the harsh measures which had been adopted to stamp out the 'heresy', still 'Dutch Anabaptists held private conventicles in London, and perverted a great many'. Thus it was admitted that the movement was growing as more and more Englishmen were joining their ranks. Things had got to such a pitch, the authorities had to complain that even 'some persons of these sentiments have been bred at our universities'. How shocking!

Furthermore, there is evidence that within the Church of England itself there were some who had adopted Anabaptist

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principles. For instance, as early as 1547, one John Bale, a Church of England minister, denied he was an Anabaptist but, in a book he did present arguments to the effect that Matthew 28:19-20 taught believer's baptism. He also wrote in defence of an Anabaptist who was burned at Colchester. Even more remarkable, is the claim that a Baptist church had been formed in England as early as 1417.

In the early 1550s, in Mary's reign, two separated conventicles were discovered – one in Bocking in Essex, and the other at Faversham in Kent. The Essex church was formed by 'a sort of Anabaptists' from Kent, probably the Faversham people. The churches had at least four ministers along with more than sixty members, all of whom were earnest in the searching of the Scriptures to determine the right way to worship God. They concluded that for this 'the heart before God was required'. They met regularly for Christ's ordinances, the worship of God, and teaching; they contributed to the upkeep of the work of God; they were prepared to travel the eighty miles between the two churches to maintain their mutual fellowship in the gospel – a daunting journey in those days. Indeed, it was at Bocking where they were caught and arrested, after which they frankly admitted they had not taken the Lord's supper in the Church of England for two years, and that their purpose in gathering together was 'for talk of Scripture'.

The members of these secret and illegal meetings, it is true, were unorthodox in that they rejected Calvinism, being of a 'free-will' persuasion. But that was not the reason they left the Church. They practiced believer's baptism, and held that to have communion with the unregenerate is entirely unscriptural. They wanted separate churches made up of the godly only. They further explained that they refused to worship in the established Church because of its superstitions and corruptions. For all these reasons 'they were looked upon as dangerous to Church and State' and therefore they were persecuted, two being sent to the Marshalsea. It culminated in the execution of one of their leaders, Mr Middleton, who was burned at the stake in Canterbury on July 12th, 1555.

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But the Anabaptists were not the only Nonconformists, nor were the Faversham and Bocking conventicles the only detached groups during Mary's reign; there were others who were willing to disentangle themselves from the State Church. Without question, several small and secret, separate churches existed in London and elsewhere. So much so, the New England settlers sixty years later referred back to them, claiming they were but carrying on the work of such. What is more, there is evidence that other independent churches existed in England even before Mary's time. But all these churches lived in a very dangerous, hostile world. They could not meet in stated buildings at regular hours, nor could they commit much to writing, for obvious reasons. However, at the great day they will form a noble part of the 'last who will be first' (Luke 13:30). Furthermore, despite the bitter treatment they received, the secret churches prospered. They thrived on the hostility.

One illegal London church in Mary's reign began with forty members but rose to about two hundred, and had a succession of pastors. Some of these, however, along with many members, were put to the stake during Mary's campaign of terror. This church was formed simply to be anti-papist, keeping itself clear of her popish measures, the members having no wish to be separate from the Church of England for any other reason. During their time of self-imposed separation, they used the more Protestant, Second Prayer Book of Edward in worship, as opposed to the form of service then employed in the State Church. When Elizabeth came to throne, this separate church dissolved itself in order to rejoin the State Church, now that it was no longer Papist.

In 1567, some one hundred Puritans separated themselves from the Church of England to form what they called a 'gathered church' meeting at Plumber's Hall in London. The members of this separate church comprised only those who were 'gathered' – gathered by their own desire, moved by the Holy Spirit, in contrast to the Church of England, whose members were coerced into that membership and who were forced to attend its

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services. It does not need to be said that this secret church was formed without Queen Elizabeth's permission. The Plumber's Hall church used John Knox's Genevan Service Book instead of the *Book of Common Prayer* in order to avoid Anglican corruptions.

Eventually, the church was discovered, and its members hauled before Archbishop Grindal to answer for their lawlessness. They explained that they had no intention of making a permanent separation from the Church of England; it was only a temporary measure until the obnoxious laws of Elizabeth were repealed. William Bonam, the pastor, along with twenty-four members, was willing to promise that they would not take the Lord's supper 'in any house, or other place, contrary to the state of religion now by public authority established, or contrary to the laws of this realm of England'. They also promised not to preach against the Church of England. Having said that, since the Church had silenced good preachers, and until they could hear lively preaching in a church free of Popery, they roundly declared that they were determined to remain apart, whatever the consequences. They justified their action, saying:

So long as we might have the word freely preached and [baptism and the Lord's supper] administered without the... idolatrous gear [that is, Anglican vestments] about it, we never assembled together in houses. But when it came to this, that all our preachers were displaced by your law, so that we could hear none of them in our church by seven or eight weeks, we were troubled and commanded by your courts from day to day for not coming to our parish churches, then we besought us what were best to do. And now if from the word of God, you can prove we are wrong, we will yield to you and do open penance at St Paul's Cross; if not, we will stand to it by the grace of God.

What a spirit! How different is this to the compromises of the conforming Puritans who remained within the Church of England. All that these staunch believers wanted was that their church life – the ordinances of Christ – should be free of idolatry and superstition. And, since the Church of England had

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silenced their true preachers, they had been driven to take steps to put this right. Even so, they had thought carefully about their actions, and they were willing to be proved wrong, but only by Scripture. Furthermore, if they were shown to be in error they would openly acknowledge it and repent. Otherwise, by God's help, they would continue.

Another secret or 'Privye church' was discovered in London in 1567 in Whitechapel Street. This church differed from the one in Plumber's Hall in several particulars – especially in that it was determined to separate, permanently, from the State Church. They called themselves nothing but 'a poor congregation whom God has separated from the Churches of England'. They condemned the established Church because of 'the mingled and false worshipping therein used, out of the which assemblies the Lord our only Saviour has called us'. This false worship, they argued, involved superstitions and idolatrous vestments, the works of Antichrist, such as 'forked caps... surplices, copes... and popish Holy Days'. They appealed to the authorities to abolish 'the manners, fashions, or customs of the Papists' which continued to be practiced in the State Church.

This Calvinistic, separated church was formed on the basis of a covenant in which it acknowledged a threefold ministry of pastor, elder and deacon. Richard Fitz, the pastor, listed three essential points as 'true marks of Christ's church':

First and foremost, the glorious word and gospel [must be] preached, not in bondage and subjection, but freely, and purely. Secondly, to have [baptism and the Lord's supper] ministered purely, only and altogether according to the institution and good word of the Lord Jesus, without any tradition or invention of man. And last of all, to have, not the filthy Canon Law, but discipline only, and altogether agreeable to the same heavenly and almighty word of our good Lord, Jesus Christ.

Reader, note the stress upon discipline. So strong was this emphasis upon mutual discipline that the church met every fourth day to carry it out. No doubt this was based on the principle that reformation of the church was – and always is – a necessity. How very different to the all-inclusive membership of

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the Church of England with its little or non-existent spiritual discipline; that is, apart from the slaughter of supposed heretics! How very like the Anabaptists the Privye church was, with their emphasis upon spiritual discipline of church members. Indeed, how very like the New Testament.

This secret church also regarded suffering as an inevitable mark of faithfulness. They went further. The authorities were not only persecuting believers, they said, but the tormentors of the church ‘do persecute our Saviour Jesus Christ in his members. Also they reject and despise our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ’. Fitz was right to say that suffering is a mark of a true church (2 Tim. 3:10-12). He was also right to note that when men persecute believers, they are, in fact, persecuting Christ himself (Acts 9:4-5).

They closed their church covenant with the prayer: ‘God give us strength still to strive in suffering under the cross, that the blessed word of our God may only rule, and have the highest place, to cast down strongholds, to destroy or overthrow policies or imaginations, and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and to bring into captivity or subjection, every thought to the obedience of Christ... and that the name of the eternal Lord God, may be exalted or magnified above all things’.

The subsequent history of the church is unknown – unknown to man, that is – except that we read that it was severely punished for its audacity to dissent from the State Church. Richard Fitz, the pastor, and Thomas Bowlande, deacon, died of gaol fever in Bridewell, while the other members languished in at least six different prisons. Under this kind of onslaught, it is not surprising to learn that the church probably ceased to exist about 1570. But though the men and women might well be silenced in death, and cease to ‘groan and cry unto God... the very walls of the prisons about this city would testify God’s anger kindled against this land for such injustice and subtle persecution’. What is more, however brief its survival, the church greatly affected the course of the battle to recover New Testament church life in England. Indeed, all the secret churches

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– both Anabaptist and Puritan – struck tremendous blows in that struggle.

Perhaps the greatest contribution made by the secret churches in the prosecution of the battle to reform the church was that they were pioneers. They took the first step. And how important a step that is. How much easier it is for us who come after, when we can see someone else's footprints! The believers who formed these secret churches showed that it was possible to worship God outside the State system and in defiance of its regulations. It would not be long before a much greater separation from the Church of England would take place. Today, it is commonplace to worship in churches outside the State Church, but it was not always so. How much we owe to these courageous saints who established a kind of bridgehead for us. What a great wrong it is if we forget the price they paid for our freedom!

Another major contribution they made to the advance of the reform of the church was in their use of the covenant. This would be taken up in a widespread way as the battle for the church raged on into the next century. It was a concept which would be used with great effect. Indeed the covenant idea became a major aspect of all Puritanism in the years which followed.

There has been a resurgence of the use of the idea of a covenant in recent years, and it is a cause for thankfulness. With this proviso, however – as long as the covenant is carried out in practice! Merely to make it is useless. One great benefit of a church covenant is that it emphasises personal commitment of heart to Christ and his people within the local church; it is not good enough just to give a formal mental assent to a creed, to have a faith in intellectual propositions. That is the curse of Churches founded under the system of Constantine, National Churches where citizenship of a State is the same as membership of the Church. In a voluntary covenant, there is an emphasis upon the individual's engagement and his loyalty to the church, since a mutual contract is made between the members which cannot – must not, dare not – be broken in any but the most serious circumstances. Furthermore, the covenant

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concept is built upon a sense of equality in the church; it militates against the idea of a hierarchy. Again, by a covenant, church membership is shown to be a voluntary affair. It is far more than a mere nominal attachment by reason of association or birth or whatever. It is certainly something very different to compulsory membership of the State Church, coming about by the so-called baptism of every infant.

For those who may never have seen a church covenant, I include a copy of the covenant which was drawn up in 1978, when the Lowestoft Reformed Baptist church was formed. There are many other examples which could be given, of course. This covenant was the basis upon which all members joined the church. (In addition, there was a doctrinal statement besides other documents, naturally). The covenant read:

Recognising our own unworthiness and inability, and in total dependence upon God, we covenant to keep our vows first to God and then to each other by the will of God.

First, we covenant to give ourselves to Christ as the head of the church; that is, to submit ourselves to him, to honour and keep all that he has appointed and commanded in his word for the well-being of his church.

Secondly, we covenant to give ourselves to one another; that is, to engage ourselves in all the mutual duties, responsibilities and privileges of members of a local church as appointed and commanded in the word of God – such as prayer for one another, love for one another, fellowship, mutual care and edification, in honour preferring one another, provoking one another to good works, assembling together for the exercise of Christ's ordinances, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit; and in any and every other responsibility of local church members as given in the Scriptures.

Thus, in all sorts of ways the secret churches made a most valuable contribution to the struggle to reform the church; they were pioneers; they were willing to suffer for their obedience to Christ; they used the covenant principle to form their churches; they emphasised church discipline. All these are large and very important concepts. To say the least, the little bands of believers, who dared to disobey evil and cruel laws in order to put into practice the teaching of Scripture, fought valiantly in

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the spiritual battle for the church. All honour to their memory. Nor did they fight in vain. They shall have their reward. Meanwhile, we with gratitude reap the benefit of their labours.

These several points need stressing today. Too often, the marks of present-day church life are a casual, frivolous attitude, a lack of spiritual commitment, practically no discipline, poor attendance at meetings for prayer, and an easy-come, easy-go mentality. The church and her ordinances are simply not prized as they ought to be. The church is taken for granted. How has this come about? One of the reasons for a low standard of spirituality in the churches is the lack of emphasis upon discipline, it being non-existent in many assemblies. Or, where it is used, it comes far too late, so that it becomes only punishment and not correction. When churches do not discipline, or are only half-hearted about it, then a superficial, shallow Christianity results. The secret churches were strong on discipline. And so should we be. The New Testament churches were.

What does this mean in practical terms? Reader, I want to be down-to-earth and specific. To take just one commonplace, current example – poorly attended prayer meetings. Is this not a very frequent occurrence? Well, what is being done about it? What can be done about it? To do nothing, is a dereliction of duty, and will have to be answered for. Looking the other way is not the answer. Wringing of the hands will not suffice. Nor is it good enough for the church secretary to bully and cajole and plead with members to attend; is this not sometimes done in the ‘announcements’? Arm twisting is not the way forward. Nor is it good enough for the elders just to harangue and exhort from the pulpit.

The answer is *discipline*. Are the members spiritual people? Then they will want to come to the prayer meeting. Their lack of desire to come is symptomatic of something very seriously wrong with them. It is this which must be dealt with. Those who wish to join the church must be spiritually-minded people. Prospective members must know from the outset that a full participation in all the spiritual life of the church is expected of them, whatever the cost. And that is how it is; that is how it is

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going to be. If they do not like it, they should not be allowed to join. They should not even want to join. Spiritual people have spiritual desires and appetites, and they take steps to satisfy them. The psalmist said: ‘How lovely is your tabernacle, O LORD of hosts! My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God’ (Ps. 84:1-2). David addressed God saying: ‘LORD, I have loved the habitation of your house, and the place where your glory dwells’ (Ps. 26:8). He could declare: ‘I was glad when they said to me: “Let us go into the house of the LORD”’ (Ps. 122:1). Bearing in mind that ‘house’ in the new covenant speaks of the body of believers, not a building, do professing believers mean it when they sing the very words of that psalm, or the rendering of it by Isaac Watts? How frequently these sentiments are expressed:

*How pleased and blessed was I,  
To hear the people cry,  
‘Come, let us seek our God today!’  
Yes, with a cheerful zeal  
We haste to Zion’s hill,  
And there our vows and honours pay.*

I ask again: Are the words meant? Do those who profess them, make ‘haste to’ the prayer meeting? Do they do so ‘with a cheerful zeal’? If not, why not? And if they do not want to come, why is something not done about it? If churches are so keen to increase their numbers that they tolerate low standards and an unspiritual (frankly, carnal) attitude in the members, they will have to account to God for it.

But what about actual church members – what if they grow slack, and prayer meeting attendance drops off? The answer is that action must be taken if members fail in their covenant vows. This can take various forms and there will be degrees of sanction. But action – not mere words – action must be taken. Richard Fitz was right. It is in the New Testament pattern. Discipline is a mark of a true church. Merely to deplore shallow spiritual life in church members is not good enough. Something must be done about it, especially in churches which claim to act on the gathered or voluntary church principle. The members are

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supposed to be regenerate and spiritually active. They are supposed to desire spiritual life. They have asked to join; they have not been asked, let alone forced!

If this sounds too hard, so be it. I realise it will be called narrow and strict. If my words are greeted with howls of protest that we shall lose members, or people will not join us, then I reply that we shall be getting somewhat closer to the New Testament churches again. Admitting that the discipline was extraordinary in Acts 5, nevertheless the effect of it is needed today. And needed badly. After the discipline of Ananias and Sapphira it is recorded 'so great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things... Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly' (Acts 5:11-13). Do men fear the church today? Are they afraid to join the people of God? Very often the church goes out of its way to make itself attractive to pagans. It wants to be 'user-friendly'. Why is it not like the church in Acts 5? Has the church discovered something the apostles did not know? Many churches think they have invented a system which makes the church comfortable for the ungodly, easy-going and tolerant of carnality in its members, and yet pleasing to God *at the same time*. Is it possible? Of course not!<sup>2</sup>

Too often, we want to be popular, and bigger numbers on the roll figure too highly in our calculations. We need to keep in mind Christ's words: 'Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets' (Luke 6:26). Is it perhaps significant that in times of persecution, as when the secret churches were meeting, or later, when (a century later) the famous Broadmead records were written for the Baptist church in Bristol, discipline was being used with great effect in the churches? On the other hand, when apathy and a limp Christianity is in vogue, discipline becomes lax or non-existent. There is a close connection between low spirituality and lax discipline. One thing is certain, if churches and their elders merely deplore superficial spiritual life and thereby tolerate and

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<sup>2</sup> See the extended note, 'Inclusivism', in my *Baptist*.

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condone it, they are a party to the offence in the eyes of God. They will have to answer for it.

What is more, church discipline is not designed to maintain church order in an arid, hard way. The idea is not that the church might just be 'right'. We are talking about the souls of men and women who are in spiritual need. For believers to grow cold, spiritually slack and casual, is not only wrong in the sense of the purity of the church – it is exceedingly dangerous for the believers in question. It is a symptom of their spiritual disease. Church discipline is designed to recover them from their spiritual illnesses, to rescue them from their backsliding and decline, and to strengthen them at their weak points. It is not a mark of love to avoid church discipline. Laxity is no sign of kindness. The very opposite is the case. True love for our fellow-believers is best shown by the whole church being engaged in mutual discipline and care. Christ designed church life for that very purpose. After all, 1 Corinthians 5 leads to 2 Corinthians 2:1-11 and 7:8-12. See also Galatians 6:1-2; 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15. One great aim of church discipline is that the offending brother might be 'gained' (Matt. 18:15). Of course it is true that 'no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous; nevertheless, afterwards it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it' (Heb. 12:11). A lawless child is a ruined child. An undisciplined Christian is a walking contradiction.

Reader, while they did not completely recover the New Testament pattern, and further progress in that direction would have to be made those who followed them, let us never forget the saints who formed the secret churches four hundred years ago. Let us remember those godly men and women who paid so dearly for doing what they considered to be their privilege; their privilege, not merely their duty, mind you. If they could see the light-hearted, flippant attitude to church life which is so common today, surely they would be horrified, they would be saddened. Of far greater moment, what does Christ think of it? How much we owe those saints of long ago. One thing we may be assured of – if we let the heritage they left us slip out of our

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grasp, then they will arise in the judgment and rightly condemn us!

Reader, how much do you treasure the church? How precious are her ordinances to you? How much difficulty are you prepared to put up with so that you can worship God, assembling with his people in the mutual exercise of the priesthood of all believers, according to your understanding of the New Testament? Or what excuses are you making for yourself in order that you can settle for something less? Is it not a privilege to be a member of the church of Christ? Whatever the cost, is it not worth paying?

## *Law-less or Lawless?*

There are two very important passages of Scripture which speak of the believer being under the law of Christ – though neither of them use the actual phrase *hupo nomon* – ‘under law’ – to Christ. In this article I want to look at one of those passages; namely, 1 John 3:4.<sup>1</sup> I quote the entire paragraph to give the context, highlighting the critical words:

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. ***Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness (anomial); sin is lawlessness (anomia).*** You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother (1 John 3:1-10).

The relevant Greek is *ho poiōn tēn hamartian, kai tēn anomian poiei; kai hē hamartia estin anomia*; literally, ‘practices sin also lawlessness practises; and sin is lawlessness’. Here we reach the crux of the text for our purposes. Now *anomia* can mean ‘the condition of one without law – either because he is ignorant of

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<sup>1</sup> For this article, I have lightly edited the relevant section from my *Believers*.

## *Law-less or Lawless?*

it, or because he has a certain law and is violating it and showing contempt for it'.<sup>2</sup> The word bears these alternative meanings in Scripture. How can we decide? By the context, as always; always by the context.

In certain contexts, the words *anomia*, *anomos* and *anomōs* speak of being destitute of the law in question, whatever that law may be. Let me give three examples.<sup>3</sup>

Take Acts 2:23. Peter, preaching Christ, told the Jewish crowd on the day of Pentecost: 'You have taken [him] by lawless hands, have crucified [him], and put [him] to death' (NKJV; see also ESV). The Jews were responsible for crucifying Christ but, to do the dirty work, they used Roman hands, Gentile hands, 'lawless hands'. The NASB, translating the phrase, 'by the hands of godless men', has a marginal note: 'Lawless hands, or, men without the law; that is, heathen'. The NIV correctly notes: 'Of those not having the law (that is, Gentiles)'. Peter, steeped in Jewish thought, was using the phrase, 'lawless men', in the Jewish sense. The men he was talking about were 'men without the law'. That is to say, they were law-less, outside the law of God, the law of Moses; they were Gentiles. The Jews boasted that they had the law of Moses. They were the only people to have it (Deut. 4:7-8,32-34; Ps. 147:19-20; Rom. 2:14; 3:1-2; 9:4; 1 Cor. 9:20-21). All the rest were 'law-less'. So, as Peter said, Christ was crucified by the Jews (who had the law of Moses) making use of the Gentiles (who did not have the law of Moses, the without-the-law people) to do the work. See also Matthew 20:18-19; and Galatians 2:15, where 'Jews by nature' are contrasted with 'sinners of the Gentiles' or 'Gentile sinners' (NIV). 'Sinners' and 'Gentiles', in such a context, means those who are law-less, outside the law of Moses, beyond the pale.

As Leonard Verduin put it: The 'lawless' men of Acts 2:23 were not:

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<sup>2</sup> See Thayer.

<sup>3</sup> In these cases, it would be better to describe those involved as law-less and not lawless; that is (Moses') law-less.

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...lawless in the sense of ‘wicked’, but ‘lawless’ in the Jewish sense – ‘without the law’.<sup>4</sup> In other words, they were law-less... The Jews prided themselves on being law-havers, the only people to whom God had given his law; this put all the rest in the ‘lawless’ category... [Christ was crucified by the Jews who used] the Gentiles, the without-the-law people... [as] their tool.<sup>5</sup>

Now for the second text, 1 Corinthians 9:21. I have already looked at it. Here are the relevant words: ‘To those outside the law (*anomois*) I became as one outside the law (*anomos*) (not being outside the law (*anomos*) of God but under the law of Christ’; literally, ‘to those without law (*anomois*) as without law (*anomos*) (not being without law (*anomos*) to God...)...’. The Gentiles did not have the law of Moses; they were, in that sense, law-less. They were outside the Jewish pale.

And then Romans 2:12: ‘For all who have sinned without the law (*anomōs*) will also perish without the law (*anomōs*)’. Clearly, the apostle is referring to the Gentiles who, though they were sinners, did not have the law of Moses. In that sense, they were law-less. They were outside the Jewish pale.

So much for the first meaning of the words in question: law-less.

But, of course, in other contexts, the words *anomia*, *anomos* and *anomōs* speak of having a certain law, but showing contempt for it, and violating, breaking or transgressing it, whatever that law may be. Here are some examples:

Then will I declare to them: ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness (*anomial*)’ (Matt. 7:23).

The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers (*anomial*) (Matt. 13:41).

You are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness (*anomial*) (Matt. 23:28).

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<sup>4</sup> Note Verduin’s proper use of ‘the’ law.

<sup>5</sup> Leonard Verduin: *The Anatomy of a Hybrid: A Study in Church-State Relationships*, The Christian Harmony Publishers, Sarasota, 1992, p71.

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He was numbered with the transgressors (*anomōn*) (Luke 22:37).

Blessed are those whose lawless deeds (*anomia*) are forgiven, and whose sins are covered (Rom. 4:7).

Just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness (*anomia*) leading to more lawlessness (*anomial*), so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification (Rom. 6:19).<sup>6</sup>

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness (*anomia*)? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? (2 Cor. 6:14-16).

That day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness [some mss, *hamartias*, ‘of sin’; others, *anomas*, ‘of lawlessness’] is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness (*anomas*) is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless one (*anomos*) will be revealed (2 Thess. 2:3-8).

The law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless (*anomois*) and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted (1 Tim. 1:9-11).

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<sup>6</sup> How can anybody be *more* without law than without it? *more* lawless than law-less? They can, of course, be *more* lawless; that is, *more* sinful, showing *more* contempt for, and violation of, the law they are under. Omitting the ‘more’ (literally not in the Greek, but obviously the apostle’s meaning), does not alter the case. To be law-less is to be law-less. Take a line; it is either straight or it is not. It cannot be *more* straight.

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Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness (*anomias*) and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works (Tit. 2:13-14).<sup>7</sup>

You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness (*anomia*) (Heb. 1:9).<sup>8</sup>

I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins [and their lawlessnesses (*anomiōn*)] no more (Heb. 8:12).

I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds [*anomiōn*] no more (Heb. 10:17).<sup>9</sup>

Righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless (*anomois*) deeds that he saw and heard)... (2 Pet. 2:7-8).

In all the above, the issue is not which law is being referred to in any particular passage. That, at this stage, is immaterial. Rather, the issue is that the words *anomia*, *anomos* and *anomōs*, in these passages, mean breaking the law which the people in question are under; any law. Law-breaking in this context is sin, and *vice-versa*. That is what the words *anomia*, *anomos* and *anomōs* are referring to: men violating, showing contempt for, the law that they are under.

Richard Chenevix Trench:

While *anomos* is once at least in the New Testament used negatively of a person without law, or to whom a law has not been given (1 Cor. 9:21)... [and] of the greatest enemy of all law, the Man of Sin, the lawless one (2 Thess. 2:8), [nevertheless] *anomia* is never... the condition of one living without law, but always the condition or deed of one who acts contrary to law... Thus the Gentiles, not having a law (Rom. 2:14) might be charged with sin, but they, sinning without law (Rom. 2:12; 3:21), could not be charged with *anomia*. It is true, indeed, that, behind that law of Moses which they never had,

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<sup>7</sup> Christ did not need to die to redeem us from any lack of law. All he had to do was issue that law, give it to us! It was our law-breaking, our sin, that made redemption essential.

<sup>8</sup> If the word ought to be *adikian*, this verse plays no part in this debate.

<sup>9</sup> Note the same Greek word in Heb. 8:12 and 10:17, where it is translated 'sins' and 'lawless deeds', respectively.

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there is another law, the original law and revelation of the righteousness of God, written on the hearts of all (Rom. 2:14-15).<sup>10</sup>

William Edwy Vine:

*anomos* ‘without law’, also denotes ‘lawless’ [see] Acts 2:23; 2 Thessalonians 2:4,8; [see] 2 Peter 2:8 where the thought is not simply that of doing what is unlawful, but of flagrant defiance of the known will of God.

*anomia*, akin to *anomos* is most frequently translated ‘iniquity’ (2 Thess. 2:7)... In 1 John 3:4... the real meaning of the word [is] ‘everyone that does sin (a practice, not the committal of an act) does also lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness’. This definition of sin sets forth its essential character as the rejection of the law, or will, of God and the substitution of the will of self.<sup>11</sup>

As I say, the context must determine which of the two meanings is correct in any particular passage.

So what about 1 John 3:4? The context could not be plainer; that is why I quoted it from verse 1 to verse 10. Here are the relevant words: ‘Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness (*anomia*)... sins... sin... sinning... practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous... sinning... sinning... the works of the devil... sinning... sinning... practice righteousness’. John is not talking about mere *possession* of a law, or lack of it, but the *practice* of actual sinning and actual righteousness, the doing of works, obedience or disobedience to the law in question. These people are not law-less, but lawless; they are kicking over the traces, showing contempt for the law in question, the law which they are under. They have a law, they are under that law, they are obliged to obey it, but they break it, they do not keep it. We are

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<sup>10</sup> Richard Chenevix Trench: *Synonyms Of The New Testament*, section 66.

<sup>11</sup> W.E.Vine: *Expository Dictionary Of New Testament Words*. Vine, ‘an English biblical scholar, theologian, and writer... traces the words of the Bible... back to their ancient *koinē* Greek root words and to the meanings of the words for that day’ (Wikipedia).

talking about contempt of law, violation of law, transgression of law.

I say this not because all the major translations agree – but they do! – but because the context absolutely demands it. John is not concerned with possession of the law in question. He takes that for granted, as a given. All men are under one law or another.<sup>12</sup> Rather, he is concerned with a man's attitude to the law in question; in particular, his doing (or otherwise) of that law. Unrighteousness, sin, wickedness, in this connection is not a man's lack of law; it is failure to keep the law, whatever that law may be.

And as for the 'law' in question, just read the entire letter: it is full of commands and instructions and imperatives concerning Christ and his gospel. The very word 'commandment' comes seven times in the letter. It is impossible to miss the overtones of John 12:47-50; 13:1 – 16:33. John's words in 1 John 3:1-10 could almost be coming directly from the mouth of Christ himself. In the context, it is patent that John means the law of Christ – he can only mean the law of Christ. He never mentions the law of Moses once in his entire letter. And in the context of 1 John, it is clear that John is telling believers that they have to keep the law that they are under. He is urging them to obey that law, he is commanding them to keep it. I cannot read his words in any other way. As the apostle says elsewhere in his letter:

By this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says, 'I know him', but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked (1 John 2:3-6).

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome (1 John 5:1-3).

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<sup>12</sup> See my 'All Men Under Law'.

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He certainly raises his doctrine to the highest possible pitch:

The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God (1 John 3:8-10).

Now, although the phrase is not mentioned, this can only be the law of Christ. No other law will fit the bill. As I hinted, John had remembered Christ's discourse in John 12:47-50; 13:1 – 16:33 (brought in any case to his memory by the Holy Spirit in accordance with Christ's promises – John 14:26; 16:12-15). Christ's commands, his law, are synonymous in this context, and obedience to the law of Christ (the commands of Scripture) is proof positive of the inward work of the Spirit. To claim to be led by the Spirit and yet not obey Scripture is a contradiction in terms.

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). 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.

If we cite the entire context of 1 John 3:4, the position could not be more explicit:

You have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth... I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. But the anointing that you received from him

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abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie – just as it has taught you, abide in him... See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are... Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness (1 John 2:20-27; 3:1-4).<sup>13</sup>

The law of Christ, once again, virtually in a nutshell! In short, the believer *is* under the law of Christ, and this comprises the inward work of the Spirit *and* the external, written Scriptures.

And this passage is not unique. Consider Paul's letter to Titus. Note his opening emphasis upon his apostolic authority for issuing binding instruction, rule and command for Titus, in the first instance, then, through him, the believers in Crete, and then for all believers through this age:

Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Saviour (Tit. 1:1-3).

Having laid the foundation, the apostle proceeds to set out detailed instruction. Titus has to appoint elders in every church, every one of whom 'must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it' (Tit. 1:10). Titus himself has to 'teach what accords with sound doctrine' (Tit. 2:1), he has to 'urge' (Tit. 2:6), to 'declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you'

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<sup>13</sup> The theme continues in 2 and 3 John. Notice how many times John speaks of 'truth'. 'Truth' is inward (2 John 2), but clearly, by his use of 'command', 'walk in obedience to commands', 'teaching of Christ', it is also objective.

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(Tit. 2:15), ‘remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient...’ (Tit. 3:1), ‘to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works’ (Tit. 3:8). ‘Older women... are to teach what is good, and so train the young women’ (Tit. 2:3-4). In short: ‘Let our people learn to devote themselves to good works’ (Tit. 3:14).

And yet, with all that, the apostle, in the same letter, can declare:

The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works (Tit. 2:11-14).

Once again, we have the combination of the inward work of God’s grace, this grace teaching believers from within, coupled with the outward apostolic command which has to be enforced by local elders in the *ekklēsia*, with believers mutually instructing and edifying one another, all the while taking responsibility for their own personal obedience, and all of it set out in the compass of the Scriptures.

## *'No Confession? Nothing to Debate!'*

During a recent conversation with two friends, I learned that some covenant theologians complain that since there is no definitive new-covenant theology Confession, they cannot really engage in any serious debate with those of us who stand for that theology. In essence, they say: 'You can't be serious. We don't know what you believe. There is nothing to debate. Until you have a Confession, that's the end of the story!'<sup>1</sup>

Hence the title of this article: 'No Confession? Nothing to Debate!'

Now this conversation was sparked off because of something I had written in my recent *Redemption History Through Covenants*:

We who overtly advocate new-covenant theology must not repeat the mistake of many in the past and turn any Confession – any Confession, even one of our own – into a shibboleth.<sup>2</sup> If any of us should be silly enough to try to capture new-covenant theology in some definitive, final statement, so that it becomes, as covenant theology has, set in concrete, then we would be working directly against the very spirit of new-covenant theology. One of its features – to my mind, its leading feature – is that it tries to come to Scripture unfiltered by any system or Confession. Every believer, in a sense, must do this for himself. To turn new-covenant theology into a system would be a contradiction in terms.<sup>3</sup>

This, apparently, caused no little stir, arousing the complaint with which I opened this article. Well, if this is how things stand, and covenant theologians demand a definitive new-covenant

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<sup>1</sup> The conversation in question can be found on the following link: <http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=951617362310>

<sup>2</sup> A shibboleth is a word or phrase used to distinguish those inside a group from those outside, a mantra that is repeated so often that it almost becomes meaningless – except to separate those who are 'in' from those who are 'out'. It derives from Judg. 12:5-6.

<sup>3</sup> My *Redemption History Through Covenants* p12

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Confession before they are willing to have a serious debate about the issues, then they will have a long wait if they want to debate with me. I won't be signing such a Confession any time soon. Let me explain, and let me say why I am taking the trouble to write about it now.

Although I have, in part, dealt with it in a previous article,<sup>4</sup> because this sort of comment raises a very important issue, I think I should return to it. Why? Because it lies at the very heart of the debate about new-covenant theology. You see, as I understand God's mind revealed in the Bible, believers, in their formulation of doctrine and practice, should start with Scripture, not with a Confession, however good and venerable that Confession might be, however sanctified by tradition. Moreover, I, myself, came to adopt (what I later – much later – discovered to be) new-covenant theology as a direct result of trying to expound Scripture in a regular teaching ministry within a local church. I had, for many years, been an advocate of covenant theology, but when preaching through Hebrews I found my system severely challenged, especially, at that time, in Hebrews 3 and 4. A little later, when preaching through Galatians, and seeing what some covenant theologians had to do to maintain their position in light of the apostle's doctrine, I simply could not go on advocating covenant theology. It did not stand the scrutiny of Scripture. I had a choice: either I could maintain my system and warp Scripture, or I could maintain Scripture and let my system go. I had to do the latter.<sup>5</sup> In truth, there was no choice. What I am saying is, I am a new-covenant theologian, not because of any Confession, but because I must let Scripture speak with its own voice, and not speak to me filtered by any statement of man. Not, I hasten to add, that I ignore the great Confessions, but Scripture must be paramount.<sup>6</sup>

And that is at the heart of my quarrel with covenant theologians over this complaint of theirs. They can only engage in serious debate with people like me if we both have our

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<sup>4</sup> See my “‘New-Covenant Theology Isn't Monolithic’”.

<sup>5</sup> For more, see ‘My Testimony’ in both video and audio.

<sup>6</sup> I do not claim that I always meet my own rubric. Alas, we all are prone to gloss Scripture when long-held, cherished principles are challenged.

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respective Confessions to defend and attack? Really? If so, it reminds me, I must say, of the days of old when the bigwigs would nominate a champion to do their fighting for them. Is it really true that 'I won't let my Tweedledum take the stand until you can put up your Tweedledee'!

If so, then, as I have said, this means that such people will never engage with me. You see, I am unable to reach an absolute, definitive, final, unchangeable statement on what I understand the Bible to teach about the new covenant. Is it any wonder? In this life, I never will come to a full understanding of the limitless glories of Christ in the new covenant, and the benefits which accrue to me through my participation in that covenant by faith in the Redeemer. Why, eternity will be too short to exhaust its vastness! And, make no mistake, that is what we are talking about – not some academic debate about a few texts. We are talking about the gospel of Christ, and of all that he accomplished in the eternal decree of God, of all that he accomplished according to the will of his Father, and of all this applied by the sovereign Spirit to the elect. If any man is daft enough to think that he can contain that ocean-fullness – the triune God's eternal purpose gloriously accomplished in Christ – in any confessional thimble, I despair of him!

In other words, as a believer I think it right – and, in particular, it is my approach in all this – to be constantly exploring Scripture by the Spirit, always willing to adjust my understanding in light of what I read and come to understand from the word of God, as guided by the Spirit. I am convinced that Christ himself (John 14:26; 16:13-15) gives me the warrant for this stance.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, I take my view of the gospel, not from any Confession, but from the Bible. I should have thought this was stating the obvious for every believer! While I am willing (and anxious) to test my view against the teachings of men, even so, primarily – and ultimately – I am bound by what I see, under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, in Scripture. I am not bound by any Confession or system.

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<sup>7</sup> I know that the primary fulfilment of Christ's promise is found in the apostolic writings, but I am also convinced that every believer has the Spirit to guide him in understanding Scripture.

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In saying this, I am propounding nothing new, of course. Take John Robinson. We all know that in 1620 he told his friends, when they were setting sail for the New World, that God had yet more light – fresh light – to break out from his word. He grieved that too many stopped where Luther or Calvin had left them. Admitting that these were great and good men, even so, he argued, they did not grasp all the truth, and, therefore, it is quite wrong for us not to be willing to disagree with or go beyond Luther or Calvin when the Spirit shows us new things from Scripture.<sup>8</sup>

Why stop at 1620? If Robinson had been speaking in 1720, he would have included, and with good reason, along with Luther and Calvin, the men of Westminster, the men of the Savoy Declaration, and the men who drew up the 1689 Particular Baptist Confession. In 1720, he would have been primarily speaking of the Westminster documents, and the documents which relied heavily upon them. He would have said that too many are not prepared, when Scripture directs them, illuminated by the Spirit, to move beyond the Westminster Confession. And he would rightly have deplored such a mind-set.

1620? 1720? What about 2016? Far too many people today think that the men of Westminster set out, for all time, the definitive statement of the faith. And everything – everything – must be judged by that standard. Appalling! I do not apologise for the word.

And yet, covenant theologians – staunch advocates of the Westminster documents and their progeny – tell us repeatedly that the Westminster documents are but subordinate standards, that the ultimate authority is Scripture! Indeed, consistency demands that they do so. The Westminster Confession tells them as much:

The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See my 'A Thanksgiving Day Thought'.

<sup>9</sup> Westminster Confession 1:10.

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But in my experience – and I know that I'm not alone – when we, as new-covenant theologians, try to engage with covenant theologians, almost invariably they turn to their Confessions. Indeed, as my opening paragraph makes clear, until we have, shall we say, the Wakkieville Confession of New-Covenant Theology, some – if not many – covenant theologians will continue to dismiss any serious examination of the points we raise: 'We cannot discuss the issue with you. You have no Confession. In any case, whatever Confession you come up with, it's bound to disagree with the Westminster (or the 1689). And that's enough for us'.

Hmm! I am reminded of an episode in the life of Christ:

And when [Jesus] was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said: 'By what authority do you do these things? And who gave you this authority?' And Jesus answered and said unto them: 'I also will ask you one thing, which if you tell me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it? From heaven, or of men?' And they reasoned with themselves, saying: 'If we shall say: "From heaven"; he will say unto us: "Why did you not then believe him?" But if we shall say: "Of men"; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet'. And they answered Jesus, and said: 'We cannot tell'. And he said unto them: 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things' (Matt. 21:23-27).

The sting is in the tail. The Jews might say that they *could* not say, but Jesus knew – and let them know that he knew – that it was not a question of *could* not but *would* not: they would not face up to his question. They dodged it!

And this highlights the serious underlying point here. We are not ruled by a Confession – any Confession – are we? Our faith is not founded on the statements of men, is it? We believers are men and women of Scripture, are we not? We believe what we believe because the Bible says it, don't we? The idea that nobody can take the claims of new-covenant theology seriously until that theology has a Confession is not only ludicrous; it is utterly wrong!

Consider this well-known scriptural statement:

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[The] Jews [in Berea] were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so (Acts 17:11).

Paul was teaching in the synagogue in Berea. His hearers were weighing his teaching, not by any Confession drawn up by the rabbis, however august such a Confession might have been, but by searching the Scriptures, and doing so day in and day out. Do not fail to see that Luke records this, not simply as a fact. Oh no! He trumpeted it as a commendation of these Bereans! Now what's good enough for Paul and the Bereans listening to him – that is, if it was scripturally commendable for the apostle's hearers to weigh his teaching in the light of Scripture<sup>10</sup> – surely it must be good enough for believers today. It ought to be the way believers deal with anything that challenges their present understanding of the faith. In particular, it must show covenant theologians how to react when confronted by new-covenant theology. After all, they have no text, do they, which says something along these lines: 'Covenant theologians are more noble because they daily search new-covenant theology, and search and weigh it by the Westminster or 1689 Confession'?

I find Calvin's comment on Acts 17:11 most interesting:

They did only examine Paul's doctrine by the rule and square of the Scripture, even as gold is tried in the fire; for the Scripture is the true touchstone whereby all doctrines must be tried.

Do not miss his 'only'. The touchstone is Scripture and *only* Scripture. That is what Calvin said. How about it, you Reformed men and women? Was Calvin right? If so, will you do what he advocated and, in particular, will you examine new-covenant theology 'by the rule and square of... Scripture' ?

Calvin had more to say:

The faithful must judge of every doctrine no otherwise than out of, and according to, the Scriptures, having the Spirit for their

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<sup>10</sup> He was not writing Scripture at the time, please note.

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leader and guide... For when the Spirit of God commends the men of Berea, he prescribes to us a rule in their example.<sup>11</sup>

Do not miss his 'no otherwise' nor his 'the Spirit of God... prescribes to us a rule in their example'.

Granted that in saying this Calvin was rebutting the Papists and their love of Councils, even so, the principle – which comes through loud and clear – stands:

Therefore, let this remain as a most sure maxim, that no doctrine is worthy to be believed but that which we find to be grounded in the Scriptures. The Pope will have all that received without any more ado, whatsoever he blunders out at his pleasure. But shall he be preferred before Paul, concerning whose preaching it was lawful for the disciples to make inquisition?... Every man is called to read the Scriptures. So likewise, making of search does not disagree with the forwardness of faith.

Let me restate Calvin's words – and it is quite proper so to do – adapting his wise counsel to the case in hand:

Therefore, let this remain as a most sure maxim, that no doctrine is worthy to be believed but that which we find to be grounded in the Scriptures. The Reformed will have all received – without any more ado – whatsoever they set out in their Confession. But shall that Confession be preferred before Paul, concerning whose preaching it was lawful for the disciples to make inquisition?... Every man is called to read the Scriptures. So likewise, for believers to search the Scriptures – and not the Confession – is right according to the Scriptures.

So, may I ask the Reformed who sympathise with the complaint I began with (and who could be more Reformed than Calvin?): 'Will you take Calvin's prescription – better, as he himself put it, the Holy Spirit's prescription – will you take Calvin's counsel seriously when it comes to new-covenant theology?' If so, when?

And what about Calvin's *Institutes* – which, as he told us, we have to regard as his settled position on doctrine (and surely,

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<sup>11</sup> Calvin also dismissed the papist arrogance that we can only hold as truth what the Church says is truth. Of course, he was talking about the Roman Church – but the same also applies to the Reformed Church. Sauce for goose and all that.

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therefore, his settled practice)?<sup>12</sup> Granted, yet again, he was rebutting the Papists, the principle still stands:

Whenever the decree of a council is produced, the first thing I would wish to be done is, to examine at what time it was held, on what occasion, with what intention, and who were present at it.

Let me do as before:

Whenever the Westminster Confession is produced, the first thing I would wish to be done is, to examine at what time it was held, on what occasion, with what intention, and who were present at it.

Well, that's easy! We know that the Westminster Assembly was overwhelmingly made up of Presbyterians, leavened by a handful of Independents. Baptists were excluded. And we know that the Assembly was convened expressly to deal with Antinomianism, both real and so-called,<sup>13</sup> and that is why the documents have such a legal twang about them.<sup>14</sup> Now all that, according to Calvin, is very important. Such information, he declared, would help him frame his opinion about the Confession.

He went on:

Next I would bring the subject discussed to the standard of Scripture. And this I would do in such a way that the decision of the council should have its weight, and be regarded in the light of a prior judgment, yet not so as to prevent the application of the test which I have mentioned.

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<sup>12</sup> Calvin: 'I have endeavoured [here in the *Institutes*] to give such a summary of religion in all its parts... Having thus... paved the way, I shall not feel it necessary, in any Commentaries on Scripture which I may afterwards publish, to enter into long discussions of doctrine... In this way, the pious reader will be saved much trouble and weariness, provided he comes furnished with a knowledge of the [*Institutes*] as an essential prerequisite... seeing that I have in a manner deduced at length all the articles which pertain to Christianity' (Calvin: *Institutes* 'The Epistle to the Reader' and 'Subject of the Present Work' in his prefixed explanations for the work dated 1539 and 1545).

<sup>13</sup> See my *Four*.

<sup>14</sup> See my 'The Law and the Confessions'.

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In other words, as before, Calvin's principle was that while he would duly listen to the Confession, above everything else he would subject it to the scrutiny of Scripture. Scripture always trumps the Confession. That is, according to Calvin.

Quoting, as so often he did, Augustine, he continued:

In this way, councils would be duly respected, and yet the highest place would be given to Scripture, everything being brought to it as a test.

Thus, according to the Reformer, the Confession would be respected, but Scripture would be supreme. What is more he would subject the Confession – and any discussion of the points it raised – to Scripture.<sup>15</sup>

Again:

Wherefore, let no names of councils, pastors, and bishops (which may be used on false pretences as well as truly), hinder us from giving heed to the evidence both of words and facts, and bringing all spirits to the test of the divine word, that we may prove whether they are of God.

As before:

Wherefore, let not the Westminster Confession (or those Confessions that came from it)... hinder us from giving heed to the evidence both of words and facts, and bringing all spirits to the test of the divine word, that we may prove whether they are of God.<sup>16</sup>

If anybody should object and complain that I have played fast and loose with Calvin, and that he would never have included the Westminster Confession in his strictures, then all I can say is that I have a higher regard for the Reformer's integrity than they have! Surely he knew the biblical principle of motes and logs did he not?

In conclusion: How about it my Reformed friends? Can we not, with Bible in hand, discuss the assertions of new-covenant theology – assertions which you so much dislike – subjecting

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<sup>15</sup> All the above may be found in Calvin's *Institutes* 4.9.8.

<sup>16</sup> Calvin's *Institutes* 4.9.12.

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them to the light of Scripture – Scripture, mind you, not any Confession – and doing so on the basis of passages and not just proof texts?<sup>17</sup> With apologies to Charles Dickens: I am sure I speak for many new-covenant theologians when I say we are willing.<sup>18</sup> Are you?

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<sup>17</sup> Proof texts, alas, being the Westminster way!

<sup>18</sup> In Dickens' *David Copperfield*, 'Barkis is willin' is the message he wants David to take to the lady he would like to marry.

## *One Command or Many in One?*

Mainstream new-covenant theologians hold that believers are under the law of Christ, and that the Scriptures are an integral part of that law. Recently, however, some have begun to argue that this is not so. Believers are not under the law of Christ, they say. There are no external commands in that law since it is entirely inward, the work of the Spirit forming Christ within believers. Although believers must and will obey Scripture, they do so as a kind of reflex action, using Scripture as an invaluable source to inform their way of life, but to talk of believers being under the rule, the law, the commanding governance of Scripture, as an integral part of the law of Christ, means a return to the killing bondage of the old covenant under ‘the letter’.

I have argued that this is wrong, depending as it does upon a faulty exegesis of certain key passages of Scripture. I have further argued that it ends up with something close to a mystical,<sup>1</sup> hyper-Calvinistic approach to progressive sanctification. Moreover, I am concerned that its long-term consequences will prove disastrous in other ways. While I do not accuse its advocates of it themselves, I do see the danger of antinomianism and perfectionism in those who, in years to come, adopt this new view without understanding *and applying* the complicated – I might say, tortuous – but necessary distinctions and qualifications it involves.<sup>2</sup>

Let me explain. As I have I read the numerous contributions to the discussion on this topic, I have been left with the very strong impression that a growing number are rejecting the very idea that believers should think and talk in terms of ‘law’, ‘rule’ or ‘commandment’ in connection with the Scriptures.<sup>3</sup> In my

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<sup>1</sup> That is, the absorption of the human into the divine.

<sup>2</sup> For my arguments, see my *Believers*; ‘Believers Under the Law of Christ’ and ‘The Obedience of Faith’. On ‘the law of Christ’ as the believer’s rule, see my *Christ* pp211-278,481-527.

<sup>3</sup> It surely goes without saying that I am not arguing that the Scriptures are a mere list of rules. I will return to this.

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view, they so emphasise the internal work of the Spirit that they are in danger of seriously weakening the role of the external Scriptures. I know they will be horrified by what I say, but I am afraid this is the distinct impression I have received. As such, I can only regard this new approach as a serious mistake.

With one important nuance, David White agrees with this new view, but not, I hasten to add, with my assessment of it. In his paper, 'The Law and the Mind of God',<sup>4</sup> he agrees that believers are indeed under the law of Christ, but only if we understand that law to consist of but one commandment; namely, Christ's 'new commandment' to love (John 13:34). There are no other commands in the law of Christ. Taking these words of Christ, 'A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another' (John 13:34), and linking them with Moses and the old covenant, he asserts:

The 'new commandment' of Christ will stand in the same place in this new covenant as the ten commandments had in the old, Mosaic covenant.

He goes on to refer to John 13:34 -35; 14:15 -24; 15:9-17, saying: 'Here... is the sum of that which is termed 'the law of Christ'. In developing his case, White quotes Christ's words in Matthew 22:34-40, with our Lord's reference to Leviticus 19:18 and Deuteronomy 6:5. Having been asked to say which was the greatest commandment in the law, Jesus declared:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets (Matt. 22:37-40).

White comments:

At the heart of the whole Mosaic law, at its very core... are these two great pillars, which hold up the whole structure, the second being the extension of the first. Jesus has highlighted this fact in the very week he is to inaugurate his new covenant.

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<sup>4</sup> I am engaging with the proof copy.

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Now, he gives new meaning, new emphasis – fulfilment – to what the Mosaic law had always been about. He completes the picture to which that old law pointed. He provides substance, now, to the former shadows. At the heart of the new covenant will be this: love for God’s Son, seen in identical love for God’s people. And just as it was the adherence to the law of Moses which was to display to the nations around that Israel was the people of the living God, so it is here. ‘By this’, Jesus says, ‘all men will know that you are my disciples’. The hallmark of the new covenant is the love of believer for believer. This is the ‘covenant commandment’. And this, I strongly suggest, is what Paul refers to as ‘the law of the Christ’... ‘Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ’ (Gal. 6:2). Do you see how what Paul says restates what Jesus has instituted as the new commandment of the new covenant? Sacrificial love, which is prepared to shoulder the load for our brothers, our sisters, is precisely what brings to completion (fulfils, not ‘keeps’) the law of the Christ.

This ‘monologue’ is what is referred to also in other terms. It is ‘God’s law’ for the believer. It has been elevated by Jesus, the King of Kings, as the ‘prince of laws’ from the old covenant – thus it is the ‘royal law’. It is the ‘law which brings freedom’. At the end of his life on this earth, John will also reflect on this single covenant commandment in his letters.

I believe that all this plays into the current debate over the law of Christ. Since I feel that White’s paper might well be used by some to bolster them in the new concept of the law of Christ that I have spoken about, I want to respond, under three headings:

Christ and Moses compared

Christ’s new-covenant commandment

Christ’s use of Leviticus 19:18 and Deuteronomy 6:5

### ***Christ and Moses compared***

While there are similarities between the old and the new covenants, Scripture stresses the contrast between them.<sup>5</sup> Israel

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<sup>5</sup> I quote from my ‘Covenant Theology Tested’: ‘The two Testaments are strictly continuous (apart from the 400 year gap), but the two

## *One Command or Many in One?*

was overwhelmingly an unregenerate nation, held under the law of Moses, which served as a child custodian over them as a people, as a temporary covenant for them alone, lasting until the coming of the Seed, Christ (Gal. 3:23-25; 4:1-7). Now that Christ has fulfilled the old covenant, and established the new, believers have died to the law of Moses<sup>6</sup> and are under the law of Christ, which law gives them motives for obedience, and instructions on how to calibrate it, what to aim for, including principles by which to work out the inward grace of the Spirit as they have to face ever-changing circumstances (Rom. 6:17; Phil. 2:12-13). The old covenant was a ministry of condemnation, even death; the new covenant is a spiritual, glorious ministry (2 Cor. 3:3-11,17-18). So, as White put it: ‘The old covenant had said: “If you keep my commandments, you will live”. The new covenant declares: “If you love me, you will keep my

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covenants are radically different, and have to be contrasted by us because they are contrasted in Scripture. The one, the Mosaic covenant, the old covenant, was the covenant of the flesh, outward, a shadow, ineffective, condemning, killing, a covenant of death, a temporary covenant which was fulfilled by Christ and abolished because it was weak and useless. The other covenant, the new covenant, is superior in that it is spiritual, of the Spirit, inward, the reality, effective, saving and permanent. While the Reformed want to talk in terms of the continuity of the two Testaments, this, in fact, is virtually irrelevant. What really matters is the fundamental disjoint of the two covenants. See John 1:17; Rom. 8:3; 10:4; 2 Cor. 3:6-9; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 7:18,22; 8:13. This is precisely what the Reformed will not face up to’.

<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere I have looked at the problem of how Gentiles believers who, never being under the law of Moses, could be said to have died to it: ‘Paul was speaking either of his own personal experience as a Jew, or else he was speaking of the Jews and not Gentiles. And even when he was clearly addressing Gentiles, he was often rebuking them for seeking to go under the law, allowing themselves to be put under it by false teachers, Judaisers, or going back to the slavery of pagan principles – this last, having nothing to do with the law of Moses at all! Christ has redeemed his people from all bondage. Even so... there are some passages where such explanations still do not satisfy. Rom. 2:14-15 is the explanation of all such’ (my *Christ* p37). I went on to tackle this important passage.

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commandments”.’ And: ‘The Christian is not “under” law at all in the same way that the old-covenant member was’. I agree. I also agree that while we should use the old covenant to illustrate the new, we should never forget the superiority of the latter.

This, of course, is precisely what the writer the Hebrews does throughout his letter. In particular, he compares and contrasts Christ and Moses, the heads of the two covenants:

Jesus the apostle and high priest of our confession... was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God’s house... Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses... Moses was faithful in all God’s house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, but Christ is faithful over God’s house as a son (Heb. 3:1-6).

We know that Moses, in the first covenant, received, and faithfully delivered, the whole law to Israel (Deut. 4:5). Likewise, Christ, in the new covenant, delivered his law to his people:

The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (John 1:17).

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son (Heb. 1:1-2).<sup>7</sup>

Moses, of course, had foretold this:

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... The Lord said to me... ‘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).

Now, I admit, we are not told explicitly that whereas Moses gave Israel ‘his’ law, Jesus has given his law to his new Israel, ‘the Israel of God’ (Gal. 6:16). But note the context linking ‘the

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<sup>7</sup> As the prophets’ words were written down as authoritative revelation, so were Christ’ (and his apostles’).

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law of Christ' (Gal. 6:2) and 'the Israel of God'.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, when we are told that God has spoken to us by Christ, it does not mean that Christ was a mere channel of information. The truth is, like Moses, Christ was a lawgiver, issuing his law repeatedly throughout his ministry, principally in his Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5 – 7), his last great discourse (John 12:47-50; 13:1 – 16:33), and in his great commission before his ascension (Matt. 28:18-20). Even a cursory glance at the Gospels will confirm it.

John Reisinger, in his *In Defense of Jesus, the New Lawgiver*, answering Richard Barcellos' book *In Defense of the Decalogue: A Critique of New Covenant Theology*, asked:

Whether Moses is the greatest lawgiver that ever lived, including the Lord Jesus Christ himself or whether Jesus replaced Moses as the new prophet and lawgiver in the very same sense as he replaced Aaron as the new high priest?

He went on:

These two contrary principles underlie the two positions. New-covenant theology defends [I would say, proclaims] Jesus as the new, greater, full and final lawgiver who replaces Moses. We insist that the laws of Christ, given to the children of the kingdom of grace, make higher demands than those given by God to Israel at Sinai... We insist that Christ is the new lawgiver... To view Christ as only an exegete, even as the greatest exegete, is to reduce the Sermon on the Mount to nothing more than a true and spiritual understanding of the law given to Moses... New covenant theology prefers to view the

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<sup>8</sup> By the context, I mean that these two verses come in the closing words of the letter to the Galatians, one of the major New Testament books dealing with the subject of law. The two topics, 'the law of Christ' and 'the Israel of God', therefore, cannot be throwaways. Indeed, it would be nearer the truth to call them the climax to the letter: 'Do not go back to the law of Moses or pagan law. You are no longer old Israel or pagans (Gal. 3:26-29). You are the Israel of God (1 Pet. 2:9-10; see also Eph. 2:19; Phil. 3:20), and you have your own new law: the law of Christ'. Furthermore, do not forget that Galatians is the earliest New Testament book: the apostle put down this vital marker right at the start of the history of the church.

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Sermon on the Mount as a vital part of the new law of the kingdom of grace given by the new prophet and king of the church.<sup>9</sup>

Christ, in his Sermon on the Mount, not only took some principles from the Mosaic law and made them more intense, he upheld others – in particular the love commandment (Lev. 19:18 – see Matt. 5:43-44) – and made others redundant. Clearly, Christ was not renewing the Mosaic covenant, but, right at the start of the new age, he was instituting his own law for the new covenant. He was setting out a new law, under a new covenant, in a new age, for new men.<sup>10</sup> And as Reisinger said: ‘The laws of the kingdom of grace established by our Lord Jesus Christ are higher and more demanding than any laws God ever gave to Israel through Moses’.<sup>11</sup>

This is the point I wish to establish, and White agrees with me: as Moses was Israel’s lawgiver, so Christ is the lawgiver for his people. Christ, of course, is far more than his people’s lawgiver, but since ‘the law of Christ’ is the issue under debate, I concentrate on this fact. Christ is the lawgiver in the new covenant. It must be right, therefore, to call his commands ‘the law of Christ’; they can be nothing else.

William Gadsby, writing on ‘the law of liberty’ (Jas. 1:25), having said ‘that the Holy Ghost has been pleased to set forth this law by a diversity of terms’, began by quoting Isaiah 2:3 and Micah 4:2: ‘Out of Zion shall go the law’ (see also Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 36:27). Stating that ‘this law is called “the law of Christ”... (Gal. 6:2)’, he went on:

The law of works was given by Moses, but this law, which is grace and truth, came by Jesus Christ (John 1:17); for, we are not without law to God, but under the law of Christ (1 Cor. 9:21), for so the passage should be rendered.<sup>12</sup>

Referring to Isaiah 42:1, Gadsby quoted John Gill:

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<sup>9</sup> John G.Reisinger: *In Defense of Jesus, the New Lawgiver* pp12-16.

<sup>10</sup> See my *Christ* especially pp236-241,493-500, and my ‘The Law the Believer’s Rule?’

<sup>11</sup> Reisinger p9. See my ‘The Penetrating Law of Christ’.

<sup>12</sup> Gadsby went into details, stressing the ‘of’.

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The gospel, the product of divine wisdom [is] the gospel of God, whose judgment is according to truth, the rule of human judgment in things spiritual and saving, and by which Christ judges and rules in the hearts of his people. This he brought forth out of his Father's bosom, out of his own heart, and published it in person to the Jews, and, by his apostles, to the Gentiles, who, being converted by it, became subject to his rule and government.

Gadsby went on, referring to Isaiah 42:4, the isles waiting for the law of the Messiah: 'Now... what law can this be?' Gadsby asked. 'Surely not the killing letter [2 Cor. 3:6-9]! No. It is the precious gospel by which he judges and rules in the hearts of his people – a law quite distinct from the law of Moses'. On 'a law shall proceed from me' (Isa. 51:4), Gadsby declared:

[It came] from Christ the Head of his church. [It was] not the Sinai law, but the gospel, the law of Christ. It is the very same law mentioned in Isaiah 2:3... This is Zion's law... delivered by Zion's King to the children of Zion, the church of the living God. And this law, gospel, doctrine, or word is by way of eminence called 'the word of the kingdom' (Matt. 13:19), 'the word of salvation' (Acts 13:26), 'the word of the gospel' (Col. 1:5), 'the word of God's grace' (Acts 20:32), 'the word of faith' (Rom. 10:8), 'the word of reconciliation' (2 Cor. 5:19), 'the word of life' (Phil. 2:16; 1 John 1:1), 'the word of Christ' (Col. 3:16), 'the faithful word' (Tit. 1:9), 'the word of the oath' (Heb. 7:28), 'the word of Christ's patience' (Rev. 3:10), and 'the word of the saint's testimony' (Rev. 12:11). This is the word of the Lord that went from Jerusalem, the vision of peace; and a precious word it is. It is the word or law of Christ, the Prince of Peace, the sceptre of his kingdom, which is a right sceptre (Ps. 45:6; Heb. 1:8) and rod of his strength by which he rules his people... There is no law so strong and forcible, so attracting and engaging, or that is so cheerfully obeyed, as this precious gospel, which is the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus... This law is called 'the law of faith' (Rom. 3:27)... The gospel [is] the law of faith... It is the gospel that faith obeys and by which it walks... The... 'obedience to the faith' (Rom. 1:5)... By 'faith' here is not meant the grace of faith, but the doctrine of faith, which is the truth of the gospel of God... If the gospel be no rule of obedience... I am at a loss to know what the apostle meant when he tells us that 'the mystery, which was

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kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, [is] made known to all nations for the obedience of faith' (Rom. 16:25-26)... How can this precious gospel be more clearly revealed, and made known by the commandment of God, for the obedience of faith, if it be no rule of obedience?... The gospel is called the truth in direct opposition to the law (John 1:17).<sup>13</sup>

White recognised the obvious, self-evident link between commands and law – indeed, their virtual interchangeability: ““law” conveys its instructions by “commands” or “commandments””, he said. I agree! So, when we read ‘law’ we read ‘commandment’, and when we read ‘commandment’ we read ‘law’. If we are talking about Moses, we are talking about the law of Moses; if we are talking about Christ, we are talking about the law of Christ. Whenever we read of Christ issuing a command, we are reading an element of his law. And it’s not just in the literal use of ‘commandment’ or ‘law’, is it? Consider Jesus’ final statement to his disciples:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age (Matt. 28:18-20).

New converts have to be taught to observe everything Christ ‘commanded’. Now what else can this be but Christ’s law? But notice the opening of this commission. While the word ‘command’ is not used, what else do all the imperatives amount to but Christ’s command to his people for all time: ‘Go... make... baptise... teach’? As White agreed, when we meet ‘law’ we meet ‘commandment’, and when we meet ‘commandment’ we are in the realm of ‘law’ – whether or not we are talking

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<sup>13</sup> William Gadsby: ‘The Perfect Law of Liberty or the Glory of God revealed in the Gospel’ in *Freedom From The Law*, CBO Publications, Ossett, 2015, pp48-78. See my ‘The Obedience of Faith’.

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about Moses or Christ. ‘The law of Christ’, as a phrase, is rare in the New Testament, but as a concept it pervades it.

Nor must ‘the law of Christ’ be limited to Christ’s own words. As we shall see, in the very discourse where he was most clearly issuing his ‘new commandment’ to his disciples, Christ explicitly told them that he would give the Spirit in order to give them the full revelation of his word – that is, his law: the Spirit would lead the apostles into all truth and so, through that revelation, grant them foundational authority over all believers for all time (1 Cor. 3:10-11; Eph. 2:20; Rev. 21:14). Therefore it is no surprise to read the apostles insisting on this right to issue commands in the name of Christ; that is, the law of Christ.

Just one example must suffice:

Paul, an apostle – not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead – and all the brothers who are with me: To the churches of Galatia... I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ. For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man’s gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:1-11).

Notice that Paul thought it was essential to open his letter to the Galatians in this way, which letter, as I remarked before, is the earliest New Testament document. Combining this with the way he finished the letter, we can see how the apostle put down two vital markers right at the start of the history of the church: under the direct authority of Christ, he, and the other apostles, would, by the Spirit, set out the full revelation of the glories of the new covenant (Eph. 3:1-12), and, of course, in so doing, they would

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flesh out Christ's one great commandment, and all, by writing Scripture (2 Tim. 3:14-17; 2 Pet. 3:14-18).

To summarise thus far: Christ issued his law to his people both in his own lifetime and through his apostles by his Spirit after Pentecost. And all this revelation, of course, is found objectively only in the written Scriptures. For obvious reasons, the Spirit's writing of Christ's law on the heart cannot fulfil that role. Hence, the Scriptures must be right at the heart of the law of Christ.

### ***Christ's new-covenant commandment***

Here are the words:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another (John 13:34).

How should we understand Christ's words? How did his immediate hearers understand them? As one literal command? Surely not. In giving his apostles this one command he was clearly giving them an envelope containing a whole body of commands and principles, exhortations and instructions in summary form. Or, putting it another way, he was giving them a covering umbrella, a synopsis, to encapsulate or embody his entire law. It was, as it were, Jesus' text for this vital sermon or discourse in which he issued his law. It was the overall précis, summary or digest of what he was going to say, delineating its overall end, purpose and scope. It is as Paul told the Romans when referring to the Mosaic law:

The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet', and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Rom. 13:9).

We may justly accommodate the apostle's words: 'The law of Christ is summed up in this word: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another (John 13:34)"'.

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M.R.Vincent on ‘commandment’:

The word [is used] for a single commandment or injunction, but [is] used also for the whole body of the moral precepts of Christianity... This new commandment embodies the essential principle of the whole law.

Clearly this is right. Notice how Christ both preceded and followed his statement with a whole continuous stream of commandments. Moreover, note how, within this series of commands, he indicated that this discourse was designedly incomplete. Do not miss the fact that it was in this very discourse that he issued his promise of the Spirit to lead the apostles into the full and complete revelation of what he had wanted to say, both here and throughout his ministry. And he was not content to leave it at saying it once! All this prepares us for post-Pentecost Scriptures: the apostles would flesh out the encapsulating principle of ‘the one new-covenant commandment’. This is why I am sure that the answer to my chosen question in the title of this article is that Christ’s one commandment encapsulates the apostolic Scriptures as the law of Christ. We are talking about many commands in one. The closing book of Scripture makes it clear enough when it speaks of ‘the endurance of the saints’, ‘those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus’, ‘those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus’ (Rev. 12:17; 14:12). We are indeed, speaking of many commandments.

Let me quote the relevant scriptures in John 13 – 16. First, the one overall commandment:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another (John 13:34).

Now for the series of commandments within Christ’s discourse:

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

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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).

And now, within this last great discourse, replete as it is with Christ's commandments gathered under the umbrella of his one 'new commandment', we meet the far-reaching promise of the gift and ministry of the Spirit to enable the apostles to complete the task of setting out Christ's law for all his people for all time, to the end of the age:

These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you... When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me... I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away... I have said these things to you that... you may remember that I told them to you... 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 Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you (John 14:25-26; 15:26;16:1,4,12-15).

In light of this, as I said under the first heading, it is no surprise to read the apostles insisting on the right to issue commands in the name of Christ. And what else can this be the 'the law of Christ'?

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If we imagine ourselves back in the very early days of the church, just after Pentecost, discussing Christ's promise, what do you think might be going through our minds? Whether or not we would have foreseen, by the apostolic writings, issued in the name and authority of Christ, a mushrooming of myriad instructions, commandments and exhortations explaining, expanding, enlarging upon and enforcing his one great commandment, I cannot say. But, this is precisely what happened. Take Paul and John:

If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord (1 Cor. 14:37).

We have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will do the things that we command. May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ. Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us... [We gave you] an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we would give you this command... We command and encourage [you] in the Lord Jesus Christ... Brothers, do not grow weary in doing good. If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother (2 Thess. 3:4-15).

As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons... The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith... I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example<sup>14</sup> to those who were to believe in him for eternal life... This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare... (1 Tim. 1:3,5,16,18).

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<sup>14</sup> 'Example', 'pattern', *hupotupōsis*.

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Follow the pattern<sup>15</sup> of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 1:13).<sup>16</sup>

Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you... This is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another... this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him... We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error (1 John 2:7-8; 3:11,23-24; 4:6).<sup>17</sup>

I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father. And now I ask you, dear lady—not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning—that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it (2 John 4-6).

And this is only the merest sample of the apostles issuing a stream of commands, rules and principles, accompanied spiritual motives, all with the authority of Christ and in his name; in other words, giving believers the law of Christ. Not

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<sup>15</sup> See previous note.

<sup>16</sup> Do not miss the role of the *commanding* army officer (2 Tim. 2:4, NIV) and, especially, the need to compete *lawfully*, *nomimōs*, according to the *rules* (2 Tim. 2:5), in the illustrations which Paul immediately set out in which he used the same word as in: ‘The law [of Moses] is good, if one uses it *lawfully*’ (1 Tim. 1:8). Clearly, we are in the realm of new-covenant law.

<sup>17</sup> Compare these words of Christ: ‘Whoever is of God hears the words of God’ (John 8:47). ‘Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice’ (John 18:37). Gill on John 18:37: ‘Hears [Christ’s] voice, the voice of his gospel, and that not only externally, but internally, so as to approve of it, rejoice at it, and distinguish it – and the voice of his commands, so as cheerfully to obey them from a principle of love to him’.

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wishing to extend this article, I limit myself to just one comment, by Gill, on 1 Corinthians 14:37:

Let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord; if he is a true prophet, and really a spiritual man, he will clearly see, and therefore ought to own, that the rules here prescribed... are perfectly agreeable to the commands of Christ, and are to be esteemed as such, being delivered under the influence and direction of his Spirit; and which the prophet and spiritual man must discern and allow, if they have the Spirit of God; for whatever was commanded by the apostles under divine inspiration, was all one as if immediately commanded by Christ himself.

And here is an example of Paul, taking Christ's commandment (using the decalogue), and expanding it for believers, and in precise detail:

Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet', and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'. Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarrelling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires (Rom. 13:8-14).

And so it goes on, right to the end of Romans.

From all this, we can see that Christ issued his law to his people both in his own lifetime and through his apostles by his Spirit after Pentecost. Was this just for the first disciples? Of course not! So where shall we, today, read the law of Christ, the apostolic pattern, rules and commandments, as issued directly by Christ and then by his Spirit through his apostles? Only in the

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written Scriptures! Hence, the Scriptures must be right at the heart of the law of Christ.<sup>18</sup>

The first believers had the original manuscripts (not all at once, of course). Surely they regarded those precious documents as the word or law of Christ to them directly. This, surely, was one of the main reasons which moved later believers to gather all these scattered documents, Scriptures (2 Pet. 3:14-18) and preserve and publish them in one volume. They recognised their authority, their value and purpose. They knew that Paul's command to Timothy applied to them in their day, and they wanted succeeding generations of believers to have the same. This is our inheritance. Taking our Bible, reading it through its apostolic interpretation and application, we know we have Christ's law to us. In particular, we know that the apostolic command to Timothy applies to us, as it has to all the saints ever since the apostle issued it:

Continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed... the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:14-17).

### ***Christ's use of Leviticus 19:18 and Deuteronomy 6:5***

Let me re-state what I said at the start. White, taking 'A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another' (John 13:34), and linking this with Moses and the old covenant, he asserts:

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<sup>18</sup> '[Moses] at Mount Sinai... received living oracles to give to us' (Acts 7:38). 'The Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God' (Rom. 3:2). 'Though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God' (Heb. 5:12). 'Whoever speaks, [let him be] as one who speaks oracles of God' (1 Pet. 4:11).

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The 'new commandment' of Christ will stand in the same place in this new covenant as the ten commandments had in the old, Mosaic covenant.

He goes on to refer to John 13:34 -35; 14:15 -24; 15:9-17, saying: 'Here... is the sum of that which is termed 'the law of Christ'.

This is highly significant. White here says that as the old-covenant law had its summary, so does the new. I agree. But I go on to maintain that just as the old-covenant summary did not do away with the full version of that law, with its detailed commandments, but, rather, complemented it, neither does the new-covenant equivalent of Christ's law do away with its full version. What is more, as with the old covenant, Israel had the law's summary written on stone tables, with the full version in the Book of the Law, so, in the new covenant, Christ's law is written on the heart of his people and in the external Scriptures.

We can go further. Deuteronomy 6:5 (the first table) with Leviticus 19:18 (the second table) is the biblical summary of the entire law. Jesus said so (Matt. 22:37-40). But just as this summary did not do away with the entire law of 613 commandments, neither does Christ's one commandment – which, as I have explained, represents a synopsis of his entire law – do away with the entire body of commandments and imperatives in the rest of the New Testament.<sup>19</sup> In other words, Jesus' use of Leviticus 19:18 and Deuteronomy 6:5 confirms the way we must regard the Scriptures as an integral part of the law of Christ.

This approach, in particular, to Leviticus 19:18 is important. It comes entirely and only from Christ. Before his use of the verse, followed by Paul writing his letters to the churches, there are no explicit references to the verse in Jewish writings.<sup>20</sup> In

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<sup>19</sup> For one thing, Christ's new-commandment has no reference to loving, serving and obeying God himself, but who can doubt that this belongs to Christ's law?

<sup>20</sup> 'Explicit references to Lev. 19:18 are lacking in Jewish literature before Paul... In contrast, Lev. 19:18 is the Pentateuchal passage most often cited in the New Testament... The stimulus to focus thus on Lev. 19:18 must therefore be peculiarly Christian and is best explained as

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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). This can only mean that the apostolic emphasis on Leviticus 19:18 is particularly and especially a gospel emphasis, deriving from Christ himself, who first used it in this way (Matt. 5:43-44; 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27). Thus an undisputable link is established between Leviticus 19:18 and Christ's law. With the apostolic use of Leviticus 19:18, following on from Christ's use of it, we are firmly in the realm of Christ, not Moses, as lawgiver.

Using the fact that the ten commands and/or Leviticus 19:18 (with Deuteronomy 6:5) summarises the entire law, let me extend the thought a little. No Jew could work out for himself all the individual commandments by using the summary; he needed all the detailed commandments in addition.<sup>21</sup> What is more, God himself, having written the decalogue on the stone tablets, insisted that the full law had to be written in a book – and not only in the book of the law, but on the door posts, and elsewhere:

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 11:18-20).

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deriving from Jesus himself'. (James D.G.Dunn: *The Epistle to the Galatians*, A & C Black, London, 1993, p291. Ben Witherington: *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on... Paul's Letter to the Galatians*, T.&T.Clark, Edinburgh, 1998, p383 agreed, but noted a Qumran reference.

<sup>21</sup> Take Deut. 14:1-21 for instance.

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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).

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.

All this plays into the new covenant. The new covenant is undeniably superior to the old in many respects – not least that God’s law is now written on the heart. But this is no way mitigates against the written law of Christ in Scripture.

Let me take one example (as used by White also). James, having referred to what he called ‘the royal law according to the Scripture’ (Jas. 2:8), which is Leviticus 19:18 in the hands of Christ,<sup>22</sup> commanded his readers: ‘So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty’ (Jas. 2:12). Making a contrast with the law of Moses, he speaks of another law, the ‘royal law’, the fulfilment of Leviticus 19:18 (Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:14), which can be none other than ‘the law of Christ’ (Gal. 6:2), ‘this rule’ by which the Israel of God must walk (Gal. 6:16; Phil. 3:16), ‘the law towards Christ’ or ‘Christ’s law’ (1 Cor. 9:21), ‘the law of faith’ (Rom. 3:27),<sup>23</sup> ‘the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus’ (Rom. 8:2), the gospel. *This* is the law by which believers must live and by which they will be judged. *This* is the easy yoke and light burden which Christ enables his people to delight in, that law which encompasses the entire word of God, as interpreted and applied by Christ and the apostles in the new covenant. This is the law by which believers will be judged. All this raises an important question: How can believers be judged by a law if that law is not objective? This, it seems to me, makes it inevitable that the law of Christ must

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<sup>22</sup> I see in the ‘royal’ a reference to the law of Christ the King. Moo thought ‘royal’ ‘is probably an allusion to Jesus’ own teaching’ (Moo: ‘The Law’ p217).

<sup>23</sup> The word is *kanōn* in Gal. 6:16 and Phil. 3:16, ‘any rule or standard, a principle or law’ (see Joseph Henry Thayer: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Ninth Printing 1991). ‘Law’ in Rom. 3:27 could aptly be translated ‘rule’. In other words, ‘the rule of faith’.

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include the objective, written Scriptures. James had already said enough to make this point:

Put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing (Jas. 1:21-25).

Yes, ‘the word’ is ‘implanted’ in the believer, but, clearly, it is also external and objective. A believer has to ‘hear the word’, ‘look into the word’, ‘look into the perfect law’, not merely look into his heart, and listen to the inward voice. Above all he has to do it, and will be judged by it (Jas. 2:12). How is this possible unless that ‘word’, that ‘perfect law’ is objective? What else can it mean? James’ words make sense only if he is talking about the Scriptures as a vital part of the law of Christ, that law which is over believers, that law which forms the objective standard by which they will be judged. Of course, James is referring primarily to the Old Testament, but 2 Timothy 3:14-17 and 2 Peter 3:14-18 warrant the extension of his words to the New Testament. They more than warrant it; they ensure it.

Thomas R.Schreiner:

I have argued from both Galatians and 1 Corinthians that the law of Christ should be defined as the law of love. We see in 1 Corinthians 9 that Paul’s flexibility and sacrifice on behalf of his hearers represents the same kind of sacrificial love that Christ displayed in going to the cross. The life of Christ, then, exemplifies the law of love. It would be a mistake to conclude that there are no moral norms in the law of Christ, for Romans 13:8–10 makes it clear, as do many other texts in Paul, that the life of love cannot be separated from moral norms.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Thomas R.Schreiner: *40 Questions About Christians and Biblical Law*, Kregel, 2010, p103.

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My question is: Where shall we find these ‘moral norms’ but in the Scriptures? Thus, accommodating Schreiner’s words, Christ’s commandment to love cannot be separated from the objective written Scriptures. Christ’s one commandment does not remove the Scriptures from the law of Christ. Rather, it guarantees that the Scriptures are at the heart of his law. In a sermon on Romans 13:8-10, Schreiner declared:

There are two mistakes that we may fall into when defining love. What is the first blunder in judgment? The first mistake is to say that since love fulfils the law we no longer have any need for commandments. Some understand these verses to say that the only moral guideline Christians need is love. After all, verse 8 says that the only thing we owe one another is love, and that the one who loves his neighbour has fulfilled the law. Furthermore, verse 9 says that the different commands of the [Mosaic] law are summed up in love. They argue, therefore, that we do not actually need commandments anymore. All we need to ask ourselves about any course of action is the question found in verse 10. Does our action actually hurt our neighbour? If it does not hurt our neighbour, if it does our neighbour good, then that action must be loving, and thus we fulfil the law, for Paul says in verse 10 that love is the fulfilment of the law. Those who believe this way bristle against imposing any commands upon believers. They think this is a form of legalism. They condemn as legalism any commands which say ‘you should do this’, or ‘you should not do this’. They insist that believers are not under any ‘commands’, except the command to love one another.

Schreiner went on:

I want to put the spotlight on the massive error that is found in this view. When Paul says that love is the fulfilment of the law, he does not intend to say that we have no need for commandments. To say that love is the fulfilment of the law does not imply that we can dispense with all commandments. Instead, specific commandments are mentioned in verse 9 so that we will see how love looks in action. One cannot commit adultery, murder, steal, and covet and claim to be loving. Specific commandments are given so that we will see in a concrete and practical way how love manifests itself in everyday life.

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He concluded:

We must let God's word in the Scriptures define for us what is loving. Otherwise, we will fall prey to the deception of the world. To sum up [this] point, certainly love involves more than the keeping of commandments, but it never involves anything less than keeping them. Love goes beyond the keeping of God's law, but it never goes around the keeping of God's law. Commandments guard us from inadequate definitions of love and provide us with an objective standard by which we can test our lives. If we claim to be walking in love but fail to keep God's commandments, then our profession is contradicted by our practice.<sup>25</sup>

I ask again: Where will we find 'God's law, God's commandments'? Israel found the law of God for them – the Mosaic law – in the Scriptures as far as they had been completed in their day. Where can we, as believers, find the law of Christ? In all Scripture, of course. For a start, see 2 Timothy 3:14-17 and 2 Peter 3:14-18.

Stephen J. Wellum:

All Scripture is authoritative and thus provides the norm for Christian ethics. What is our standard for ethics? How do we establish moral norms? The simple answer: all of Scripture is our standard and it alone establishes moral norms. In this regard, 2 Timothy 3:15-17 is a crucial text. Paul describes Scripture, specifically the Old Testament, as God's breathed-out word and thus fully authoritative for Christians. In other words, the entire Old Testament, including the law-covenant, [along with, now, the New Testament] functions for us as the basis [better, authority] for our doctrine and ethics. Although Christians are not 'under the law' as a covenant, it still functions as Scripture and demands our complete obedience<sup>26</sup>... Christian ethics is not antinomian... Our triune God has not left us to ourselves; Scripture is our sufficient and authoritative moral standard... We determine what is morally binding upon

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<sup>25</sup> Sermon by Thomas R. Schreiner: 'Loving One Another Fulfills the Law: Romans 13:8-10'.

<sup>26</sup> Wellum noted that on this point we should see Brian S. Rosner: *Paul and the Law: Keeping the Commandments of God*, Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2013, p31.

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us today by appealing to the entirety of Scripture viewed through the lens of Christ and the new covenant. Although Christians are not ‘under the [Mosaic] law’ as a covenant, it still functions for us as [part of] Scripture. As with any biblical text, however, before we directly apply it to our lives, we must first place it in its covenantal location and then, second, we must think through how that text points forward, anticipates, and is fulfilled in Christ. It is only by doing this that we correctly apply any biblical text to our lives as Christians... In answering the question – what is the moral law for Christians today? – we... first gladly confess that the entirety of Scripture is our standard. But we must simultaneously add that all of Scripture’s moral teaching is only binding upon us in light of its fulfilment in Christ... Both the replacement and fulfilment of the old covenant by the new is taught in the New Testament.<sup>27</sup> On the one hand, in the new covenant, the old is replaced by the law of Christ (1 Cor. 9:20-21). Instead of reliance upon the law [of Moses], we rely upon Christ (Gal. 2:19-20; Phil. 3:4-14), and we discern God’s will in Christ and apostolic instruction (Gal. 6:2; 1 Cor. 7:19; 9:21). As Rosner contends: ‘Christians are not under the law of Moses, but under the law of Christ, the law of faith and the law of the Spirit. We have died to the [Mosaic] law, Christ lives in us and we live by faith in the Son of God... We do not keep the [Mosaic] law, but fulfil the law [of Moses] in Christ and through love. We do not seek to walk according to the [Mosaic] law, but according to the truth of the gospel, in Christ, in newness of resurrection life, by faith, in the light and in step with the Spirit’<sup>28</sup>... In order for Christians, then, to determine what God’s moral law is, we must apply all of Scripture in light of Christ.<sup>29</sup>

Fred G. Zaspel:

Even as redeemed men and women we struggle against remaining sin. God in grace though Christ has broken sin’s previously over-powering grip (Rom. 6), but we are men and women caught between two worlds. We have been redeemed out of this present world and are citizens of heaven, enthroned with Christ himself. Yet we live in this present evil world and

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<sup>27</sup> See Rosner pp111-134.

<sup>28</sup> Rosner p134.

<sup>29</sup> Stephen J. Wellum: ‘Progressive Covenantalism and the Doing of Ethics’.

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feel the downward tug of it. We are properly living in two worlds and are torn in two very [*sic*] opposing directions. We are sanctified in Christ Jesus and feel the overwhelming force of his powerful grace at work in us drawing us to ever higher levels of glory. But in our struggle with sin we are a walking civil war (Gal. 5:17).<sup>30</sup>

This, in turn, is one of the great reasons why God has given us his law.<sup>31</sup> It provides for us an objective standard to correct the confused deceitfulness sin has brought to our hearts. The deceitfulness of sin is such that we seldom stop to consider sin's consequences. We do not adequately consider the evil of sin. There is a blind folly about sin, and we need God's law to inform our conscience to keep us from justifying what it condemns. What a depth of sin resides in our heart!

This is James' point [in James 1:13-18]. We are sinners. We sin because we want to. Our sin is our own fault. Our will is still tainted with a tendency to evil that has not yet been fully eradicated. And this is why our trials carry with them such occasions for sin.<sup>32</sup>

And it is also why we need an objective standard to be over us, to govern our aspirations, emotions, attitudes, wills and actions. And that objective standard is Scripture.

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<sup>30</sup> While I agree that we are in such a war, I disagree with Zaspel's view of this verse. See my *Christ* p150.

<sup>31</sup> The law of God for the believer is the law of Christ. I quote from my *Christ*: 'When, in Scripture, we meet "the law of God", we must ask ourselves which covenant we are talking about. If it is the old covenant, then "the law of God" is the "the law of Moses". If it is the new covenant, then "the law of God" is "the law of Christ"' (my *Christ* pp218-219,483-487). Zaspel would agree. In his review of *New Covenant Theology: Description, Definition, Defense*, by Tom Wells and Fred Zaspel, Thomas R.Schreiner wrote: 'Wells and Zaspel emphasise that the Mosaic covenant has come to an end with the coming of Jesus Christ... The Sinai covenant has been set aside now that Christ has come. Indeed, the Mosaic covenant points to Christ and is fulfilled in Christ. They do not conclude from this that believers are no longer under moral norms. Rather, believers are subject to the law of Christ, and the law of Christ is discerned from the New Testament'.

<sup>32</sup> Fred G.Zaspel: 'Thoughts from James on Sovereignty, Sin and Grace' in *Ministry of Grace: Essays in Honour of John G.Reisinger*, New Covenant Media, Frederick, 2007, p178.

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By way of illustration, take the following passage:

Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your [progressive] sanctification [or holiness, footnote]: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honour, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you. Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one (1 Thess. 4:1-10).

Notice how the apostle commands believers to be progressively sanctified, how he spells out his meaning in detail, and enforces the love commandment both by the inward work of the Spirit and his own commandment, and all within the compass of the external Scriptures. See also Matthew 5:43-44; Galatians 5:14; Ephesians 5:1-2; Hebrews 13:1; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 4:7-12, for instance. The inward teaching of the Spirit does not in the least way diminish the absolute need of the apostolic commands recorded in Scripture.

### ***Conclusion***

In light of this, I regard any weakening (however slight at first) of the sense of the binding authority of Scripture upon believers, and their response to it by determined obedience, in the power of the Spirit, to its rule and governance as the law of Christ, as a thoroughly retrograde step, and one to be resisted at all costs. I

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am convinced that the right exegesis of the relevant scripture passages firmly secures both the inward work of the Spirit in the believer's heart, and the written Scriptures, right at the heart of the law of Christ. I say it is essential for believers to maintain both. Putting it negatively, I assert that believers should stoutly resist any move which might threaten either, or, in the least respect, upset the scriptural balance between the two.



## *Misleading, Sad, Revealing: 'Relevant Today' by Jeremy Brooks*

To give Jeremy Brooks' article its full title: 'Are the Ten Commandments Relevant Today? An Exposition of Exodus 20:1-2'.<sup>1</sup> Why do I call it misleading, sad and revealing?

Since he was purporting to deal with the ten commandments and their relevance today, surely Brooks should have given us what the apostles have to say on the subject, should he not? Exodus 20:1-2, yes, but the believer's paramount authority for all his belief and practice is the apostolic writings. Surely that must be a given.<sup>2</sup> I hope nobody runs away with idea that this means I have no time for the Old Testament. Far from it!<sup>3</sup> The question is, however, how do we read the Old Testament? It must be through the eyes of the New. And if the believer's *paramount* authority – note my word – is not the apostolic writings, what is? So, I say again, any work on the relevance of the ten commandments today, if it's worth its salt, must be crammed full of apostolic passages on the subject. Brooks, alas, gives us none. None! And this is more than strange. For although you would never guess it from Brooks' article, Paul, in particular, did use the ten commandments when pressing progressive sanctification on believers.

But he did so on only three occasions. Only three occasions, mark you, in all his writings, and even then, he did not quote all

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<sup>1</sup> Published in the February 2017 issue of *The Banner of Truth*, pages 9-12.

<sup>2</sup> If Brooks found himself washed up a desert island one day, and he could be given only one page of Scripture, would he opt for Ex. 20 or Rom. 8?

<sup>3</sup> As I will show, it is Brooks and the advocates of 'historic Reformed theology' who see little use for believers for 99% of the Mosaic law, for instance. And this is in stark contrast with the apostles and, I might add, the advocates of new-covenant theology.

ten, not by a long chalk.<sup>4</sup> Such is the sum total of Paul's use of the ten commandments when instructing believers in holiness.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, in pursuing his aim to promote the believer's progressive sanctification, Paul made far greater use of the entire Mosaic law – which, see below, Brooks thought had no relevance for believers today. Now the very limited use the apostle made of the ten commandments, coupled with his far greater use of the entire old covenant, when dealing with the believer's progressive sanctification must, in itself, tell us something about the importance of the ten commandments in apostolic thinking, must it not, as well as telling us something about their role in the life of the believer?

Let me make good Brooks' failure to quote Paul's relevant use of the ten commandments:

Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet', and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'. Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law (Rom. 13:8-10).

For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Gal. 5:13-14).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Nor did he ever use the phrase 'the ten commandments'. Indeed, it appears only three times in the entire Bible.

<sup>5</sup> I am not forgetting Paul's use of Rom. 7:7, when, speaking of his unregenerate days as a Jew under the law, he declared: 'If it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said: "You shall not covet"'. But since Brooks was dealing with the relevance of the ten commandments for believers today in the matter of their progressive sanctification, Rom. 7:7 is not relevant. There is another point. Notice that even in Rom. 7:7 Paul did not limit what he was saying to the ten commandments; he spoke of 'the law'. See also Rom. 3:20; 4:15. I will return to this.

<sup>6</sup> Notice that even here Paul did not actually quote one of the ten commandments.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honour your father and mother' (this is the first commandment with a promise), 'that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land'. Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6:1-4).

This is the sum total of Paul's quotation from the decalogue when dealing with the believer's life of holiness, and, as I have noted, in Galatians 5:13-14 he did not actually quote one of the ten. I leave you, reader, to decide if you get the impression that Paul was always referring to the ten commandments, which, if Brooks had been right, he would have been.<sup>7</sup> After all, according to Brooks, 'the ten commandments' have 'abiding relevance, and [serve] a vital role as the believer's rule of life'. Well, if that really is so, I would expect the apostolic letters, letters in which they are constantly calling for the believer's progressive sanctification, to be full of extracts from the ten commandments. Yet they are not. This speaks volumes.

Above all, why did Brooks fail to mention the key Pauline passage on the subject? I refer to:

Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you? You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all. And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to

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<sup>7</sup> The same goes for the other apostles.

have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it. For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory. Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains un-lifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:1-18).

Whatever this passage is talking about, it most definitely is talking about the ten commandments. What else can the apostle's 'carved in letters on stone', and his reference to Moses' veil, be alluding to?

But Brooks quoted none of these passages. He did not even mention them. Instead, he gave us a screed based on 'historic Reformed theology'. This, it seems, is what being 'relevant today' means for men like Brooks. Remarkable!

Before we leave 2 Corinthians 3, however, we should note that it demands a closer look, for it deals with something of the utmost importance in the believer's approach to the law. Why? Because, in that passage Paul does not confine his remarks to the ten commandments. Oh no! He certainly includes those ten commandments at the heart of what he wants to say – and rightly so, since, as I will show, the ten commandments encapsulate and stand for the entire Mosaic covenant. But what Paul is doing in 2 Corinthians 3 is putting backbone into believers who are being damaged by teachers who want them to go under the law. Nothing new under the sun, you see! And very much as he did to the churches in Galatia and elsewhere, Paul writes to rebuke his readers for yielding to this pressure, and, in addition, to strengthen them in their resistance to it, by reminding them that they are not under the old, Mosaic covenant – the law, including the ten commandments – but under Christ and his law in the new covenant. Having laid this foundation in 2 Corinthians 3, in

subsequent verses – chapters – he goes on to apply his doctrine.<sup>8</sup>  
Read the passage again – out loud – and see.

We can very easily summarise the apostle's main points in 2 Corinthians 3:

The old covenant – including the ten commandments – was to do with the flesh; the new covenant is the covenant of the Holy Spirit (verses 3,6,8).

The old covenant – including the ten commandments – was an outward covenant, written on stones; the new covenant is an inward covenant, written on the heart (verses 2-3,7).

The old covenant – including the ten commandments – killed; it spelled death; the new covenant is life (verses 3,6-7).

The old covenant – including the ten commandments – was deliberately temporary, designed by God to be so; the new covenant is permanent; it remains (verses 11,13).

The old covenant – including the ten commandments – had glory, but its glory was lesser and fading; the new covenant has a glory which exceeds, excels, being so much greater than the glory of the old covenant – including the ten commandments – (verses 7-11).<sup>9</sup>

The old covenant – including the ten commandments – condemned; the new covenant is saving (verse 9).<sup>10</sup>

The old covenant – including the ten commandments – spelled bondage; the new covenant brings liberty (verses 12,17).

I will not stop to develop this further, having done so elsewhere,<sup>11</sup> but there can be doubt as to the apostle's teaching. For my present purpose, two main points stand out.

*First, it is impossible to separate the ten commandments from the entire law, the old, Mosaic covenant.* But that is precisely what Brooks, arguing on the basis of 'historic Reformed theology', wants to do. I quote him again: 'The ten commandments [are] distinct from the other Mosaic laws, having

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<sup>8</sup> See my *Glorious*.

<sup>9</sup> Note the apostle's 'deliberate tautology' – without redundancy, of course.

<sup>10</sup> 'Righteousness', *dikaïosunē*, 'justification'. But this does not mean that the apostle is speaking only about the law for justification. 'Righteousness' here includes the whole of salvation, not excluding sanctification. The context proves it.

<sup>11</sup> See my 'The Two Ministries'.

abiding relevance, and serving a vital role as the believer's rule of life'. Paul, in 2 Corinthians 3, simply will not let Brooks get away with this. As the apostle told the Galatians, 'every man who accepts circumcision... is obligated to keep the whole law' (Gal. 5:3); that is, the law is not a menu to play pick and mix with.<sup>12</sup> It is all or nothing.

But it is not only Paul that will not let Brooks and 'historic Reformed theology' get away with it. The ten commandments 'are distinct from all the other Mosaic laws', according to Brooks. Really? In one sense, yes, in that they were written on the tables of stone. But the fact is, the ten commandments encapsulate the entire Mosaic covenant and are intimately – unbreakably – bound up with it. After all, the ark of the *covenant* contained the tables of the ten commandments. And God explicitly made the entire law – including the ten commandments – one covenant:

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).

And [the LORD] declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, that is, the ten commandments, and he wrote them on two tablets of stone (Deut 4:13).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Do not miss 'the whole law' in Gal. 5:13-14 and Jas. 2:10-11. James is blunt: breaking one command, wherever it is found in the law, brings the ruin of the whole law with consequent condemnation for the offender. And although the immediate context of Gal. 3:10 is justification, nevertheless the principle is clear: 'Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them'. This is what the law said (Deut. 27:26). The idea that we can pick and choose with the law is utterly forbidden by Scripture. Greater and lesser commandments there are, but not one of them can be hived off from the rest and broken with impunity (Matt. 5:19; Mark 12:31). 'Historic Reformed theology', disposing of 99% of the law by its schemes, is playing with fire. New-covenant theology demands and glories in Christ's fulfilment of the entire law, and its abiding relevance for the believer today.

<sup>13</sup> See also 2 Kings 23:3,21; Ps. 103:18; 111:9; Jer. 11:8; Dan. 9:4; Mal. 2:4. See my *Christ* pp105-106,401-404. By the way, Ex. 34:27-28 and Deut 4:13 are two out of the three references to 'the ten commandments' in all the Bible. The third is Deut. 10:4.

Read the entire law through and you will see the ten commandments – the sabbath commandment in particular – mixed, even jumbled higgledy-piggledy, I might say, with all sorts of laws throughout the entire old covenant. The notion that the ten commandments can be hived off from the rest of the law might be a clever trick, but it is utterly contrary to Scripture, and repugnant to those who want to honour the God who gave his law to Israel to distinguish them from all other nations (Deut. 4:6-45; 5:26; 7:6-11; Ps. 147:19-20; Rom. 2:12-14; 9:4; 1 Cor. 9:21; Eph. 2:11-12), and did so in solemn state and with dire warning (Ex. 19:1-25; Heb. 12:18-21).

*Secondly, the believer has been liberated or delivered from the old covenant – the Mosaic law, including the ten commandments – and is in, and under, the new covenant.* These two covenants are in stark contrast as I have noted, as, of course, they have to be! Believers are in the *new* covenant, under a *new* head, under a *new* law, not in Adam under the rudimentary law which is written in the conscience of every man (Rom. 2:12-15), or under pagan law, or under the law of Moses, the law that aroused sin (Rom. 7:5) and brought bondage (Gal. 4:21 – 5:1), the ministry of wrath, condemnation and death (Rom. 4:15; 7:9-11; 2 Cor. 3:7,9), but in Christ and under his law. And this is precisely what Paul sets out, not only in 2 Corinthians 3, but time and time again throughout the New Testament – though from Brooks' article you would never guess it. And yet what could be more relevant for the believer today than apostolic teaching on the question in hand?

Brooks might want to restrict the discussion to the ten commandments, but Scripture will not let him. The only authority Brooks can come up with to justify his sleight of hand is 'historic Reformed theology' and its use of Aquinas' construct of the tripartite division of the law. Brooks' thesis depends absolutely and entirely on this man-made imposition on Scripture, and it represents the fundamental flaw in his attempted imposition of the law – 'the moral law', as 'historic Reformed theology' styles it – on the believer.

And this opens the door into the necessary exploration of the real question. Which is? What is the relevance of the Mosaic law

in its entirety – including the ten commandments – for the believer today? On this score, Brooks' article was an abject failure. He just did not face up to the fundamental question. Either he did not recognise it as fundamental, or, if he did, he simply ignored it.

And this is why I called Brooks' article sad. It is sad because the subject he was purporting to deal with – the law (and, make no mistake, that is what the subject is or ought to be, as I have explained) and its relevance today – is of the highest contemporary significance. Naturally enough, one might have thought, even as the title of his article more than suggests. Indeed, the law and the believer is, as he tacitly admitted, subject to vigorous debate within 'much contemporary evangelicalism'. While it is refreshing, therefore, to see *The Banner of Truth* taking up this issue, the subject requires a far more rigorous response than it gets in Brooks' article. I am not talking about length, I hasten to add. I recognise the limitations imposed by a magazine article. No! The article is – yes, I will use the word – unworthy of such a prestigious magazine, and that because it is misleading. The article is sad because it does nothing to clarify the issue, and shows a woeful ignorance of new-covenant theology. But it is sad for a far more important reason. And that leads me to say more about it being misleading.

Before I do, a word on lack of space. If that should be pleaded as an excuse to explain away Brooks' failure to set out scriptural teaching, imagine a physician being content to give his patient life-saving diagnosis and counsel by cramming it into a ten minute consultation, ignoring vital material, leaving his patient in a misleading position, no wiser about the real issue, but confirming him in his preconceived misunderstanding. This, I suggest, is more or less what we get in Brooks' article – and on a far more important matter. For we are not dealing with mere illness. Nor are we moving pieces on a theological chess board. Vital pastoral issues are at stake, not least the believer's assurance and progressive sanctification. Indeed, eternal issues are at stake – for sinner and saint. The subject deserves far better than Brooks' article. He found space enough for 'historic

Reformed theology'. Why did he not omit that and give us Scripture?

What extracts from, or references to, Romans (especially chapters 6 – 8), the letter to the Galatians, 2 Corinthians 3:6 – 4:5, Ephesians 2, Philippians 3, Colossians chapters 2 and 3, for instance, did we get? And what about the letter to the Hebrews? Brooks did not even mention any of these passages – even entire books – which deal with the very issue at the root of what he was talking about, let alone expound them, let alone expound them rigorously. Consequently, his article ends up as irrelevant because it is misleading, in that it does not refer to the very source material that is essential for the believer's understanding of the issues.

I acknowledge that Brooks did, in his title, speak of expounding Exodus 20:1-2, and I suppose it could be said that to some extent he kept to his last. But it is the 'relevant today' which is the issue here. The truth is, as he himself told us, he fell back on 'historic Reformed theology', and, I would add, merely repeated its well-worn dogmas on the law. How sad! Imagine attending a lecture supposedly on the contemporary theory of the chemistry of combustion, and it turns out to be a talk advocating the phlogiston theory!<sup>14</sup>

Now this is far from trivial. Is *the* issue here. By 'historic Reformed theology', there can be no doubt that Brooks was talking about the writings of John Calvin, the puritans and, supremely, the Westminster documents and the Confessions which depend on them – more or less from about 1550-1690, give or take. While I am not dismissing these works, are we really to believe that for the Reformed they are the relevant authority for believers today? It certainly looks like it.

Right from the start, Brooks told us what to expect. It did not take him long to introduce the key phrase. 'Historic Reformed

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<sup>14</sup> First put forward in 1667, the theory was that when materials burned they lost phlogiston. Unfortunately for the theory, it was found that when substances burned they gained weight, not lost it. The advocates of the theory responded by saying that phlogiston must have a negative mass. We now know that when substances burn they gain oxygen; they do not lose phlogiston.

theology' came in the second line of his article, setting the tone for all that was to follow:

Historic Reformed theology has understood these ten commandments to be distinct from the other Mosaic laws, having abiding relevance, and serving a vital role as the believer's rule of life... Matthew Henry... Historic Reformed theology has argued very differently... Reformed theologians speak in terms of the threefold division of the law... Thomas Watson... The puritans and their successors...

True, Brooks did quote two modern authors – Vernon Higham and Sinclair Ferguson – but since these writers are firmly cast in the mould of 'historic Reformed theology', in a very real sense we have already reached the end of the story, and Brooks has effectively shut the door on constructive consideration of Scripture on the issues. It was all cut and dried by Calvin 450 years ago, apparently. Read the *Institutes* laced with the Westminster Confession! That's all you need! Brooks' article is really nothing more than a regurgitation of the hackneyed statements of 'historic Reformed theology' – the tripartite division of the law, and all that that entails. And when it is all boiled down, the result is – surprise, surprise – a foregone conclusion. The yardstick on this great contemporary issue has been set in stone since the 1640s by the covenant theologians of the day, and today's antinomians are antinomians because they reject the template imposed by covenant theology on Scripture.<sup>15</sup> How sad! Incidentally, Brooks, speaking of 'the overwhelming view of the puritans and their successors', said: 'We would argue that it is nothing more and nothing less than the teaching of holy Scripture'. Pity then, as I have already remarked, that Brooks did not even mention the vital New Testament passages concerned with the issue, let alone expound them.

By the way, would the two Johns – Calvin and Robinson – have qualified for membership of Brooks' historic Reformed faith? On the sabbath, Calvin would have had a job to pass

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<sup>15</sup> In my experience, this seems to be standard way Reformed writers deal with the issue. See my 'A Must-See Debate'; 'No Confession? No Debate!', for instance.

muster; indeed, by Reformed (including Brooks in his article) assessment today, poor Calvin would find himself well on the way to being relegated to the ranks of the antinomians! With his non-Reformed view of the sabbath, he would certainly fail to pass what Brooks called 'the litmus test'. And as for Robinson, in 1620 he had the 'audacity' to reprimand those many believers who were stopping where Luther and Calvin left them.<sup>16</sup> If he had said it in 1720, he would have had to include 'the men of Westminster' in his sticking point for many. If Robinson had been writing today, he would certainly have had Brooks in his sights. Perhaps I may be forgiven for advocating a healthy dose of Robinson's dictum for the Reformed today? *Sola Scriptura* is a great mantra.<sup>17</sup> How about keeping to it?

And that takes us to the next point. As Robinson saw, believers have a more substantial dictum to go by than 'historic Reformed theology' – Isaiah 8:20 and Acts 17:11. In all matters to do with the spiritual life of the believer, should we not read, interpret and understand old-covenant scriptures (in Brooks' article, Exodus 20:1-2), by reading them through the lens of the new? Should we not read the Old Testament in the light of the New? Should we not go first to the primary New Testament passages that deal with the matter in hand? Brooks told us how the historic Reformed faith imposes its template on the passage, and that, according to him, is final. But what did Paul make of the law, including its prologue? After all, Christ promised that his apostles would be led by his Spirit into all truth, that they would expound and set out the definitive faith for all time which he himself could not give them at that moment (John 14:25-26; 16:12-15). Should we not, therefore, establish all our belief and practice primarily from the apostles?

Brooks mentions only one New Testament text; Mark 2:27-28, on the sabbath.<sup>18</sup> And since, I can say without the slightest

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<sup>16</sup> See my 'A Thanksgiving Day Thought'.

<sup>17</sup> The Reformed love to repeat *Sola Scriptura* – Scripture only. I wish they meant it and started doing it. Especially over this question of the law.

<sup>18</sup> For the Reformed, the sabbath is the touchstone today. In Brooks' words: 'The... sabbath commandment... our attitude to which is the

hesitation, that the readers of *The Banner of Truth*, and Brooks himself, signally fail to keep the sabbath according to explicit biblical teaching, this would seem to be a singular case of shooting oneself in the foot.<sup>19</sup>

And this is why Brooks' article is revealing. I am delighted to say it gives the game away.<sup>20</sup> I can best explain my meaning by repeating the Council of Trent, which in 1564 stated:

In order to restrain petulant spirits, it decrees that no one... shall... presume to interpret... Scripture contrary to that sense which holy mother Church... has held and holds.

Shocking, is it not! Quite.

But Reformed writers today have no qualms about stating their position on the Mosaic law in terms not so far removed from that:

In order to restrain antinomianism, historic Reformed theology defines an antinomian as someone who, on the doctrine of the

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litmus test in this wider debate'. To raise any question about sabbath observance today is to invite, and almost certainly get, instant dismissal as an antinomian. Yet even a superficial knowledge of the history of the 'Christian sabbath' proves that, on the basis of the Reformed criterion, the vast majority of believers since Pentecost have been antinomians. The sabbatarianism Brooks advocates stems from Nicholas Bownde who published *The Doctrine of the Sabbath* in 1595. See my *Sabbath Notes*.

<sup>19</sup> Brooks (on the basis of 'historic Reformed theology') confirms his readers in some sort of half-cock Sunday-keeping, in an observance which is full of escape clauses and other attempts to wriggle out of sabbath laws. If they dare to think about it for a minute, they know the supposed 'Christian Sabbath' is without an atom of biblical authority, but is entirely creedal and theological; in other words, an invention of man. Indeed, the 'Christian Sabbath', which is supposed to be the fourth command, represents a man-made change to the unchangeable law of God given uniquely to Israel at its key point – the sabbath as the special distinguishing mark for Israel (Ex. 31:12-17; Neh. 9:14; Ezek. 20:12) until Christ came and fulfilled the shadows and rendered them obsolete (Matt. 5:17; Gal. 3:19 – 4:7; Col. 2:16-23; Heb. 8:13, for instance). See my *Sabbath Questions; Essential*.

<sup>20</sup> See my 'A Must-See Debate'.

law, interprets... Scripture contrary to that sense which the historic Reformed faith... has held and holds.<sup>21</sup>

Sauce for Rome is sauce for the Reformed, I reckon.

### ***Setting the record straight***

Paul certainly quotes the ten commandments, but he never imposes them on believers as their perfect rule of life, but always uses them as paradigms, and, even then, he does so on only three occasions (Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:13-15; Eph. 6:1-4). But, there again, he uses all the law in that way (1 Cor. 5:7-8,13; 9:7-14; 10:1-14,18; 14:21,33-35) – just to take one book – as well as pagan authors (Tit. 1:12-13) and nature (1 Cor. 11:11-16). And what about 1 Corinthians 9:19-23? None of this establishes that the believer is under the ten commandments as his perfect rule of life for holiness, any more than it gives that dominant role to the entire law. Of course the believer is under a law – the law that is written on the heart of the believer in the new covenant – and this can only be the law of Christ, not the law of Moses. Matthew 5 – 7, John 1:17; 12:47 – 16:33, Romans 6:14 – 7:6, 1 Corinthians 9:21-23 and Galatians 6:2 put this beyond doubt.<sup>22</sup>

As I have explained, it is biblically impossible to isolate the ten commandments from the rest of the law, call them ‘the moral law’, and impose it on believers as their rule of life. But just for sake of argument, let me allow Brooks his historic Reformed theology’s tripartite division of the law. Brooks could not have elevated the ten commandments to a higher station:

The ten commandments [are] distinct from the other Mosaic laws, having abiding relevance, and serving a vital role as the believer’s rule of life... The decalogue shows us the way [of

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<sup>21</sup> Of course, I have invented the precise form of words. But I submit that this fairly sums up Brooks’ article – and a host of other efforts to refute new-covenant theology. Indeed, the Westminster Assembly was convened specifically to deal with antinomianism – both real and imaginary – and that is why its documents are so heavy on law. See my ‘The Law and the Confessions’.

<sup>22</sup> See my listed works for my arguments. Incidentally, 1 Cor. 7:19; Jas. 1:25; 2:8,12; 1 John *passim*; 2 John 6; Rev. 12:17; 14:12, refer to the law of Christ, not the law of Moses.

progressive sanctification]... They show us the pathway of holiness.

Really? Does Brooks judge everything by the ten commandments? For, mark it well, according to Brooks and 'historic Reformed theology', the ten commandments are not *part* of the rule: they serve as *the* believer's rule, full stop. If so, then Brooks won't have much guidance, will he, concerning the glories of the believer's justification and positional sanctification in Christ, his assurance, his life as the slave and husband of Christ under his law, baptism, the Lord's supper, the appointment of elders, private and public prayer, preaching, temptation, church discipline, how to deal with things indifferent, and a host of other vital topics, all of which are the utmost concern to the believer? Or should be! And why did Christ pray as he did in John 17:17? Why did he not adopt historic Reformed theology's mantra? After all, he asked his Father: 'Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth'. All the word, please note, is the believer's rule, not simply the ten commandments. New-covenant theology, contrary to historic Reformed theology, stresses this point.

As I conclude my response to Brooks, let me fill in some of the most glaring gaps in his article. Here is a sample of the passages which must come top of the list for any believer who wants to know what Scripture has to say on the relevance of the law – including the ten commandments – for his life of holiness today. Having set out my arguments elsewhere,<sup>23</sup> I will make no comment here, but just let the words of Scripture stand for themselves – except to plead that these passages be read unfiltered by the glosses and escape clauses of the historic Reformed faith:

Sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace... 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. For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are released from

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<sup>23</sup> See my works listed below.

the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code (Rom. 6:14; 7:4-6).

God... has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it. For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory... Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:5-13).

Through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me...

Before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith...

When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying: 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God...

Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman... 'Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman'. So, brothers, we are not

children of the slave but of the free woman. For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery...

You were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'... But I say, 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 (Gal. 2:19-20; 3:23-26; 4:4-7,21-22,30-31; 5:1,13-18).

A 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. And it was not without an oath... This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant...

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. 7:18-22; 8:7-13).

Let me close with Brooks' final statement:

Our Saviour lived a holy life by obedience to the ten commandments springing from a heart overflowing with love to his heavenly Father. If that is what holiness meant for him, then that is what holiness means for us. How we should thank God for the ten commandments!

Just a minute! What a slipshod statement! The Bible tells us that Christ came under 'the law' (Gal. 4:4), the entire law, please note, not merely the ten commandments. As I read the Gospels, I find Christ repeatedly quoting the law – all parts of it – repeatedly obeying the law – all parts of it – not just the ten commandments. Of course he did! For as he made clear, he came into the world in order to fulfil the law in its entirety (Matt. 5:17). As the rest of the New Testament explains, by fulfilling the entire law, Christ established the new covenant to supersede all the shadows of the old covenant, thus rendering that covenant and its law obsolete (Col. 2:16-23; Heb. 8:13).

Thus, yet again, Brooks has shot himself in the foot. On his argument, the believer should take the same attitude to the law – the entire law – as Christ did, and keep it in order to live a life of holiness. Does Brooks pass muster on this score? Does he keep the 613 commandments? How does he cope with Matthew 5:17-48? How does he cope with James 2:10-11? And so on. And on.

Since Brooks has made it perfectly clear what he thinks of 'historic Reformed theology', perhaps I may be permitted to give my opinion of its attitude to the law. I do so, by accommodating some words of Martin Luther in his *Table Talk*:

When God's word is by the Fathers expounded, construed and glossed, then, in my judgment, it is even as when one strains milk through a coal sack, which must needs spoil and make the milk black; God's word itself is pure, clean, bright and clear; but, through the doctrines, books and writings of the Fathers, it is darkened, falsified and spoiled.

Now my accommodation:

When God's word on the law is by historic Reformed theology expounded, construed and glossed, then, in my judgment, it is even as when one strains milk through a coal sack, which must needs spoil and make the milk black; God's word on the law itself is pure, clean, bright and clear; but, through the doctrines, books and writings of historic Reformed theology, it is darkened, falsified and spoiled.

*Misleading, Sad, Revealing: 'Relevant Today' by Jeremy Brooks*

If only the advocates of historic Reformed theology would look at Scripture as Scripture, and not as glossed by their theology... But, in saying that, I fear I am wishing for the moon. How sad!

***Some of my works on the subject.***

*Assurance in the New Covenant.*

*Believers Under the Law of Christ.*

*Christ is All: No Sanctification by the Law.*

*Grace Not Law!: The Answer to Antinomianism.*

*New-Covenant Articles (Volumes 1-8).*

*Psalms 119 and the New Covenant.*

*Redemption History Through Covenants.*

*Sabbath Notes.*

*Sabbath Questions: An open letter to Iain Murray.*

*The Essential Sabbath.*

*The Glorious New-Covenant Ministry.*

## *A Brief Response to Prince Charles*

Prince Charles has just stated (that is, on 22nd December 2016) – Prince Charles has just stated that whatever religious path we follow, we all get to the same end. On what grounds does he base this nonsense? Religion is fatal; Christ is all. And as the Lord Jesus stated categorically, he alone is the way, the truth, the life, and that there is no way – no way – to God but by him. Peter declared that there is no salvation for any man in any other name than the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. See John 14:6; Acts 4:12. I trust Christ and his apostles – no one else. No, not even Prince Charles.

By the way, Harry Belafonte was mistaken when he sang that man will live for evermore because of Christmas day. No! Sinners (and we are all sinners) who trust the merits, blood and righteousness of Christ will live for evermore in glory. And only they. The message, therefore, is clear: trust Christ now!



## *Robert Browne*

### *Thinking the Unthinkable*

Robert Browne, who then was in his early thirties, lodged in this city of Norwich for a few months during the years 1580-81. He was soon arrested and jailed, after which, in 1582, he emigrated to Middleburg in the Low Countries, where he published three books. Such are the salient facts about my subject this evening. Not much, is it? End of story? End of paper? Far from it.

In 1583 – remember the aforementioned dates, 1580-1582 – in 1583, Elias Thacker and John Coppin were hanged at Bury St Edmunds, hanged with Browne's books tied about their necks. Their crime? They had read, and led others to read, Browne's writings.

In 1584 – remember, yet again, the dates – in 1584, seven Norfolk clergymen wrote to the authorities asking for help, complaining that they were having great difficulty in keeping the people from going over to the Brownists.

At the opening of the 17th century – that is, within twenty years – William Shakespeare published his *Twelfth Night*, in which Sir Andrew Aguecheek is advised that if he wants to win the lady he will have to change tactics. Either he will have to venture all and speak openly, or else scheme his way into her affections. Sir Andrew is clear. He has no heart for scheming: 'I'd had as lief be (that is, I'd hate it as much to be) a Brownist as a politician'. A politician? The lowest of the low! Not at any price! It would be as bad as being accused of being a Brownist!

In the USA, Browne has the reputation of being 'The Father of the 1620 Pilgrims' and 'The Grandfather of the Nation'.

Speaking for myself, I can see how a man like Oliver Cromwell – a man of whom I cannot speak too highly – can be thought of as a spiritual great grandchild of Robert Browne.

*Robert Browne: Thinking the Unthinkable*

These facts speak volumes. Whoever Robert Browne was, and whatever he did, it is clear that he was, by any standard, a man to be reckoned with. Clearly he had a tremendous influence, a widespread influence, in his day, and in a very short time. Take the first incident. Within a year of the publication of Browne's books, two men were hanged for reading them, and for leading and encouraging others to do the same and to adopt his teaching. They were hanged with Browne's books straddling their necks. I myself have written several volumes, but none of my works have caused such a disturbance or had such an influence as that! And I have had the advantage of the internet for distribution! So I say it again: Robert Browne must have been a man to be reckoned with.

Then again, it surely says something that within three or four years of his stay in Norwich seven Anglicans were sufficiently alarmed that they complained that they were unable to prevent his influence in Norfolk – he was proving to be more than a handful – and within twenty years, Shakespeare could refer to Browne knowing that everybody would grasp the allusion. These facts all tell a similar tale. Within twenty years, Robert Browne had national notoriety. Moreover, within forty years he had an international reputation, a reputation that has not gone away. When we bear in mind the difficulties of mass communication in the late 16th century, we can only conclude that my chosen subject was indeed a phenomenon in his own day.

I want to begin with an apology. Getting my defence in first, I have to confess that since I prefer to preach, and do so extempore, I am not really in my element in reading a paper. But in mitigation, let me remind you of the excellent dictum: 'If a thing's worth doing, it's worth doing badly'. No, it's not a clever quip from Oscar Wilde – though it certainly sounds like it. Rather, it is an excellent sentiment from G.K.Chesterton. I would argue it is a biblical sentiment: tonight's speaker and his paper might not be up to much, but his subject is well worth thinking about.

On an even more serious note, when I speak of an apology, I do not mean to imply that I am sorry for what I say. I use the

word in a technical sense. That is, you may be here this evening under false pretences. The fact is, I do not belong to academe. For a start, I do not have sufficient grey cells for it. More important, I do not have the disposition for it. It seems to me, at least, members of the academy have to be neutral, disinterested, determined above all to be rigorously accurate and factual, all without expressing a personal opinion. In approaching my subject tonight, however, I am partisan – unashamedly and openly partisan. May I stress this? I admire and respect Robert Browne. For all his faults – and they were many, and they were big – I want to express my open admiration and gratitude for the stand that this thirty-year old man took in this city in 1580. He being dead speaks to me. He challenges me. He confronts me. He sets me an example that I want to emulate.

Since I do not come from the world of academe, I am sure that there will be people here this evening who know far more about Robert Browne, particularly his connection with Norwich, than I do. As a consequence, when we come to questions after my paper, it is almost certain that some of you will be far better at providing answers than I. Indeed, I shall be glad to listen to your contributions, and learn from what you have to say. The truth is, I have not made Robert Browne the great study of my life. I do not claim to be an expert on Robert Browne. I want my paper to be regarded merely as an appetiser to encourage you to look more deeply for yourself into the life of this remarkable man, particularly his teaching on the nature of the church. In my view, he – especially, his doctrine – is well worth the study. We all – all of us – owe him a tremendous debt.

It is essential to fit Robert Browne into his times. Unless we bear in mind the circumstances into which he was born, the culture in which he found himself, we shall never understand how great was the step that he took at Norwich in 1580-81.

During the 3rd century, the Roman Emperors Constantine and Theodosius had set in motion the linking of Church and State to form one Commonwealth, Christendom. From then on,

Western Europe – that is, the known world, the civilised world – was dominated by this all-encompassing organisation. So much so, the people of Europe were not primarily citizens of any particular country; rather, they were members of this Christendom, which they entered at birth through baptismal regeneration by sprinkling at the hands of a priest. Uniformity of religion in belief and practice, enforced by political power, was the watchword. Of course, dissident voices were heard – the Waldensians, the Albigenses, the Paulicans, the Lollards and such like – but the vast majority of men and women lived and died in Christendom – unless they were excommunicated or burnt or otherwise disposed of for ‘heresy’. This state of affairs continued with – with, not until – the Reformation. Luther, Zwingli, Tyndale, Calvin, the English Reformers were all committed to the power of the magistrate – supremely the power of the king – to rule the State Church. In the early 1520s in Zurich, Ulrich Zwingli, with his followers, wanted more and more reform according to Scripture – including the rejection of infant baptism. But whereas Zwingli would only act if granted permission by the authorities, his followers grew impatient with his reticence, and in 1525 George Blaurock, Conrad Grebel, Felix Mainz and others took the fateful step – in not a few cases, the fatal step – and were baptised as believers. They were dismissed outright as Anabaptists – re-baptisers. This they resolutely denied, dismissing their baby baptism as no baptism at all. In this act, they had stepped outside the State Church system, and they suffered accordingly. Mainz was drowned in the river Limmat, tied to a hurdle. Many others paid a high price, even the ultimate price. Even so, Anabaptism spread rapidly throughout Europe. Nevertheless, while this radical movement mushroomed, it remained only a tiny minority, and – to change the figure – it was crushed like a nut between Rome and the Reformed, both parties calling on the power of the State to do the dirty work.

By 1550, when Robert Browne was born, the uniformity of Christendom enforced by the magistrate was still the norm in England. True, there had been, still were exceptions to the rule: various secret churches (the churches at Bocking and

Faversham, the Plumber's Hall gathering, the Privye church under Richard Fitz, and so on), the Anabaptists and a whole range of other radicals. But when Elizabeth, the daughter of Henry VIII, came to the throne, and was firmly established as the supreme Governor of the Church of England, she soon showed that she was determined to have her way, crushing all dissent.

By the mid 1570s, the Church of England was in a very troubled and unsettled condition. In the eyes of many believers, it stood in desperate need of much reform if it was ever going to be a church in the sense of the New Testament. And these critics gave open voice to their convictions even though this was contrary to the law of the land. The State Church was under attack on two fronts; it had two main opponents. It was censured by the Anabaptists and various other scattered, hidden and separated churches from without; and it was criticised by the Puritans – both Episcopalian and Presbyterian – from within. But there was one great and constant obstacle to reform, one resolute defender of the Anglican system – Queen Elizabeth herself. She and her bishops weathered every storm, warded off every onslaught; or so it seemed. However, as if two fronts were not enough for Elizabeth to contend with, a third and far more penetrating assault upon the fabric of the Church of England was about to be launched. This attack would come from a new group of Puritans; which group, though very small in number to start with, would prove the most devastating in the long run.

This new category of antagonists arose as an unexpected result of Thomas Cartwright's Presbyterian short-lived lectures at Cambridge in 1569 as the Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity in the University. Robert Browne attended those lectures, and by 1573 he was taking an altogether more radical line than his former Professor. Browne was daring to think the unthinkable, and was prepared to act according to his understanding of Scripture, whatever men might say; he was prepared to do the undoable. He realised that the common or conforming Puritan approach was mistaken. The Puritans demanded reform of the Church of England, whether of

vestments, ceremonies or the system of church government, but they were prepared to wait until the authorities – the queen, the magistrates and the bishops – were willing to move and give it to them. Browne came to the opinion that this approach was wrong. It was misguided! The reforms were needed, but the waiting was wrong! He came to the conclusion that it was right to act without the consent of the authorities. He would later publish his views in the now-famous book *A Treatise of Reformation without Tarrying for Any*, the title of which became the catchword of the third group, who were nicknamed ‘The Separatists’. At this distance, and in the very different circumstances of today, it is almost impossible for us to appreciate how great a leap Browne took. Those who were prepared to take it with him certainly paid a high price, but being so devoted to the cause of Christ they willingly met the cost.

These Separatists, then, were determined upon reformation according to the New Testament without waiting for permission from the authorities. Indeed, they went further, and said that the State Church cannot be reformed, that it is pointless to try, and that separation from it is the only way forward. In any case, the State has no say, no right or power in religion, they declared. In these sentiments, there were unmistakable echoes of John Hooper, thirty years earlier. Now, this stance was in marked contrast to both the Anglicans and the Puritans who, while they disagreed on many things, did hold certain principles in common; one great unifying bond between them being their love of Constantine. Hence, they both believed in a State Church, in religious uniformity and its strict enforcement by the magistrate. They both rejected the idea of religious tolerance. It was anathema to them both. Consequently, over this issue of tolerance as opposed to an enforced uniformity, a bitter conflict was in the making. On the one hand there were the Anabaptists and the newly-arisen Separatists; on the other, the die-hard advocates of an imposed State religion.

Cartwright baldly stated that heretics should not be pardoned even if they repented. He went on to say that they

‘ought to be put to death now... If this be cruel or extreme I am content to be counted so with the Holy Ghost’. All that the Puritans lacked was the power, but if they could have got the chance they would have forced all men to conform to their point of view. Madly, Cartwright even insisted:

The magistrate ought to enforce the attendance of Papists and atheists on the services of the Church; to punish them if they did not profit by the preaching they might hear; to increase the punishment if they gave signs of contempt; and if at last they proved utterly impenitent, to cut them off.

How the magistrates were supposed to be competent to judge ‘who had not profited’ by preaching, what tests they could apply to read men’s hearts, is utterly beyond my comprehension. It was a ridiculous demand. Surely this prerogative is God’s alone.

In adamant opposition to the Anglicans and the Puritans, the Separatists argued that religion should be free of the State. More than that, they began to see that the New Testament knows nothing of State Churches with an all-embracing membership. They argued for the New Testament position of churches made up of believers only, churches whose members all give credible evidence of regeneration. The Anglicans accepted all who had a certificate of infant baptism. The Puritans demanded more. But not enough! It was the Separatists who argued for the New Testament order, and spoke of ‘gathered’ churches. In this there were echoes of Richard Fitz and others in the secret churches, as well as the Anabaptists.

The more numerous Puritans very strongly opposed the Separatists, denouncing them in no uncertain terms. Elizabeth also reacted with vigour against all her opponents. While she kept up her discipline measures to force the Puritans into line, that was far too good for the Separatists and the Anabaptists whom she lumped together. They were to be persecuted! Literally, to death!

It is time to trace how Puritanism developed into Separatism through the life and teaching of Robert Browne.

Robert Browne was a man who, in his day, provoked strong reactions. He still does. But, alas, many who are indebted to him and his stance have either never heard of him – or worse – they openly disown him. In truth, he made many enemies both in his own day and since. It must be borne in mind, however, that much of the information about Browne comes only through the writings of his opponents, and as such it must be treated with caution. In any case, on any reckoning it has to be admitted that God greatly used the man's courage, discernment and faith to advance the cause of Christ. Browne recovered nothing less than the New Testament concept of the church, with its distinct, separate churches at Corinth, Philippi, Rome, Ephesus and the like, churches which have no central control or hierarchy. Episcopalianism is foreign to Scripture, but so is the Presbyterian notion of synods and other ecclesiastical courts ranked in order of importance. A treatise published by the Brownists when they were in Middleburg, entitled *Antichristian Abominations Yet Retained in England*, spoke against the notion of hierarchy, and said that 'every particular church, with its pastor, stands immediately under Christ, the Arch-pastor, without any other ecclesiastical power intervening, whether it be of prelates, of synods, or any other invented by man'. Each church is separate from every other church and is answerable to Christ alone, they maintained. These churches 'ought not to be governed by popish Canons, courts, classes, customs, or any human inventions, but by the laws and rules which Christ has appointed in his Testament'. For those who followed him, Browne got rid of words and notions like 'parish' and 'diocese'. He stoutly resisted the view that the magistrate should exercise discipline in Christ's church. He also asserted that discipline is essential in Christ's church – so much so, without it the church ceases to exist – but it must be spiritual discipline, exercised by the church itself upon its own members:

The essence, substance, and life of the... church... [is] the keeping of the covenant by outward discipline and government... Nothing can make a... church except... the power of Christ to separate the unworthy.

He further declared that the magistrates:

Have no ecclesiastical authority at all... They may do nothing concerning the church... To compel religion, to plant churches by power and to force a submission... by laws and penalties, belongs not to them.

For all that, there is some evidence that Browne was somewhat confused about the position of the magistrate. At times, he did allow a place for the enforcement of scriptural religion by the civil authorities. The full-blown doctrine of religious liberty and tolerance had a few more years to wait before it would be put forward with all its New Testament vigour and clarity by John Smyth, Roger Williams and the like.

On the qualification for the ministry, Browne asserted that it is not the magistrate who gives the right for a man to minister the gospel. It is the gift of God, 'by consent and ratifying of the church', which qualifies a man for the ministry, he said. The magistrate cannot make a minister; nor can he take a man's ministry away. He argued that churches are made up only of those who freely covenant together to walk in Christ's ordinances. When he said: 'Let them know that the Lord's true people is of the willing sort... It is the conscience and not the power of man that will drive us to seek the Lord's kingdom', he was simply echoing the New Testament. But this kind of teaching was hated by those who formed Churches on the basis of Constantine coercion.

How did Browne come to these earth-shattering views?

Robert Browne was born into a family of wealthy merchants near Stamford about 1550, went to Corpus Christi, Cambridge in 1570, probably drawn to his particular college because of his Puritan sympathies. There he attended Cartwright's epoch-making lectures on Acts. Graduating in 1572, he became a schoolmaster for about three years, probably at Southwark, during which time he engaged in open-air preaching at the Gravel Pits at Islington. Upon an outbreak of the plague in 1578, he returned to his father's house. Increasing scriptural light was breaking in upon him all the while, and, as his

understanding developed, so he sought to obey to the best of his ability.

Moving to Dry Drayton, five miles from Cambridge, he joined the household of a conforming Puritan minister, one Richard Greenham, who had been recently appointed rector. Greenham, one of the most underrated Puritans, was a ‘godly pastor, a good preaching minister’, most diligent, practical, kind and able, a very gentle man. Rising at four each week-day to preach to the farm labourers, he then followed them over the fields to bring home the truth to their hearts by spiritual conversation. He aimed ‘to deal wisely and comfortably with an affected conscience’. In which aim he succeeded, for ‘his masterpiece was in comforting wounded consciences... God used him... as an instrument of good to many, who came to him with weeping eyes and went from him with cheerful souls’. His house at Dry Drayton became a kind of Puritan academy with various Puritan ministers staying there from time to time on extended visits. Much profitable, spiritual discussion took place. Sadly, Greenham came to the end of his ministry at Dry Drayton – when he was nearly sixty – in a depressed and lonely condition. He thought he had accomplished no good at all, except to one family; the place had remained obstinate against the gospel. But Greenham was mistaken, for he did much good in his time and it lived on after him. He died of the plague in 1594.

Such was the godly man under whose roof Robert Browne took up lodgings in 1578. Greenham was a loyal Anglican, but though he was an Episcopalian, he was also earnestly resolute over simplicity in ministerial dress and in worship. Into his household came Browne, who was becoming more and more grieved over the lamentable state of the church. The young man studied and debated much to discover the proper scriptural order of the church; ‘night and day he did consult with himself and others’. Cartwright’s lectures were having their effect. Browne began to see that the trouble was not merely that the bishops were bad in their behaviour, that they were wicked, but that ‘their whole power and authority’ was unbiblical. Greenham, too, had attended Cartwright’s lectures,

but he tried to defend Episcopalianism against the new-fangled Presbyterianism in his many discussions with Browne. Browne retorted that the bishops were a miserable failure, they were not calling the people from their sins, they did not preach the word of God.

Greenham must have been very impressed with the younger man for he invited him to expound the Scriptures at the family table after meat. Then he went much further; without the necessary licence from the bishop, he let Browne teach openly in the parish. So gifted was the young Puritan that the Mayor and Vice-Chancellor gave him leave to take the lectureship at Benet church in Cambridge for six months – still without a licence! Radical indeed! Browne's brother did take the trouble to obtain the necessary seals for him but he refused them. 'To be authorised... to be sworn, to subscribe, to be ordained, and to receive their licensing, he utterly disliked and kept himself clear in these matters'. Furthermore, he refused payment for his labours. He would allow no one to call him a hireling! 'I preach to satisfy duty and conscience', he said. During the course of his preaching, he declaimed against the power of bishops to license or silence preachers, going on to assert that 'the kingdom of God is not... whole parishes but rather of the worthiest be they never so few'. The bishop, naturally, resented this attack upon the very fabric of the Church of England, and deprived him of the pulpit.

This was an important period for the young man, and it had a lasting effect upon him and, especially, his later health, in mind as well as body. He passed through spiritual torments and anguish as he tried to maintain his high level of spiritual activity while, all the time, developing his arguments, both in public and in private, in the face of much hostility. What he was putting forward was all so new and revolutionary. And what about all those good men – the vast majority of them – the other Puritans, who saw things differently? What of Richard Greenham and the many godly ministers who stayed at Dry Drayton? Was it possible that he, Robert Browne, was the only man in step? Were all the others wrong? How many perplexing doubts must have flooded the young man's mind.

The strain under which he laboured smote him down, and he was compelled to rest for six months, probably suffering from what is commonly called a nervous breakdown. All the same, he distinctly felt that the Lord was leading him and trying him; indeed, that the Lord was preparing him 'to a further and more effectual message'. He wept much over the state of the church and his own lonely position. Where could he find anyone like-minded?

When Browne recovered his health, he went to Middleburg in the Low Countries, probably in 1579-80; perhaps he was influenced by the knowledge that Cartwright, his former Professor, was preaching in a Puritan congregation there. While we cannot be certain, it is most likely that Browne had conversations with the Dutch Anabaptists during his time in Middleburg. His views were moving all the time; from Episcopalianism to Presbyterianism to... to what? It is very likely, also, that the Dutch told him of the large Anabaptist settlement at Norwich, in East Anglia. At that time, there were nearly five thousand Dutch people in Norwich – a huge number for the period; indeed, it was a majority of the population. Besides which, Norwich was the centre of a fervent Puritanism, possibly made even more radical by the influence of the many Anabaptists in the locality. Robert Harrison, a fellow-student of Browne's at Cambridge, was by this time the master of a charity hospital in the city. Harrison had previously renewed his acquaintance with Browne, meeting him at Cambridge when he, Harrison, went there to get the bishop's licence to enable him to preach. Browne had dissuaded him, calling the licence 'trash and pollution'.

Browne now moved to Norwich from the Continent, lodged with his friend, and by powerful arguments won him over to the position he had come to adopt on the Separatist order of a church. Browne, being a very persuasive and dogmatic man, convinced Harrison that 'we are to forsake and deny all ungodliness and wicked fellowship, and to refuse all ungodly communion with wicked persons [for] God will receive none to communion and covenant with him which as yet are one with the wicked'.

There was only one logical outcome of this kind of reasoning in which the two men were engaged, and they decided to take the momentous step. Accordingly, they formed the first Separatist church in England sometime during 1580-81. It was of the Congregational order. When I say ‘the *first* Separatist church’, it will be realised that this is not strictly true – secret separate churches had been formed in England years before, and the Anabaptists had been forming churches for more than half a century. But the one at Norwich is usually reckoned to be the first Separatist church. On a set day, a small group met together in Norwich, established various points from Scripture, made a covenant and gave their consent to join themselves to the Lord and to one another as a church under elected pastors. They also established principles of discipline and rule among themselves.

Browne maintained that each church should have the offices of pastor, teacher, elders, deacons and widows. He thought that churches should be independent, separate and distinct, but they ought to associate for common ends. He had in mind some kind of arrangement whereby the separate churches could meet to redress matters which concerned them all. It is clear that Browne did not follow the Anabaptists blindly; he did not accept their views on baptism, oath-taking and other matters. Yet it is true to say that this rise of the Separatists marks the decline of the Anabaptists in England – they were so similar in many respects that the one gradually replaced the other, especially after Baptist churches were being formed. Besides opposing Episcopalianism, Browne was decidedly against Presbyterianism on the other flank, saying that if it were to be established then there would be a thousand popes instead of one! Hence the Congregational order of the Norwich church; that is, the church governed itself by its church meeting; it did not submit to any outside rule. It would appear that John Milton, about a century later, must almost certainly have read Browne’s works.

Browne was an effective preacher, attracting a hundred or more in congregations gathered in conventicles and private houses in and around Norwich. He was also a fervent advocate

of the despised Congregational system. On hearing that there were people at Bury St Edmunds, in the neighbouring county of Suffolk, who were interested, he went there and for his pains was imprisoned – the first of thirty-two similar sentences. The cells were often so dark he could not see his own hand, while he was kept in close confinement with the vilest of humanity. Because of sore persecution, the Norwich church members were minded to flee, but from prison, Browne, their pastor, staunchly urged them to stand and testify. However, in the end they all ‘were fully persuaded that the Lord did call them out of England’ in order to continue with their religious practices. Hence they emigrated, as a church, to Middleburg in 1581 – showing further evidence of sympathy with the Anabaptists.

On first arriving in Middleburg, the Separatist church from Norwich joined the Puritan congregation already established under Cartwright, but after a while – when Browne was released from prison and arrived – they separated. Browne quarrelled with his former teacher, Cartwright, over the status of the Church of England, which Browne was convinced was not a true church, that it could not be reformed and must be forsaken. Cartwright disagreed. This issue would prove to be a bone of contention between the Separatists and the Puritans for a long time to come. A vehement, excessive correspondence ensued between the two men. Browne, it has to be said, was the offender, pouring torrents of abuse on Cartwright, distorting the Presbyterian’s arguments beyond recognition. Browne suffered another nervous attack, and his letters reflected the instability of his mind at the time.

Regrettably, the Congregational church in Middleburg with Browne as pastor, began to quarrel among themselves, and they debated hotly over many issues – some most unedifying – and the church grew confused. In 1583, the disputes became so bad that Browne was censured by the church, whereupon he resigned and sailed for Scotland accompanied by a few families. Harrison remained with the church, but after his death in 1594 it ceased to exist.

This period, for all the mistakes and troubles, was not unproductive, however. Browne published three works in these months in Middleburg, and one in particular proved to be of enormous influence and importance. I have already mentioned it – *A Treatise of Reformation without Tarrying for Any*. His writings were greatly feared by the authorities, so much so that in 1583 the aforesaid Elias Thacker and John Coppin were both hanged at Bury St Edmunds, just for distributing the works of Browne!

While in Scotland, Browne even tried to reform the Scottish Presbyterian system, launching attacks on John Knox himself! He was never one to avoid a fight, even against overwhelming odds. He met with no success in this attack but was put into prison for his pains. On his release he eventually returned to England, preaching where he could.

However, the years of struggle, torment, and many grievous imprisonments, by this stage had wrought havoc on his body and mind. There is no doubt that by this time the poor man was not always sane. He had in his earlier days dared to think the unthinkable; and what is more, to do it. Now he did the unthinkable again! He gave up his Separatism, conformed to the Church of England, and in 1591 became a rector in Northamptonshire, where he settled for forty years. But there is some evidence that, in his heart, he never truly conformed. One of his many enemies admitted that Browne never really recanted or altered his opinions. In the end he died tragically and sadly in 1633.

As only to be expected the Anglicans abused him and his followers terribly, Bishop Hall sneering that the Church of England and God matched Separatists with the vilest of humanity. And even the Separatists who followed Browne disowned him for his defection, and scathingly called him an Anglican! He was an apostate! He was no Separatist! Many lies were told about him, and some continue to be repeated.

Yet, in spite of Browne's defection, the seed of Separatism had been sown, and 'Reformation without Tarrying for Any' became the watchword of this third group of Puritans. Browne denounced those who pleaded that 'the time has not yet come

to build the Lord's house; they must tarry for the magistrates and for Parliament to do it... Can the Lord's spiritual government be in no way executed but by the civil sword?' he demanded. This may not seem a remarkable thing to ask nowadays, nevertheless in the late 16th century these and similar views cost men their lives in England! But the Separatists were convinced and committed men and women. They wanted full reform of the church – back to the New Testament – and they wanted it at once. Not only that. Nothing and nobody would stop them! Not Elizabeth, not all her bishops, nor all the magistrates in England.

The Separatists had feeble beginnings, but their spiritual influence far out-stripped their political power. Their political clout was nil. They never wanted it any in any case. They only desired to be scriptural. Like the New Testament churches, they had no access to the high officials of State; they had no influence at Court; nor did they seek any. For them there was only one king who counted in the church – King Jesus, 'the Lord Christ' (Col. 3:24).

Though small their numbers, though tiny and fragile in their beginning, the feeble origins of the early Separatists belied the importance of their contribution to the advance of reform in the church. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to them.

But many, today, have forgotten their Separatist origins. Forgotten or suppressed, which is it? And how does this forgetful – or worse – attitude reveal itself? The early Separatists were fugitives and rebels, treated as the off-scouring of society and the dregs of humanity. They rotted in dungeons; some died there; others were hanged. Who was responsible for it? The Church of England! The State Church, tacitly supported by the Puritans – they persecuted the Separatists. But what do we see these days? Many Separatists fawn on the very establishment which so tormented the saints, their forefathers. Separatism has become respectable, refined and genteel today. Christianity has become 'sanitised'. Some Separatists, more than a little ashamed of their humble origins, have even developed a fancy for the trappings of the establishment. Moderators of this and that Free Church like to

attend State occasions, officiating here, there and everywhere dressed in all their finery, even alongside Papists.

It is nothing new. In Victorian times, many Separatist meeting-houses were built to look like massive parish churches, to out-do the Church of England, whereas in the preceding years, such meeting house were designedly plain, hidden away in back-alleys and the like. Again, today, in many Separatist services there is a kind of liturgy creeping back, little repeated phrases, set forms and rituals, various unwritten laws of the 'Medes-and-Persian' variety. Indeed, in a growing number of cases, a formal liturgy is becoming the norm, and it is not merely 'creeping back'!

Furthermore, Separatists badger Parliament for its intervention to bolster a crumbling Christianity, they beg for grants, they play at being respectable. Away with it! The early Separatists would not recognise it. They would abhor it.

Browne and his friends died in ignominy. The vast majority of them are unknown today, unrecognised by most, and despised by some. But not, I am sure, by God. All honour to their memory. They have their reward.

Browne, above all, was a man under the authority of Christ in his word. Whatever he saw in Scripture, he would carry it out. It is this, above all, which speaks to me down the centuries. He rebukes me. He encourages me. He challenges me. I hope he has a like effect on you.



# *The Obedience of Faith*

## *Synopsis*

In this article I trace how those who argue that the believer is not under the law of Christ, and that the Scriptures are not part of the law of Christ, but who emphasise the inward work of the Spirit at the expense of the believer's deliberate obedience to the commands of Scripture, end up with a view of progressive sanctification that is very similar to the hyper-Calvinistic view of conversion.

## *Introduction*

Paul could not have been more explicit in the opening remarks of the letter to the Romans:

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:1-6).

Paul's readers (hearers) could have been left in no doubt as to the apostle's purpose, both in life and this letter: he wanted to bring as many as possible to 'the obedience of faith'. And, in saying this, he was thinking not only of unbelievers. As he so plainly stated, God had commissioned him 'to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, *including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ*'. Clearly, he wanted believers, as well as unbelievers, to come to 'the obedience of faith', to produce 'the obedience of faith'. He knew that this was God's work for him, this was God's purpose for his ministry.

## *The Obedience of Faith*

Whatever was he talking about? What was he consumed by? What is ‘the obedience of faith’?

Speaking of unbelievers, can there be any doubt that the apostle wanted them to hear the gospel, yield to it, submit to Christ, obey the call, invitation and command to repent and believe and so be saved? Of course not. Obedience to the gospel command is a vital aspect of conversion (Acts 5:32; Rom. 2:8; 2 Thess. 1:8; Heb. 5:9; 12:25; 1 Pet. 1:2,22; 3:1; 4:17). It is precisely what we want today, is it not? We want to carry out our Lord’s standing commission (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:47), and preach the gospel to all in order to see as many sinners as possible converted to Christ, as many sinners as possible brought to ‘the obedience of faith’. May we live to see ‘the word of God continue to increase, and the number of the disciples multiply greatly... and a great many... become obedient to the faith’ (see Acts 6:7). ‘The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ’ (2 Cor. 10:4-5).<sup>1</sup> As far as unbelievers go, this is ‘the obedience of faith’.

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<sup>1</sup> This note applies to this paragraph and the next. John Gill: The person thus affected ‘clearly sees Christ to be the alone, able, willing, full, and suitable Saviour, and so becomes obedient to him, both as a Saviour and a King. Such an enlightened soul looks to him alone for life and salvation, ventures on him, and relies upon him, and is desirous and willing to be saved by him in his own way. He receives and embraces all his truths and doctrines with faith and love, and obeys them from the heart, and cheerfully and willingly submits to all his commands and ordinances. For though he is taken by the grace of God, and all his strongholds, reasonings, and high thoughts are demolished by the power of God in the gospel, and he himself is carried captive, yet [it is] not against but with his will [that he is made] to be a voluntary subject of Christ, and cheerfully to submit to the sceptre of his kingdom’. M.R.Vincent in his *Word Studies in the New Testament*: ‘The obedience is the new stronghold into which the captives are led. This is indicated by the preposition *eis* “into” or “unto”’. Do not miss how all this follows hard upon 2 Cor. 9:13. See the following note.

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But what about believers? Is it not clear that the apostle wanted them to live holy, Christ-like, sanctified lives by believing, submitting to, and obeying Scripture? Of course. Obedience to gospel commands is a vital aspect of progressive sanctification (2 Cor. 2:9; 9:13; 10:4-5; 7:15; 10:6; Gal. 5:7; 2 Thess. 3:14; Philem. 1:21; see faith and works linked in Heb. 11:1-40; Jas. 2:14-26).<sup>2</sup> This is what Paul was talking about. So he knew what he had to do. He had to set out the gospel to inform his readers' minds, yes. But, more than that, he wanted to inform their minds in order to stir their hearts and, in this way, move their wills to obedience to the gospel, to get them to work out its consequences in daily life, and to put it into practice. This is why he wrote his letter to the Romans. And this is what we find. Putting it simplistically, we may say that in the first eleven chapters of his letter the apostle sets out his doctrine, and in the last five chapters he issues his call, and gives his commands, to the believers for their obedience.<sup>3</sup> All this he makes clear right from the start. Could anything be more patent? As far as believers go, this is 'the obedience of faith'.

In light of what is to come, let me stress this. The apostolic way of producing 'the obedience of faith' was to preach the gospel and write Scripture. Naturally, as far as we are concerned, the latter was completed by the apostles, but the standing principle is as plain as a pikestaff: the Scriptures are right at the heart of 'the obedience of faith'. And our mission, as believers, is to do what we can to bring about this 'obedience of faith' – in the conversion of sinners, and the progressive sanctification of saints, beginning with ourselves.

Referring to Matthew 28:18-20, John Piper put it this way:

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<sup>2</sup> As for 2 Cor. 9:13, see previous note. Paul describes their generosity thus: 'Your submission [obedience, NIV, NASB] that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ' (2 Cor. 9:13). 'You yield yourselves in willing subjection to the gospel precepts, evinced in acts, as well as in profession' (Jamieson, Fausset and Brown).

<sup>3</sup> Compare the first three and the last three chapters of Ephesians.

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The aim of Christian missions is to cause people to obey a new Commander. [Progressive] sanctification is happening where the words of Jesus are being obeyed.<sup>4</sup>

And those ‘words of Jesus’, and all they encompass, are found in Scripture – Matthew 28:18-20 in the first instance, but *in toto* from Genesis to Revelation as nuanced by the apostles.

Getting back to Romans: Paul clearly felt himself impelled by Christ’s commission to bring all to ‘the obedience of faith’. He was a driven man. Take Romans as a case in point. As he moves through the letter, although he does not repeatedly use the phrase, nevertheless he keeps returning to ‘the obedience of faith’, and that by sinners and saints. You can sense how intensely he felt the ‘burden’ (responsibility) of it, so vital a matter was it to him. Paul wrote Romans – the pinnacle of Scripture – with this as his stated purpose!

Take Romans 6. Having explained that believers are united to Christ, he immediately moves to the consequences of this massive truth, issuing commands and backing them up with an extended and powerful argument:

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. What then? Are we to sin because we are not under 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 (Rom. 6:12-19).

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<sup>4</sup> John Piper: ‘How the Spirit Sanctifies’, a sermon on Rom. 15:14-21.

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And so on. It is all here: scriptural exposition to give light to the mind, to warm the heart and thus call for submission of will and obedience of life. In other words, ‘the obedience of faith’.

Take Romans 8:12, where the apostle states that believers are ‘debtors’; that is, they are obligated (see NIV, NASB). The word *opheiletai* is emphatic. Paul is speaking of those who are ‘held by obligation’ and the consequent ‘duty of people who owe’.<sup>5</sup> Naturally, he includes himself. As he had explained right from the start of the letter, he too was a debtor, he had an obligation: ‘I am under obligation (*opheiletēs*) both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome’ (Rom. 1:14-15). He knew that it was by the preaching of the gospel that he could bring sinners and saints to ‘the obedience of faith’,<sup>6</sup> and he was under ‘obligation’ to do all he could to bring it about.

Having made sure that he had placed that firmly on the record, on reaching Romans 8, Paul links himself with his readers to declare: ‘So then, brothers, we are debtors (*opheiletai*), not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh’ (Rom. 8:12). He is telling the Romans the same as the Galatians: ‘If [since] we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit’ (Gal. 5:25), let us walk in the Spirit. Now, as I have explained elsewhere,<sup>7</sup> this ‘walking in the Spirit’ cannot be divorced from determined – though willing and joyful – submission to the Scriptures. The two go hand in hand. No man – sinner or saint – can obey Scripture but by the Spirit, and no man walking in the Spirit can do anything other than regard Scripture as his sovereign rule and guide. Thankfully, in the new covenant, not only is the law of Christ written on the believer’s heart *and* in the Scriptures, but every believer has the Spirit. Thus, in Romans 8 and in Galatians 5 – 6, having set out the doctrine of the gospel in writing Scripture, the apostle is calling for obedience of life on the basis of what he has written. Calling for it? He is demanding it! He is

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<sup>5</sup> See Thayer. *opheilō* is ‘to must’, to have to, to have a duty to.

<sup>6</sup> As I have explained times without number, preaching is more than ‘pulpit work’.

<sup>7</sup> See my ‘Believers Under the Law of Christ’.

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commanding his readers to obey! Do not misread the ‘let us’ of Galatians 5:25; it is explained by the ‘obligation’ of Romans 8:12. He is calling for ‘the obedience of faith’; he is writing expressly to get it. Scripture is at the heart of it.

Still he has not exhausted the theme. Take Romans 12. After setting out, in the first eleven chapters of the letter, the most glorious statement of the gospel in all Scripture, the apostle comes to this:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect (Rom. 12:1-2).

He appeals for obedience on the basis of his doctrine. But, once again, do not misread the apostle. He might ‘appeal’, but the apostolic appeal is nothing less than a command! ‘In light of the gospel, live lives that reflect it’. This is what he is commanding. He wants ‘the obedience of faith’. He is calling for it, demanding it.

And so it goes on, right to the end of the letter. Look how the apostle closes, not forgetting the way he had opened the letter:

Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith – to the only wise God be glory for evermore through Jesus Christ! Amen (Rom. 16:25-27).

‘The obedience of faith’! There is no mistaking it: one of the chief ends of the gospel ministry is to bring both sinners and saints to ‘the obedience of faith’. This end is the responsibility that Christ laid on the apostle, right from his conversion, and it explains the apostle’s life-long ‘obligation’ (Rom. 1:14-15). As Christ had made clear to him:

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I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles – to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.

Paul knew what this entailed. As he told Agrippa:

Therefore... I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance (Acts 20:16-20).

Do not miss the final clause. Paul did not want conversions in the sense of ‘making a decision’. He wanted real conversion leading to life-long obedience to reflect the reality of the repentance. And he wrote and taught Scripture for it, issuing commands in the name of Christ to sinners for their conversion, and then to the converts for their progressive sanctification. It is just as the Lord himself had said at the close of his own earthly ministry:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age (Matt. 28:18-20).

As I have explained, the believer’s obedience to the externally written Scriptures arises from the inward writing of the law of Christ in his heart, in the power of the Spirit. *Both the inward and the outward are vital*. The fact that Paul sets all this out so clearly in writing this letter to the Romans is a clear demonstration of it.

D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones on Romans 7:6 raised a very important question: ‘What are the differences, in detail, between life lived “in the Spirit” and the old way of living “according to the writing” and “under the law” and “in the flesh”?’ He answered it thus:

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First, there is the difference between an external and an internal relationship to the law of God, in other words, to morality. This difference is well described in 2 Corinthians 3:3, where Paul says: ‘Forasmuch as you are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God’. Before, it was, as it were, a writing ‘with ink’, but it is no longer that, it is now a writing with the Spirit. But, further, ‘not in tables of stone’ – that is something outside you. Well, where is the writing now? In ‘fleshy tables of the heart’. The old law was outside a man, written on stones, written with ink, something you looked at with your physical eyes. That is no longer the position. It is now engraven and written and implanted in the fleshy tables of the heart, in the very centre of the personality, in the deepest recesses of our being. We are no longer looking at something outside ourselves, we are considering something that is already within us, and working within us. Hebrews 8 states it. The author is quoting what Jeremiah had said in the 31st chapter of his prophecy. God says that he is going to make a new covenant with the people – ‘not the old covenant that I made with your fathers’, but a ‘new covenant’. What are the characteristics of the new covenant? ‘I will put my laws into their minds, and write them in their hearts’. Before, he had put the laws on tables of stone which he handed to Moses, and Moses brought them down to the people. But in the new covenant he is going to ‘put (his) laws into their minds, and (imprint) write them in their hearts’.

Here we meet with a fundamental distinction between the two covenants, the two ways of life. Before you become truly Christian you try to conform to a standard and a pattern outside yourself; but to be a Christian means that the standard is inside you. Of course, in one sense it is still outside, *but the important fact is that it is now inside as well.*<sup>8</sup> You read it in the Word, but it is also in your mind and in your heart. You are not only looking at something external, you are also aware of that which is within. You do not have to be persuaded to look at that which is outside you; there is now a power within you calling your attention to it, a principle operating in the centre of your personality. The same truth is stated in Philippians 2:13: ‘Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God that works in you (inside you) both to will and to do of his good pleasure’. The apostle rejoices that we have become dead to the

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<sup>8</sup> My emphasis.

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law, and that we are delivered from the law which formerly held us because we can now serve ‘in newness of Spirit, not in the oldness of the writing’. It is within us, in our minds and in our hearts.

Lloyd-Jones, of course, was addressing a congregation already persuaded of the priority of the written word. Consequently, he rightly stressed the inward work of the Spirit writing the law of Christ on the believer’s heart. But in light of what I am talking about here, the same doctrine needs to be stressed the other way round. Both the inward and outward are essential for ‘the obedience of faith’.

‘The obedience of faith’. Obedience to what? Obedience to Scripture under the impulse of the Spirit. It is this unbreakable link between faith and obedience to Scripture that I now want to develop.

### ***Faith and obedience linked***

While the following extract from Romans concerns unbelievers coming to Christ, the underlying principle is precisely the same for the believer.<sup>9</sup> Paul made the point I am trying to stress, thus:

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed?  
And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?  
And how are they to hear without someone preaching?  
And how are they to preach unless they are sent?... But they have not all obeyed the gospel... So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ (Rom. 10:14-17).

Paul preached the gospel to bring sinners to faith; that is, to obey the gospel, submit to Christ, obey Christ, receive Christ as Saviour and Lord.<sup>10</sup> And we know what he meant by ‘preaching the gospel’:

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<sup>9</sup> I have already made the link; or, rather, as I have shown, Paul did right at the start of Romans.

<sup>10</sup> ‘The word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith’ (Acts 6:7).

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I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ... I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God... I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom... I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God... For three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified (Acts 20:20-32).

Notice that the apostle was talking about his approach to both sinners and saints. Furthermore, do not miss the way he concluded this parting address, commending the saints to God and Scripture – to both, please note – to bring about their continued edification. And he was not thinking of Scripture merely as a source of information for the children of God!

Clearly, faith and obedience to the gospel, obedience to Scripture, are intimately linked, and indissolubly so. It can be put in the negative. Unbelief is disobedience. The condemning sin for sinners is their refusal to obey the gospel and trust Christ as Saviour and Lord (John 3:18,36; 16:7-9). The reward-losing sin for believers is their refusal to obey the commands issued by Christ and the apostles using all Scripture.<sup>11</sup> Unbelief and disobedience – or, faith and obedience – are Siamese twins (Rom. 2:8 with 2 Thess. 2:12, both ESV). The apostle made the link more than once: ‘Just as you [Gentiles] were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their [Israel’s] disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all’ (Rom. 11:30-32). Again: God complained of

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<sup>11</sup> While the believer will never be condemned for disobedience, he will lose his reward (1 Cor. 3:8,14-15; 4:5).

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Israel that through their unbelief they were ‘a disobedient and contrary people’ (Rom. 10:21).

All this applies as much to the believer as to the unbeliever: believers have to produce ‘the obedience of faith’; not to do it is ‘disobedience’. The believer’s ‘obedience of faith’ is his submission to all gospel commands, and the keeping of them. And this law of Christ is written both in the believer’s heart and in Scripture.

Many might be asking themselves: Why make such a song and dance about something so obvious? I agree. Or rather, I did agree until very recently – when I discovered that some new-covenant theologians teach in a way that threatens these principles. They say that the believer is *not* under the law of Christ; rather, he has that law written within him by the Spirit, and while the Spirit moves the believer to obedience to Scripture, it is not as a command, imperative, law or rule. Indeed, Scripture is not an integral part of the law of Christ. Moreover, since the believer has the law of Christ written within his heart, and since the Spirit moves him to obedience, there must be no talk of command, duty or accountability when thinking of the believer’s obedience to Scripture in his progressive sanctification. True, the believer will obey Scripture, must obey Scripture, but there must be no talk of ‘law’ in connection with this.<sup>12</sup> All such talk smacks of ‘bondage’.

This is wrong. The believer *is* under the law of Christ, and Scripture *is* at the heart of that law. And although the Spirit does move the believer to obedience, even so the believer deliberately obeys Scripture, submitting himself to it as God’s commandment and law. It all plays out in ‘the obedience of faith’. When a man believes, who does the believing, who does the obeying of the gospel command? Is it God? Or is it the man himself? Is the man responsible? Or is it down to the Spirit? Is the man active or passive? Is his obedience deliberate, or is it some kind of reflex action under the prompting of the Spirit? Does the man consciously obey the commands of Scripture, or does he do it

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<sup>12</sup> In my ‘Believers Under the Law of Christ’ I commented on the illogicality at the heart of this.

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incidentally, indirectly? In all this, the doctrine I am writing against ends up with a passive view of progressive sanctification reminiscent of the old Keswick teaching of ‘Let go, and let God’. In fact, it verges towards the hyper-Calvinistic denial of duty faith.

It is this that I wish to examine.

### ***The link with hyper-Calvinism***

Let me start at the beginning. As for unbelievers, hyper-Calvinists do not like duty faith. Sinners should not be commanded or invited to trust Christ, they say. Since they are dead in sin, it is not logical to invite or command them to repent and believe. I agree with that last. It isn’t logical. But that’s not the question. Is it biblical? That is the question! And as I have shown elsewhere, duty faith is biblical. Let me remind you of the definition I used in my *The Gospel Offer is Free*:

*Duty faith is the duty, the obligation, the responsibility, of all sinners to trust Christ. The gospel preacher must command all sinners to believe.*

I then spelled this out:

*A command implies a duty. The gospel commands all sinners to repent; therefore it is their duty to repent. The gospel commands all sinners to believe; therefore it is their duty to believe.*<sup>13</sup>

As far as the unbeliever goes, the hyper-Calvinist argues that since the sinner is dead then he has no responsibility to believe and thus obey the gospel. And that’s the end of the story. The sinner has to wait patiently, passively attend preaching services and ordinances, waiting, hoping, that God might effectually work in him and grant him assurance that he is redeemed. The man

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<sup>13</sup> See my *Offer* pp19-34. Please note, it is not the duty of an unconverted sinner to believe that Christ died for him in particular; his duty is to trust Christ. In any case, the sinner cannot know the former until he has done the latter; and even if he could, he would be exercising historical faith, accepting a fact, when what is required is saving faith, reliance upon Christ.

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himself has no responsibility to believe, and is not accountable for his unbelief. This is utterly wrong on more than one count.<sup>14</sup>

But in this article I am not concerned with duty faith as it applies to the sinner, the unbeliever, but with the duty of *believers* to obey God's commands in Scripture. As I have shown, dealing with the former raises important principles for the latter. It is the believer's duty to obey the commands of Scripture. This obedience is an integral part of being under the law of Christ. In coming to faith in Christ, believers are united to Christ, delivered from the bondage of the Mosaic law, and brought under the easy yoke of their Redeemer. In other words, they are under his law. From the moment of their conversion, as Paul explains in Romans 6:15 – 7:6, they are slaves of Christ, and married to him, subject to his law (Eph. 5:22-24; Col. 3:18; Tit. 2:5; 1 Pet. 3:1). Christ's law is written both on the believer's heart by the indwelling Spirit *and* written in Scripture. The believer, moved by the Spirit, empowered by the Spirit, must and will obey his Redeemer and Lord as he has revealed his mind in Scripture.<sup>15</sup>

So as to leave no misunderstanding on this, the view that I am disputing says that since the believer has the law of Christ written within his heart, and since the Spirit moves him to obedience, there must be no talk of command, duty or accountability when thinking of the believer's obedience to Scripture in his progressive sanctification. True, the believer will obey Scripture, must obey Scripture, but there must be no talk of 'law' in connection with this. All such talk smacks of 'bondage'. In reply, I say that this teaching has all the makings of a hyper-Calvinistic view of progressive sanctification.

What do I mean by hyper-Calvinism in this regard? Consider this conversation between the Jews and Christ:

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<sup>14</sup> As I say, I have dealt with it in my *Offer*. See also my *Septimus; Eternal; No Safety*.

<sup>15</sup> See above and my *Christ*; 'Believers Under the Law of Christ', and so on.

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‘What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?’ Jesus answered and said to them: ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he sent’ (John 6:28-29).<sup>16</sup>

What did Jesus mean by ‘the work of God’?

Either it is the work which God himself does, or else it is the work God requires men to do. If the former, then since the Jews asked Christ what they had to do (John 6:28), they must have been asking how they could do what only God can do, and Christ told them how to do it. A most remarkable suggestion! Did they want to create? Did they want to rule all nations? Or what? The notion is absurd. We can dismiss it. What is more, Christ’s answer, to ‘believe in him whom he sent’, can hardly be described as God’s own work. Sinners have to believe, not God!<sup>17</sup>

But were the Jews thinking in a much more subtle way – were they thinking of saving faith as the work of God in his elect? In other words, were they asking how God would work in them, enabling them to believe? This too we can dismiss. The suggestion that they had reached this level of spiritual understanding, and reached it *before* believing,<sup>18</sup> and were sincerely asking how God would work faith in them, is too much to swallow. Saving faith came into the conversation only *after* the Jews had asked their question about the work of God, and it arose only because Christ raised it. It had not entered the minds of the Jews.

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<sup>16</sup> For the next part of this article, I have lightly edited my *Offer* pp43-47.

<sup>17</sup> I acknowledge, of course, the obvious; ‘the works of God’ *can* mean God’s own works. When Jesus told his disciples that the blind man had been born blind so ‘that the works of God should be revealed in him’ (John 9:3), this is precisely what he was talking about. God was going to display *his* works – his compassion, his power, and so on – in giving the man sight. Yes, of course. But Jesus made this very clear by saying the works of God were to be *revealed in* the man; God was about to demonstrate his compassion and his power. But this is very different to John 6:28-29.

<sup>18</sup> They were not spiritual men; the context offers abundant proof of their carnality.

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Above all, the idea introduces a dreadful confusion. The Jews were asking about what *they* had to do, not what God would do. The confusion is this: When a sinner believes, who does the believing? Is it the sinner or God? It is the sinner. It can only be the sinner. While faith is the *gift* of God (Eph. 2:8), it is never called the *work* of God. Although God gives faith to the elect sinner, working in him, it is the sinner who believes (Eph. 2:8-10; Phil. 2:12-13). The Holy Spirit does not believe for the sinner; God does not do the believing.

John Gill had it right when he said: ‘It is the convinced sinner, and not God or Christ, or the Spirit, who repents and believes’.<sup>19</sup> ‘Faith... as a principle, is purely God’s work; [but] as it is an act, or as it is exercised under the influence of divine grace, it is man’s act’.<sup>20</sup> Yes, indeed, ‘it is man’s act’. The upshot is, even if the Jews were asking about saving faith – which they were not – they were asking about what God required of them, not what he would do in them.

Let me stress this. The fact is, the Jews were not talking about God’s *own* work at all! They wanted to know what *they* had to do. They wanted to know how *they* could please God, what did he require of *them*, what was *their* duty. Indeed, they had asked their question only because Christ had spoken of what they ought to ‘labour’ for (John 6:27). This is what they wanted to know, and this is what Christ told them. The work under discussion was not the work which God *does*, but the work which *pleases* him, the work God *requires*. As Thomas Goodwin put it: ‘By works of

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<sup>19</sup> John Gill: *The Cause of God and Truth*, W.H.Collingridge, London, 1855, p112.

<sup>20</sup> *Gill’s Commentary*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1980, Vol.5 p654. ‘Faith, as it is our act, is our own; hence we read of *his* faith, and *my* faith, and *your* faith, in Scripture’ (John Gill: *Sermons and Tracts*, Old Paths Gospel Press, Choteau, Vol.4 p185, emphasis his). ‘Whilst faith is unquestionably God’s gift, it must be your act’ (Frank White: ‘Should an anxious enquirer be exhorted “to pray”?’..., being an article in: *The Sword and the Trowel...*, edited by C.H.Spurgeon, Passmore and Alabaster, London, 1867, p39).

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God they mean works acceptable to God'.<sup>21</sup> Lexicons tell us it is 'the works required and approved by God, the deeds that God desires'.<sup>22</sup> Joseph Henry Alford: "The works of God" must not be taken to mean "the works which God works", but... "the works well pleasing to God".<sup>23</sup> As the NIV translates it: 'What must we do to do the works God requires?' And Jesus, by his answer, was telling them: 'This is your responsibility, this is what you must do to please God, this is what God requires of you, this is the work of God, this is your duty'. 'Do not labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you,<sup>24</sup> because God the Father has set his seal on him... This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he sent' (John 6:27,28). Alford again: 'The meaning is not that faith is wrought in us by God... but... working the work of God is to believe on him whom he has sent'.<sup>25</sup> Believing in Christ is that which pleases God, it is what God requires, it is what he demands, it is the sinner's duty.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Thomas Goodwin: *Of the Object and Acts of Justifying Faith in The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, Vol.8, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1985, p584.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph Henry Thayer: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Ninth Printing 1991; William F. Arndt and F.Wilbur Gingrich: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago... and The Syndics of the Cambridge University Press, London, 1957.

<sup>23</sup> Henry Alford: *The New Testament for English Readers...*, Vol.1 Part 2, Rivingtons, London, 1863, p518.

<sup>24</sup> Of course, salvation, and all the things which accompany it – repentance, faith, and so on – are gifts and graces which only God can give and produce. This is not at issue.

<sup>25</sup> Alford p518.

<sup>26</sup> 'The work of God is to believe. Faith includes all the works which God requires' (M.R.Vincent: *Word Studies in the New Testament*, Macdonald Publishing Company, Florida, Vol.1 p441). Compare 'the work of the LORD' (Jer. 48:10), the work God requires, 'which is said with respect to the Chaldeans, who were enjoined to destroy the Moabites, which is called the work of the Lord, because he had given them a commission to do it; and which was to be done by them... This is a general rule... every man has work to do for God' (Gill: *Commentary*

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Consider Christ himself. He did ‘the works of God’. What did this entail? Take the curing of the blind man. Yes, God was about to reveal his works in making the blind man see (John 9:3), but as Jesus immediately went on to say: ‘I must work the works of [God] while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work’ (John 9:4). Clearly, Christ was speaking of the work *he himself* would do. Yes, it was ‘the work of God’ in that it would be done by God’s power (John 14:10), and would please God; yet, in making the blind man see, whilst it was God’s work which Christ did, *it was Christ who did the work*. It was one of *his* works (John 15:24).

Christ’s curing the blind man is not an isolated example of the way he pleased his Father by his works. Christ’s entire life and death was a constant demonstration of it. Coming into the world, he set out his manifesto: ‘I have come... to do your will, O God’ (Heb. 10:5-7,9). Addressing his disciples, he elaborated the point: ‘My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to finish his work’ (John 4:34). In other words, Christ was saying he delighted to obey God his Father, to carry out his commands, to complete the work, the duty, the Father had given him to do. In this way Christ was at work. ‘My Father has been working until now, and I have been working’ (John 5:17), he told the Jews. True, as he explained, ‘I can of myself do nothing’ (John 5:19,30), but even so his works were *his* own works; *he* did them. In all this, he could say, ‘I do not seek my own will but the will of the Father who sent me’ (John 5:30); in other words, I do my works in order to please the Father; indeed, ‘I always do those things that please him’ (John 8:29); ‘the works which the Father has given me to finish – the very works that I do – bear witness of me’ (John 5:36), ‘for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me’ (John 6:38). Of ‘the works that I do in my Father’s name’ (John 10:25), one – which he called ‘the will of the Father’ – was not to lose any who had been

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Vol.4 p209). Compare also ‘[Christ’s] works’ (Rev. 2:26): ‘By his works are meant [here], not the works which were done by him... but the works which are commanded, and required by Christ to be done by his people... [such] as the work of faith... and every act of obedience’ (Gill: *Commentary* Vol.6 p949).

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given him by the Father (John 6:39); this work he did (John 17:12). Further, we hear him praying in the garden: ‘O my Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will’ (Matt. 26:39). It was just as he had said: ‘I have come... to do your will, O God’ (Heb. 10:5-7,9). And he completely fulfilled and accomplished all the work the Father had given him to do: ‘I have glorified you on the earth. I have finished the work which you have given me to do’ (John 17:4), ‘I have accomplished it’. We hear it loud and clear in his triumphant cry on the cross, ‘It is finished’ (John 19:30), ‘it is accomplished’.

In short, Christ did the works of God; that is, he did those works (John 14:31; 15:10) and said those words (John 12:49; 14:10,24) which God commanded him, which God required of him, and which pleased the Father (John 10:37). But it was Christ himself who did the works. While they were ‘the works of God’, they were *Christ’s own* works. Christ promised his disciples: ‘He who believes in me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do’ (John 14:12).

In John 6:28-29, therefore, the Jews were asking, as William Gurnall put it, about ‘that part of his will which above all he desires should be done – called therefore with emphasis “the work of God” (John 6:29)’.<sup>27</sup> And this is what Christ meant when he told them to believe. God requires you to believe, he told them. In short, Christ preached duty faith.

The principle is established: God requires sinners to believe; it is their duty; it is what pleases him. Not, it goes without saying, that sinners can believe by their own power: ‘No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him’ (John 6:44), Christ declared. Even so, sinners are accountable for their unbelief:

Whoever believes in [Christ] is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God (John 3:18).

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<sup>27</sup> William Gurnall: *Christian in Complete Armour*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Vol.2 pp49-50. The Jews said ‘works’ (*ta erga*). Jesus replied ‘work’ (*to ergon*).

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Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him (John 3:36).

I [Jesus] will send [the Spirit] to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin... concerning sin, because they do not believe in me (John 16:7-9).

All this is part and parcel of ‘the obedience of faith’.

### ***So what?***

What does all this have to do with the believer and his progressive sanctification? I suggest there is a very close parallel. In fact, the principle comes over directly from the one to the other. God commands all men everywhere to repent and believe, to look to him for salvation (Isa. 45:22; Acts 17:30). Repentant faith, therefore, is every sinner’s duty. ‘Ah, but that’s for salvation, whereas we are talking about progressive sanctification’. So we are! We are talking about ‘the obedience of faith’. As I have shown, all men are obliged to give God ‘the obedience of faith’. The point is here, God’s commanding men does not cease when the sinner trusts Christ. God commands believers as well as unbelievers! Take just one example: ‘Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ’ (2 Pet. 3:18). Is that not a command? Is it not a command in Scripture? Is this not a part of the law of Christ? Is it not an aspect of ‘the obedience of faith’?

Conscious of what will be said by way of reply, let me stress yet again that just as the sinner cannot repent and believe without the operation of the Spirit (John 6:44), neither can the believer yield willing submission to Christ under his law except by the inward power and grace of the Spirit. As I have said, he can only live to God by walking in the Spirit (Gal. 5:25). None of this is at issue. Nevertheless, the point still stands. God does not stop commanding once a man is converted. I have already quoted the apostle’s statement to Agrippa:

I... declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that

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they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance (Acts 26:19-20).

But this obedience is only possible by the Spirit. As the apostle put it:

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).<sup>28</sup>

The letter to the Hebrews is the book of all books setting out the glories of the new covenant. In approaching his conclusion, its writer left his readers with a clear exposition of the principle:

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 (Heb. 13:20-21).

It is as the prophet had foretold:

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).<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> The point is beautifully illustrated in this: ‘By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed’ (1 Cor. 15:10-11). Paul worked. He worked hard. He preached with saving result. But it wasn’t he – it was God. It wasn’t flesh – it was grace. But, even so, he worked, and worked hard. See Rom. 12:3; 1 Cor. 12:6.

<sup>29</sup> Calvin commented: ‘God does not wish us to be like stones. Let us strive therefore and stretch all our nerves, and do our utmost towards acting uprightly. But Paul advises that to be done with fear and trembling; that is, by casting away all confidence in one’s own strength... Paul gives the reason, because, says he, it is God who works both to will and to accomplish (Phil. 2:13)’.

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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).

Just as the sinner is obligated to repent and believe, so the believer is obligated to obey scriptural commands and live worthy of his calling. The believer's duty to obey God is no less a duty and obligation than the unbeliever's. If he fails, he sins.<sup>30</sup> As Matthew 5 – 7 and John 12:47-50; 13:1 – 16:33 make clear, Christ is his people's lawgiver. And as for post-Pentecost Scriptures, are they not full of apostolic commands calling for the believer's obedience? And not only direct commands. The apostles set out a host of principles which believers are duty-bound to apply in their daily lives. And do not forget Christ's addresses to the churches (Revelation 1 – 3). Look how that book begins:

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it (Rev. 1:1-3).

Too many treat prophecy as mere advance information, when the fact is Christ issues his word, all his word, for us to apply to our lives as principles and commands which we have to obey. And there is nothing passive about it.

Nor is it just isolated verses. The overall picture of the believer's progressive sanctification throughout the New Testament is as far removed from the passive as it is possible to

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<sup>30</sup> As I have already noted, there is a difference between the unbeliever and the believer. Unbelief (that is, not obeying the gospel) for the sinner is condemning (John 3:18,36; 16:7-9); for the saint it is reward-losing (1 Cor. 3:8,14-15; 4:5).

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get. Thus, believers – who are God’s ‘workmanship’ – produce ‘good works, which God prepared beforehand’. But, I emphasise, it is the believers themselves who do the good works. God doesn’t. ‘We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that *we* should walk in them’ (Eph. 2:10). Of course, believers can only do those works by God’s grace, by the Spirit’s power, but the point stands; believers do the works, believer have to do the works, it is their duty, they are obliged to obey God’s commands, and they are accountable to Christ if they do not. And they discover God’s commands in Scripture.<sup>31</sup>

In short, the idea that the believer is not under the law of Christ, and that the Scriptures are not an integral part of that law, and that the believer is anything less than fully active in determined obedience to the revealed will of God written in Scripture, is wide of the mark.

Yes, the believer has a renewed will, having been regenerated by the Spirit, and, yes, the Spirit moves him to obedience. But

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<sup>31</sup> Compare this Facebook post from an advocate of the system I am contesting: ‘We are not dependent upon law prescriptions to produce in us what only the Spirit can effect through his word. We don’t learn to love others (the chief fulfilment of the law [of Moses] and fruit of the Spirit) by reading/obeying written detailed “how to” prescriptions (laws). We learn what love looks like and acts like by reading of Christ, the incarnate fulfilment, his tenderness toward sinners, his tireless ministry of mercy and good works, his love for the Father, and the grand display of their triune love for the world through the cross. In this way, we see that love is shaped like a person. It is the gospel of Jesus-Christ-shaped, grace-empowered, self-sacrificing, redeeming, merciful, sin-cancelling, and cross-centric. This love is informed in [to?] our minds as we saturate ourselves in him through the written word. But it is not empowered in our volition [will, decision, deliberate choice, resolve] by prescriptive law(s) that binds us “to do” upon pain of death. Rather, God’s love is empowered in us by the Spirit, in conformance with the gospel pattern of Christ. He gives us a living will/volition and ability to love with Christ’s own love’. While there is much to applaud in this (without the Spirit, no amount of Scripture will produce godliness, and so on), notice the lack of emphasis on the believer’s deliberate obedience to the law of Christ as found in apostolic commands in Scripture; indeed, notice the stress the other way!

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this obedience is not passive, some kind of reflex reaction to the Spirit. As the sinner has to obey the gospel, so does the saint. The Spirit does not obey gospel commands for the believer any more than he repents and believes for the sinner, although he is the ultimate cause of all gospel obedience. While the Spirit is the prime mover of all faith and obedience, nevertheless both the sinner and the saint must deliberately obey God's commands. It is their duty to obey. And they are answerable to God if they do not. Accommodating the words of the apostle (Rom. 3:27), we would not go far wrong to call this 'the law of the gospel'. Sticking to Scripture, it is 'the obedience of faith'.



## *The Reformed and Baptismal Regeneration*

Baptismal regeneration, one of the most diabolical of all falsehoods ever to be imposed on the church of Jesus Christ, has been responsible for the delusion of millions leading to their eternal damnation. Rome teaches it. *But so do many of the Reformed.* All the statements I now quote come from men who have exemplary Reformed credentials. All advocates – and would-be advocates – of the Westminster Confession, and the like, particularly over infant baptism, need to take full account of these testimonies.<sup>1</sup>

### ***Reformed Confessions teach baptismal regeneration***

Who says? The Confessions themselves! Take, for instance, the Westminster Confession:

Baptism... is for the solemn admission of the party baptised into the visible church...<sup>2</sup> Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one, or both, believing parents, are to be baptised... The grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongs unto.<sup>3</sup>

The Independent or Congregational Savoy Declaration of 1658 repeated this terrifying assertion. Note the word *conferred*: ‘The

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<sup>1</sup> For this article, I have lightly edited my *Infant* pp38-39,48-65.

<sup>2</sup> A visible church is a church knowingly containing both the regenerate and unregenerate, invented by infant baptisers to try to cope with the fall out of infant baptism. See my *Infant* pp237-276. The Westminster Confession, Chapter XXV, puts it this way: ‘The visible church... consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children’ (*The Confession of Faith* and other documents of the Westminster Assembly, The Publication Committee of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, 1967, p107).

<sup>3</sup> Westminster pp114-116.

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grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and *conferred*, by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongs unto'. Conferred! What a word! Do those who hold to these statements today really believe that grace is actually *conferred* to elect infants in their baptism? Where do infant baptisers find any scriptural justification for this? Are infant baptisers prepared to assert, categorically, that every one of the elect who is baptised as an infant is regenerated at the time of their baptism? Those who hold to the Westminster Confession say it is so.<sup>4</sup>

What is more, it is easy to ignore the final caveat: 'to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongs unto'. History shows that many reared under the Westminster Confession really do hold to the baptismal regeneration of *their* children in the performance of the sacramental rite.

Many covenant theologians past and present confirm the point. Take David F. Wright:

The divines who laboured so long and hard on the Westminster Assembly benches clearly held to regeneration as God's normal baptismal gift. The erosion of such full-bodied teaching about infant baptism among Protestant evangelicals in modern times distances them from the Reformers more markedly than on almost any other topic... The Westminster Confession teaches baptismal regeneration of infants and older persons. Just as [the usual] qualifications are commonplace among the Reformers,<sup>5</sup> so also the generality of their baptismal theology conveys a decisively realist message: baptism is God's normal channel for imparting his gifts... to his children.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> What about the elect who are *not* baptised as infants? And what about the *non*-elect who *are* baptised as infants? And notice the 'whether of age or infants'. Does this mean that baptism confers saving grace on all the elect irrespective of their age when baptised? But if the adult was a believer when baptised, didn't he have saving grace before his baptism?

<sup>5</sup> See my *Infant* pp109-110 and *passim* for repeated examples of Reformed double-speak.

<sup>6</sup> David F. Wright: *What has Infant Baptism done to Baptism? An enquiry at the end of Christendom*, Paternoster Press, Milton Keynes, 2005, pp24,99.

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Rich Lusk, using the abominable word ‘sacrament’,<sup>7</sup> speaking of baptism in particular, declared:

The Reformed Confessions clearly teach that a sacrament includes *both* the sign *and* the thing signified. Sacraments are not merely signs; they are signs *conjoined* with the gracious work of Christ and the Spirit.

In this, said Lusk, the Reformed Confessions were following ‘Calvin [who] repeatedly claimed the sacraments perform what they picture; that in them, God accomplishes what he signifies’.<sup>8</sup>

And that takes us neatly to the Reformers and subsequent writers, down to the present day.

### ***Dangerous statements by infant baptisers***

I say dangerous. I could say unbiblical and therefore dangerous.

Martin Luther, for example, commenting on: ‘For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ’ (Gal. 3:27):

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<sup>7</sup> By a ‘sacrament’, I mean the idea that grace is conferred by performance of a rite. I will have to use the word; it is in the literature, and many Reformed writers and others more-than-like it. John Calvin had a high view of the word (John Calvin: *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, James Clarke and Co., Limited, London, 1957, Vol.2 pp491-511). D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones was not so keen: ‘It is unfortunate that this word should ever have been used... Personally, I try not to use this term’ (D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones: *The Church and the Last Things*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1998, pp26-27). It is, to me, an abomination. See Benjamin Wills Newton: *The Doctrine of Scripture Respecting Baptism Briefly Considered*, Lucas Collins, London, 1907, pp74-81. To anticipate an objection: No, I am not confusing sacramentalism and sacerdotalism. But they are connected. Both are unbiblical, and the former leads to the latter – whatever the Reformed might say. See my *No Sacerdotalism; Baptist*.

<sup>8</sup> Rich Lusk: ‘Paedobaptism and Baptismal Efficacy: Historic Trends and Current Controversies’, in Wilkins, Steve and Garner, Duane (eds.): *The Federal Vision*, Athanasius Press, Monroe, 2004, pp96-102, emphasis his; see also Wilkins: ‘Introduction’ in the same volume pp12-13.

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Putting on of Christ... consists... in a new birth and a new creation... which is done in baptism... They which are baptised, are regenerated and renewed by the Holy Ghost... There rises in them... new and holy affections, [such] as the fear of God, true faith and assured hope... There begins in them also a new will.

He attacked the Anabaptists, saying they were:

Fond and fantastical spirits, which go about to deface the majesty of baptism, and speak wickedly of it. Paul contrariwise commends and sets it forth with honourable titles, calling it 'the washing of the new birth, the renewing of the Holy Ghost' (Tit. 3:5). And here also he says, that all they which are baptised, have put on Christ. As if he said: You have not received through baptism a mere token whereby you are enrolled in the number of the Christians, as in our time many fantastical heads have supposed, which have made of baptism a token only, that is to say, a bare and empty sign. But as many (says he) as have been baptised, have put on Christ: that is, you have been carried out of the law into a new birth, which is wrought in baptism... Paul therefore teaches that baptism is not a sign, but the garment of Christ... Wherefore baptism is a thing of great force and efficacy.<sup>9</sup>

Paul, of course, did not say what Luther tried to make him say. Luther confused water baptism with spiritual baptism. Paul was not speaking of water baptism at all in Galatians 3:27. It was spiritual baptism he was writing about. Luther's comments are highly dangerous and wrong; they boil down to the doctrine of baptismal regeneration. He clearly stated that the 'new birth... is done in baptism', the 'new birth... is wrought in baptism', and he meant water baptism. This is Popery! It is an entirely false assertion.<sup>10</sup> What the verse actually teaches is that all who are

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<sup>9</sup> Martin Luther: *A Commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, James Clarke and Co., Ltd., London, reprinted 1961, pp340-341. 'If any man... denies (as the fantastical spirits [Anabaptists] do) that righteousness and salvation is given unto an infant when first it is baptised... such a one utterly takes away salvation from baptism' (Luther pp234-235).

<sup>10</sup> The New Testament demands baptism *after* the Spirit has given repentance and faith (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 8:12-13,36-

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baptised by the Spirit into Christ – that is, all who are spiritually baptised – that is, all who are regenerated – that they, and only they – are true Christians, having put on Christ. Water baptism is *not* the washing of regeneration. Spiritual baptism is. Water baptism, following faith, symbolises it, yes. But water baptism is not in view in the verse at all.<sup>11</sup> Even though Luther derided them, the Anabaptists in 1525 saw this distinction clearly. Luther did not. He did not understand Galatians 3:27. He did not understand baptism. What he said was wrong; and it was dangerous.

As another example of dangerous statements made by infant baptisers, listen to John Calvin. He, like Luther, also confused spiritual and water baptism, and thus certainly gave the impression that he believed in baptismal regeneration. He made this plain enough when rightly arguing that the regenerate are not entirely free of sin:

By regeneration, the children of God are delivered from the bondage of sin, but not as if they had already obtained full possession of freedom, and no longer felt any annoyance from the flesh... When it is said that God purifies his church so as to be 'holy and without blemish' (Eph. 5:26-27), that he promises this cleansing... and performs it in his elect, I understand that reference is made to the guilt rather than to the matter of sin. In regenerating his people, God indeed accomplishes this much for them; he destroys the dominion of sin, by supplying the agency of the Spirit, which enables them to come off victorious from the contest. Sin, however, though it ceases to reign, does not cease to dwell in them... The remains of sin survive, not to have dominion, but to humble them under a consciousness of their infirmity.

So far, so good. But how does God regenerate his elect? According to Calvin, in this way:

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37; 16:30-33), whereas Luther spoke of the gift of the Spirit, and his work in repentance and faith, *being produced by baptism*.

<sup>11</sup> See my *Baptist*.

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When it is said that God purifies his church so as to be ‘holy and without blemish’ (Eph. 5:26-27)... he promises this cleansing *by means of baptism*.<sup>12</sup>

And he was speaking of water baptism. In other words, Calvin held to baptismal regeneration.

In his *Commentaries*, I admit, Calvin rowed back – employing the usual qualifiers – double-speak, I call it – but before I quote him there, we must not forget his own stated position; namely, that his *Institutes* represent his definitive position:

I have endeavoured [here in the *Institutes*] to give such a summary of religion in all its parts... Having thus... paved the way, I shall not feel it necessary, in any *Commentaries* on Scripture which I may afterwards publish, to enter into long discussions of doctrine... In this way, the pious reader will be saved much trouble and weariness, provided he comes furnished with a knowledge of the [*Institutes*] as an essential prerequisite... seeing that I have in a manner deduced at length all the articles which pertain to Christianity.<sup>13</sup>

Now for what Calvin said on ‘washing of water’ (Eph. 5:26) in his *Commentaries*:

Having mentioned the inward and hidden sanctification, [the apostle] now adds the outward symbol, by which it is visibly confirmed; as if he had said that a pledge of that sanctification is held out to us by baptism.

I pause. Note the glosses. Who said anything about baptism? who said anything about symbol? who said anything about adding the symbol? Baptism is not even mentioned in Eph. 5:26. Note also Calvin’s subtle watering down of his *Institutes*. In the latter, baptism wrought regeneration; in the *Commentaries*, sanctification is held out to us by baptism. Which is it?

To let Calvin go on:

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<sup>12</sup> Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.1 pp516-517, emphasis mine.

<sup>13</sup> Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.1 pp21,23, in his prefixed explanations for the work dated 1539 and 1545.

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Here it is necessary to guard against unsound interpretation [quite – DG], lest the wicked superstition of men, as has frequently happened, change a sacrament into an idol. When Paul says that we are washed by baptism [he doesn't – DG], his meaning is that God employs it for declaring to us that we are washed, and at the same time performs what it represents [in other words, baptismal regeneration – DG]. If the truth – or, which is the same thing, the exhibition of the truth – were not connected with baptism, it would be improper to say that baptism is the washing of the soul [which it is not – DG]. At the same time, we must beware of ascribing to the sign, or to the minister, what belongs to God alone. We must not imagine that washing is performed by the minister [but it is; he baptises the infant, does he not, and Calvin said baptism is the washing – DG], or that water cleanses the pollution of the soul, which nothing but the blood of Christ can accomplish [quite – DG]. In short, we must beware of giving any portion of our confidence to the element or to man; for the true and proper use of the sacrament is to lead us directly to Christ, and to place all our dependence upon him. Others again suppose that too much importance is given to the sign, by saying [that is, when we – Calvin – say] that baptism is the washing of the soul. Under the influence of this fear, they labour exceedingly to lessen the force of the eulogium [high praise] which is here pronounced on baptism [by Calvin – not Paul – DG]. But they are manifestly wrong; for, in the first place, the apostle does not say that it is the sign which washes, but declares it to be exclusively the work of God. It is God who washes, and the honour of performing it cannot lawfully be taken from its Author and given to the sign. But there is no absurdity in saying that God employs a sign as the outward means. Not that the power of God is limited by the sign, but this assistance is accommodated to the weakness of our capacity. Some are offended at this view, imagining that it takes from the Holy Spirit a work which is peculiarly his own, and which is everywhere ascribed to him in Scripture. But they are mistaken; for God acts by the sign in such a manner, that its whole efficacy depends upon his Spirit. Nothing more is attributed to the sign than to be an inferior organ, utterly useless in itself, except so far as it derives its power from another source. Equally groundless is their fear, that by this interpretation the freedom of God will be restrained. The grace of God is not confined to the sign; so that God may not, if he

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pleases, bestow it without the aid of the sign. Besides, many receive the sign who are not made partakers of grace; for the sign is common to all [infants who are baptised under Calvin's system – DG], to the good and the bad alike; but the Spirit is bestowed on none but the elect, and the sign, as we have said, has no efficacy without the Spirit.<sup>14</sup>

As I say, this is full of the double-speak so beloved of the Reformed. By this, Calvin certainly has given me the impression that he was only too well aware of the weakness of his position, and tried to stifle nagging doubt (in himself and others) by sheer weight of words. Methinks he protested too much. He certainly professed too much for baptism.

Calvin again:

Our children, before they are born, God declares that he adopts for his own when he promises that he will be a God to us, and to our seed after us... As soon as infants are born among them, the Lord signs them with the sacred symbol of baptism; they are therefore, in some sense, the people of God... The offspring of believers are born holy... included in the covenant of eternal life... admitted into the church by baptism... they belonged to the body of Christ before they were born... The children of the godly are born the children of the church and... they are accounted members of Christ from the womb... Children derive some benefit from their baptism... being ingrafted into the body of the church.<sup>15</sup>

This is confused. Infants, by baptism are 'ingrafted into the body of the church', even though 'they belonged to the body of Christ before they were born'. Which is it?<sup>16</sup> Even so, according

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<sup>14</sup> John Calvin: *Commentaries*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, reprinted 1979, Vol.21 Part 1 pp319-320.

<sup>15</sup> Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.2 pp525,535. See Graham Miller: *Calvin's Wisdom*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1992, p16; David Boorman: 'The Halfway Covenant', being a paper given at The Westminster Conference 1976: *The Puritan Experiment in the New World*, p77.

<sup>16</sup> 'The children of believers are not baptised in order that though formerly aliens from the church they may then, for the first time, become children of God, but rather are received into the church by a formal sign, because, in virtue of the promise, they previously

to Calvin, infants born to Christians are in some sense the people of God and holy. They belong to the body of Christ, are accounted members of Christ, and by their baptism are ingrafted into the church. This is a dreadful statement. This is Popery! While it is readily granted that infant baptism may make infants into members of the Roman Catholic Church, the Presbyterian Church, the Church of England, or whatever, it will never – never – make them members of the church of Christ.<sup>17</sup> When Calvin said that baptised infants are ‘in some sense the people of God’, in what sense, exactly, did he mean? No child is born holy, in the sense Calvin implied. All are born in sin and are the children of wrath (Ps. 51:5; 58:3; Eph. 2:1-3).

Listen to Calvin again: ‘Children are baptised for future repentance and faith. Though these are not yet formed in them, yet the seed of both lies hid in them by the secret operation of the Spirit... Paul... terms it the “washing of regeneration and renewing” (Tit. 3:5)’.<sup>18</sup> Calvin was mistaken. Paul did not call water baptism the washing of regeneration. Do infant baptisers really believe that God’s Spirit works in infants, producing the

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belonged to the body of Christ’. Those who disagreed with him, Calvin dismissed as ‘frenzied spirits’, ‘furious madmen’ (Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.2 pp526,529,535). Well, I for one, ‘madman’ or not, disagree with him! I find *his* contradictions quite ‘mad’ enough. Why *did* Calvin baptise infants? Does anybody *know*? According to Wright, Calvin baptised infants because he thought ‘they were already regenerate’ (Wright p100). But, according to Lusk: ‘For Calvin, regeneration began at the font’ (Lusk: ‘Paedobaptism’ p89). For more on Calvin’s and other Reformers’ view of baptism, see Lusk: ‘Paedobaptism’ pp89-102. As Lusk showed, Bucer developed an even stronger sacramentalism than Calvin (who was influenced by Bucer – Wendel pp324,326); nor were John Knox and Cornelius Burges laggards.

<sup>17</sup> Wright ironically pointed out the opposite in Scottish *Book of Common Order* (1994). The baptised baby is received ‘as a member of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church’, but ‘oddly enough’, said Wright, ‘the service is not so explicit about the child’s becoming a member of the Church of Scotland! The lesser does not seem to follow from the greater – or is it encompassed within the greater?’ he asked (Wright p84).

<sup>18</sup> Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.2 p543.

seed of repentance and faith within them by sprinkling? What is the justification for this astounding assertion? And what is ‘the seed of repentance and faith’? I do not deny that God can regenerate a sinner when he will, but that is very different to what Calvin said.<sup>19</sup> What is more, a literal understanding of his statement leads to only one end – the indiscriminate baptism of all children.<sup>20</sup> All of them – apparently – will have the secret work of the Spirit within them. I realise Calvin did not actually believe this, but that is why I say that the assertions I have quoted are so very dangerous. They tend to baptismal regeneration. Indeed on the plain reading of the words they tend to nothing else. To put it bluntly, they assert it!

François Wendel’s testimony concerning Calvin, the prince of Reformed teachers, should not be forgotten:

Throughout [his] reasoning [on infant baptism in his *Institutes*], Calvin is following Bucer’s line of argument... Most probably... it was in reliance upon the patristic evidences adduced by Bucer... Since it was not possible for him [Calvin] to adduce a single New Testament passage containing a clear allusion to infant baptism, he had to be content with indirect inferences and analogies drawn from circumcision and Christ’s blessing of the children. Calvin has been much reproached for the weakness of this reasoning... and he himself seems to have been aware of the defects of his exegesis upon this point. He was debarred, however, from using any other, from the moment when he undertook to defend, on scriptural grounds, an institution of later date than the New Testament writings, and to [try to] justify an ecclesiastical tradition after having proclaimed that all tradition, to be valid, must be based upon certain scriptural proof... [If he had taken his own medicine, it] would have enabled him to come to the [right] conclusion...

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<sup>19</sup> The question of whether or not infants can be regenerated is a red herring – of course they can – but when such a statement is made in connection with baptism (Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.2 p541), it is loaded beyond description.

<sup>20</sup> As history verifies. See my ‘Glass Eyes and Wooden Legs in 17th Century New England’.

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frankly acknowledging that one cannot find an acceptable basis for it [infant baptism] in the Scriptures.<sup>21</sup>

Another infant baptiser, Archibald Alexander, said:

How solicitous should parents be for their children, that God would bestow his grace upon them, even before they know their right hand from their left; and, when about to dedicate them to God in holy baptism, how earnestly should they pray that they might be baptised with the Holy Ghost – that while their bodies are washed in the emblematical laver of regeneration, their souls may experience the renewing of the Holy Ghost, and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus. If the sentiments expressed above be correct, then there may be such a thing as baptismal regeneration; not that the mere external application of water can have any effect to purify the soul; nor that internal grace uniformly or generally accompanies this external washing, but that God, who works when and by what means he pleases, may regenerate by his Spirit the soul of the infant, while in his sacred name, water is applied to the body. And what time in infancy is more likely to be the period of spiritual quickening, than the moment when that sacred rite is performed which is strikingly emblematical of this change? Whether it be proper to say that baptism may be the *means* of regeneration depends on the sense in which the word *means* is used.<sup>22</sup>

I wonder, however much Alexander tried to guard his assertions, is there any danger that some parents baptising their infant according to this system, might really believe that their child is actually regenerate in and through their baptism? Have any parents actually believed Alexander's words that 'there may be such a thing as baptismal regeneration'? Whether or not they understand the ins-and-outs of baptismal regeneration, and all the theological niceties surrounding the word 'means', I suggest that some parents might, in practical terms, take their child away

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<sup>21</sup> François Wendel: *Calvin: The Origins and Development of his Religious Thought*, Collins, London, 1973, pp326,328-329. For more on some of these themes, see my *Infant* pp44-48,51.

<sup>22</sup> Archibald Alexander: *Thoughts on Religious Experience*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, reprinted 1978, pp12-13, emphasis his.

from ‘the emblematical laver of regeneration’, as Alexander put it, with their heads and hearts filled with the diabolical and Papist notion of baptismal regeneration. They might well think that their baby is now regenerate, their baby ‘is now all right if anything should happen’. I say it is a very real possibility and danger, and one which arises out of Alexander’s words. If I am right, or if there is any chance that I might be right, all infant baptisers ought to think about it very seriously. Those who teach this kind of thing carry an enormous weight of responsibility – the full extent of which will not be known until the day of judgement.

Listen to the words of Charles Hodge who pleaded with parents to baptise their infants, saying: ‘Do let the little ones have their names written in the Lamb’s book of life, even if they afterwards choose to erase them; being thus enrolled may be the means of their salvation’.<sup>23</sup> Did Hodge really believe this? Can an infant’s name be written in the book of God’s decrees by baptism? Can the growing infant then choose to erase it? Was Hodge an Arminian or a Calvinist at this point? It seems that some infant baptisers, when they speak of baptism, can forget the doctrines of grace. How do Hodge’s words square with election? On what do infant baptisers base these opinions?

Consider the words of J.W.Alexander, who encouraged infant baptisers to think of their children as Christians, even to say to them: ‘You are Christian children – you are Christ’s – you ought to think and feel and act as such!’<sup>24</sup> What an alarming statement. Where do infant baptisers find this parental attitude in the New Testament? Is this the way preachers ought to speak to unregenerate children (and, eventually, unregenerate adults)

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<sup>23</sup> David Kingdon: *Children of Abraham*, Henry E.Walter Ltd., Worthing, 1973, p65. Some modern-day infant baptisers regard Charles Hodge as weak in this area. Commenting on Hodge’s ‘distress over the loss of infant baptism’ in America in the first half of the 19th century, according to Lusk, Hodge himself ‘proved to be part of the problem’. And Lusk had no doubt as to the reason: ‘Hodge failed to develop a robust sacramental theology’ (Lusk: ‘Paedobaptism’ pp71,83).

<sup>24</sup> Kingdon p63.

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simply because they were baptised as infants? Where do infant baptisers find the scriptural justification for it? Immense dangers attend the notion.

As another example of a dangerous statement by an infant baptiser, take the words of A.A.Hodge: 'In the baptism of every infant there are four parties present and concerned in the transaction – God, the church, the parents, and the child. The first three are conscious and active, the fourth is for the time unconscious and passive'.<sup>25</sup> I ask: What – precisely – is God doing in 'the baptism of every infant'? In particular: What is he doing in the baptism of a child who will never be regenerate?

As a further example of statements made by infant baptisers which are perilous, not to say downright wrong, consider the words of David J.Engelsma:

The children of believers are included in the covenant *as children*, that is, already at conception and birth. They receive forgiveness of sins through the blood of Jesus, the Holy Spirit of sanctification, and church membership – as children. For they have God as their God, and are his people – as children. Therefore, they have full right to baptism... God does not merely put the children of believers in a more advantageous position [than the children of unbelievers], so as to make it likelier that they will be saved; but he establishes his covenant with them, so as to be their God. God gives to the children the promise of the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ. Accordingly... the Reformed Church regards them, and must regard them, as those 'sanctified in Christ'... God... gathers his church from age to age from the children of believers... Covenant children are... Jehovah's children (Ezek. 16:20,21). They are not sinful flesh, spiritually like the devil; but they are holy (1 Cor. 7:14). Quite unlike the children of disobedience, who are ruled by the prince of the power of the air so that they have their conversation in the lusts of their flesh (Eph. 2:1-3), the baptised children of believers are in the Lord Jesus.

Engelsma said that he witnessed boldly to God's covenant because, among other things, God, 'looked upon me in my

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<sup>25</sup> A. A. Hodge: *Evangelical Theology*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1976, p336.

infancy in grace, incorporated me as a baby by his Spirit into his Son, Jesus'.<sup>26</sup> He meant, of course, by infant baptism.

I must be brief in my comments, but these words cannot go unchallenged. First, observe Engelsma's emphasis; God blesses the children of believers *as children*, even from 'conception and birth', he said. He claimed that they receive the forgiveness of their sins as children. But the Scriptures say that we receive the forgiveness of sins through and by faith (Acts 10:43; 13:38-39; Rom. 4:1-13). We are saved through faith (Eph. 2:8). Sinners have to be converted to receive forgiveness of sins (Acts 26:16-18). Sinners have to confess their sins before they are forgiven (1 John 1:9). Do the children of believers stand outside all this? Do the children of believers receive forgiveness of their sins as children, because they are the children of believers? Most definitely not! Does this need to be said? Apparently it does. A man, a woman, a child, can only receive the benefits of salvation through faith – their own personal, saving faith (Rom. 3:21-31; Gal. 3:14,22; Eph. 2:8; Phil. 3:9). They are not saved by proxy. Infant baptisers agree that no infant can exercise saving faith – how then can he receive the benefits of Christ's redemption? To be saved, a sinner has to believe. No infant can savingly believe.

Reader, please do not allow yourself to be side-tracked at this stage on to the vexed and sad question of infants who die. This red herring is often raised by infant baptisers, but the spiritual condition and fate of such infants is another issue altogether, totally unconnected with the main argument. In the tragic case of infant death, let us rest in the assertion: 'Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?' (Gen. 18:25).<sup>27</sup> He is the

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<sup>26</sup> David J.Engelsma: *The Covenant of God and the Children of Believers*, Protestant Reformed Church, South Holland, Illinois, third printing, 1993, pp9,12-13,17-18,23.

<sup>27</sup> And, it must be remembered, Abraham used this argument with God to prevent 'the righteous' minority being caught up in the judgement of 'the wicked' majority. Of course, each of us – every infant born (except Christ) – is a sinner, and God's judgement is just, but, to my mind, Abraham's argument is very powerful. If he felt it would carry

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gracious God who is ‘abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression’ (Num. 14:18). We may safely leave such infants, along with all those who never develop a sufficient sense of reason to be responsible before God, in the merciful hands of the LORD. But, as I said, none of this is relevant to the debate about infant baptism.<sup>28</sup>

To return to the main point: the plain biblical fact is, no one is saved because his parents are believers. Every sinner must come to Christ by faith in order to be saved, and until he does so come, he is under the wrath of God (Eph. 2:3). We do not become the children of God by being the children of believers, as Engelsma asserted – no! we become the children of God ‘through faith in Christ Jesus’ (Gal. 3:26).

Further, what of Engelsma’s assertion that the children of believers are not merely *more likely* to be saved than the children of unbelievers? What did he intend by that statement? After all, according to his own words, these children already have the Holy Spirit, already are the children of God and have already received the forgiveness of sins. What is left? But taking his words at face value – what, precisely, is the advantage Engelsma referred to? In comparison with the children of unbelievers, they are more than more likely to be saved, he said. How much more? Very likely? Almost certainly? In reality, as I have just said, if Engelsma’s words mean anything, these children are certain to be saved! They are already saved. If they are incorporated into Jesus in infancy by infant baptism, what remains to be done? If words mean anything at all, it amounts to an assertion that all the children of believers are saved because they are the children of believers and have been sprinkled. Indeed, Engelsma called them Jehovah’s children.

What is more, Engelsma declared that the children of believers are not born sinners like others, in that they are not born with the grim consequences of the fall as listed in

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weight with God over Lot in Sodom, how much more for us over infants who die before they have reached the age of responsible action!

<sup>28</sup> As always, it is foolish to legislate on the basis of the exception. Hard cases make bad law.

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Ephesians 2:1-3. They are ‘quite unlike the children of disobedience’, he declared, they do not conduct themselves in the lusts of the flesh, since ‘the baptised children of believers are in the Lord Jesus’. Did Engelsma mean to say this? If so, he contradicted himself. In another statement he said that ‘our children are by nature dead in sin’;<sup>29</sup> that is, of course, they are included in Ephesians 2:1-3, they are among the children of disobedience, and they do conduct themselves in the lusts of the flesh.

I am not interested in merely pointing out the inconsistency of Engelsma’s assertions; I am deeply concerned, passionately concerned, lest anyone should believe the totally unscriptural view that any child – any child – is born in a condition not covered by the fall. All the sons of Adam are ruined from conception (Ps. 51:5), contrary to Engelsma’s assertion that the children of believers are the children of God from that time. His alarming statement runs directly counter to Scripture. All children, including the children of believers, are born ‘dead in trespasses and sins... by nature children of wrath’ (Eph. 2:1-3). Paul stated that ‘we all’ were ruined in Adam – all of us, including the children of believers. Jesus is the only man to have avoided this corruption; are the children of believers free of it? Do they escape this ruin by being conceived of believing parents who sprinkle them in infancy? Is this what the gospel amounts to?

Finally, in contradiction of Engelsma’s claim, it is a relief to be able to state that God does not ‘gather his church... from the children of believers’.<sup>30</sup> Rather, he gathers his elect from out of the mass of fallen humanity, ‘the same lump’ (Rom. 9:21). He redeems, calls and saves the ungodly as sinners (Mark 2:17; Rom. 5:6-10; 1 Tim. 1:15). God delights to call sinners as sinners; he does not work among the children of believers as such, nor exclusively among them. Indeed, he glories in spreading his arms wide to embrace those who have no

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<sup>29</sup> Engelsma p18.

<sup>30</sup> I am not saying, of course, that God does not call children of believers!

connection whatsoever with the covenant people (Rom. 9:24-26; 10:11-21). This is a vital point, a wonderful point. There is no distinction whatsoever in the gospel call, neither on the basis of race nor of family connection. God calls sinners *as sinners*.<sup>31</sup> The Spirit is sent to convince men of sin (John 16:8); this is the warrant for faith, since Christ died for sinners. Am I a sinner? Then I am invited to Christ. If it is true that God gathers his elect out of the line and descent of believers, then the Spirit must convince men that their parents were truly the children of God! But we have no promise to say that he does so convince.<sup>32</sup> Reader, do you not see that Engelsma's words are dangerous, as I claimed earlier? They are unscriptural. Their effect is devastating.

Herman Hanko, in his defence of infant baptism, said that 'believers and their seed are saved. And the seed of believers are saved as children'. He also declared that believers have 'the sure knowledge that God's promise is to save them and their

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<sup>31</sup> 'Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honour, and another for dishonour?' (Rom. 9:21). It is 'from the same lump', from fallen humanity, that God chooses and forms elect or reprobate vessels. 'Paul is not now dealing with God's sovereign rights over men as men but over men *as sinners*' (John Murray: *The Epistle to the Romans*, Two Volumes in One, Marshall, Morgan and Scott, London, 1974, Vol.2 p32, emphasis mine). 'The mass of *fallen men* are in [God's] hands, and it is his right to dispose of them at pleasure' (Charles Hodge: *A Commentary on Romans*, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1972, p319, emphasis mine). 'The potter does not create the clay; he starts with it, it is there in front of him on the bench... The apostle is not dealing here at all with God's purpose in the original creation of man, or with what God does with human nature as such. He is dealing with God's relationship to *fallen humanity*' (D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones: *An Exposition of Romans 9. God's Sovereign Purpose*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1991, pp199-200, emphasis mine). See also editor's notes in Calvin: *Commentaries* Vol.19 Part 2 pp366-367. All humanity, elect and reprobate, are at birth, whether born of believers or not, 'by nature children of wrath' (Eph. 2:3), of 'the same lump'.

<sup>32</sup> Compare the hyper-Calvinist's insistence on a sinner being made 'sensible' before he is invited to Christ (see my *Offer* pp25-26, and my *Septimus*.

children. They instruct covenant children. And their instruction will be fruitful for it falls upon hearts which are regenerated by the Spirit of Christ'. Did Hanko really believe this? Are all the baptised children of believers regenerated? He said they were! If God has given his promise to all believers, as Hanko claimed, that both they and their children are to be saved, why is it sadly undeniable that some children of some believers are not saved? How sure is this 'sure knowledge' which Hanko spoke of? He also said: '[When] believers... instruct their children in the ways of the Lord, they have the sure word of God that they are instructing children of God, God's own elect people'.<sup>33</sup> Well, are the children of believers elect and regenerated by God because their parents are believers? What a breathtaking assertion! Is this the Christian religion? Is this the doctrine of the Bible? Even Papists do not go this far. Dangerous? Statements like these are diabolical.

Finally, as the last in this long catalogue of terrifying assertions by infant baptisers, listen to the horrific *Prayer of Thanksgiving* of the Reformed Church: 'Thou hast forgiven us, and our children, all our sins, through the blood of thy beloved Son Jesus Christ, and received us through thy Holy Spirit as members of thine only begotten Son'.<sup>34</sup> If these words are true – if, and what an 'if' – what is left for the children of believers? They are saved because their parents are believers, is the claim! Those who believe these words ought to have as many children as possible in order to populate the world with Christians! But it is not enough for sinners to belong to believing parents. Listen to the words of Christ: 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God... That which is born of flesh is flesh' (John 3:3-8). Yes! And that includes the children of believers – they are born of flesh, are they not? They must be born again. The fact that their parents are believers will never ensure their salvation.

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<sup>33</sup> Herman Hanko: *We and Our Children*, Reformed Free Publishing Association, Grand Rapids, 1981, pp55,56,89.

<sup>34</sup> Engelsma p11.

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Reader, is my assertion not true? When infant baptisers argue for their practice, they say things which are highly dangerous; and worse.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Reader, if you need further damning evidence, see Wright pp81-102. Let Lusk sum this up. In furthering his claim that ‘a truly Calvinistic soteriology requires a Calvinistic sacramentology and *vice-versa*’, his extracts from various writers showed what he meant. Hughes Oliphant Old: ‘The Reformers insisted that according to Scripture there was one baptism. To divide the sacrament into a baptism of water and a baptism of the Spirit... was misleading... Reformed churches should not in their liturgical practice give ground to a separation of the baptism with water and the baptism of the Spirit’. James White: ‘The traditional Catholic and [please note!] Reformation view [is] that God acts to accomplish God’s purposes through sacraments’. Cornelius Burges: ‘Sacred baptism, the laver of regeneration and of the renewing of the Holy Ghost... I do not deny future actual efficacy of baptism after the act of administration, but I only plead for some efficacy when it is administered’. Lusk added that ‘Burges claimed Calvin for support of this view’. Lusk also rightly argued that ‘the ordinary necessity of baptism for salvation is simply the teaching of the Westminster standards... The Confession teaches that there is no ordinary possibility of salvation outside the visible church and baptism is the mode of entrance into the visible church’ (Lusk: ‘Paedobaptism’ pp97,118,122,124,125; Westminster pp107-108,114).



## *To Whom Did God Give the Law?*

With regard to the law of Moses, Paul divides the human race into two.<sup>1</sup> All are sinners, but some have sinned ‘without law’; the rest have sinned ‘in the law’ (Rom. 2:12). This is the biblical divide – those ‘under the law’, and those ‘without law’ (1 Cor. 9:20-21). Those ‘in the law’ have the law of God; those ‘without law’ do not. Clearly, therefore, the law could not have been given to all men. If it had, Paul’s division would have been utterly meaningless; indeed, nonsensical.

Those ‘in’ or ‘under’ the law are the Jews, God having made known his entire law to Israel (Rom. 3:1-2; 9:4); those ‘without law’ are, therefore, non-Jews, Gentiles. We are specifically and repeatedly told that God did not reveal his law to any other nation but Israel.<sup>2</sup> He did not deal in this way with any other people

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<sup>1</sup> For this article, I have lightly edited my *Christ* pp27-37; see also pp337-341.

<sup>2</sup> Israel became a nation in Egypt (Gen. 46:3; Deut. 26:5), particularly at the exodus leading to Sinai (Gen. 12:1-2; 17:2-14; 46:3,26-27; Ex. 1:5,7; 2:24-25; 3:6-8,10,15-18; 4:5,22-23; 6:2-8; 7:4,16; 8:1; 9:1; 12:2,17; 13:3-10; 15:11-18,26; 16:22-30; 18:1; 19:3-6; 31:13-17; 32:11-14; 33:13; Deut. 4:20,34; 16:1; 27:9; 28:9; Ps. 114:1-2; Ezek. 20:5-12,20; Acts 7:14,17), and confirmed at the giving of the covenant just before entering Canaan (Deut. 26:18; 27:9). This is when God distinguished them from all other nations by starting their calendar, giving them the feasts and the sabbath as an integral part of his law. ‘What great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgements as are in all this law which I set before you this day?’ (Deut. 4:8). Deut. 4:7 shows the same in his nearness to Israel and his willingness to hear their prayers. In short, Deut. 4:32-38. Israel’s position was *unique*, not merely *special*. Now these things are clearly contrasted to the creation-gift of beasts, birds, fish, planets and the like ‘which the LORD your God has given to all the peoples under the whole heaven as a heritage’ (Deut. 4:17-19). The contrast is enforced further: ‘But the LORD has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be his people, an inheritance’ (Deut. 4:20). And, as I say, one of the greatest distinctions God made between Israel and all other nations was to give his law to Israel – and to no others. The law divided, separated, Israel from all other people. See Ps. 103:7.

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(Deut. 4:6-45; 5:26; 7:6-11; Ps. 147:19-20; Rom. 9:4). The principle underlies Romans 9:30-32. We are told expressly that the Gentiles do not have the law (Rom. 2:12-14), but that it was given to the Jews, being ‘the statutes and judgements and laws which the LORD made between himself and *the children of Israel* on Mount Sinai by the hand of Moses’ (Lev. 26:46), God immediately reiterating the point with the closing verse of Leviticus: ‘These are the commandments which the LORD commanded Moses *for the children of Israel* on Mount Sinai’ (Lev. 27:34).<sup>3</sup> Right from the start, while the people were camped in the wilderness of Sinai, even as Moses was called up to the mountain to receive the law, God prefaced it all: ‘Thus you shall say to *the house of Jacob*, and tell *the children of Israel*...’ (Ex. 19:3-6). God opened the ten commandments thus: ‘I am the LORD your God, who brought *you* out of the land of Egypt...’ (Ex. 20:2). And after the re-giving of the law, God could declare to Moses: ‘According to the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with *Israel*’ (Ex. 34:27). (See also 2 Kings 17:13; 2 Chron. 5:10; 6:11; Neh. 9:1,13-14; *etc.*).

Nor was it the last time Israel was reminded of the fact. Solomon called Israel to ‘take care to fulfil the statutes and judgements with which the LORD charged Moses *concerning Israel*’ (1 Chron. 22:13). When Israel was removed from the land and taken into captivity, the king of Assyria replaced the children of Israel in Samaria with foreigners. These foreigners, it is recorded, brought their own gods, and their own ‘rituals’. Rejecting the law of the Hebrews, they did not ‘follow *their* statutes or *their* ordinances, or the law and commandment which the LORD had commanded *the children of Jacob*, whom he

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<sup>3</sup> This is not to be confined to the so-called ‘ceremonial law’ – see my *Christ* pp99-110,392-408. For now, notice how this blanket description in the closing verse of Leviticus includes at least the second, third, fourth, fifth, seventh, eighth and ninth commands (Lev. 19:3,4,11-13,16,30; 20:9,10; 23:3; 24:10-23; 26:1,2) of the so-called ‘moral law’. As for the rest, the first commandment is implied throughout Leviticus – see in particular Lev. 26:1, the sixth in Lev. 19:16-18, and transgression of the tenth is pervasive – Paul found it so (Rom. 7:7), since the Jews thought it summed up the law, and to break it to be the root of all sins.

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named *Israel*' (2 Kings 17:34). Addressing Israel, God could speak of 'the statutes, the ordinances, the law, and the commandment which he wrote for *you*' (2 Kings 17:37), promising Israel they would not 'wander any more from the land which I gave *their* fathers – [but] only if *they* are careful to do according to all that I have commanded *them*, and according to all the law that my servant Moses commanded *them*' (2 Kings 21:8). As with the land, so with the law – both had been given to Israel, and no others. When God revealed his law to Israel, he expressly commanded them not to do as the pagans did, but to 'observe my judgements and keep my ordinances... [to] keep my statutes and my judgements' (Lev. 18:1-5,26-30). Centuries after Sinai, God had to complain that Israel had not done this: 'You have not walked in my statutes nor executed my judgements, but have done according to the customs of the Gentiles which are all around you' (Ezek. 11:12), they had 'conformed to the standards of the nations around' them (NIV), breaking God's law (Deut. 12:29-32).<sup>4</sup> This makes sense if, and only if, God's (and Israel's) laws were different to the laws, principles, statutes, norms, judgements and standards of the pagans.

Asaph reminded Israel that the LORD 'established a testimony in *Jacob*, and appointed a law in *Israel*, which he commanded *our* fathers' (Ps. 78:5). Daniel, when praying for the children of Israel, could speak of God's 'laws, which he set before *us* by his servants the prophets' (Dan. 9:10-13). God reminded Hosea, concerning Israel: 'I have written *for him* the great things of my law' (Hos. 8:12). And 'God, the one of Sinai... God, the God of *Israel*' (Ps. 68:8, NIV), commanded Israel to 'remember the law of Moses, my servant, which I commanded him in Horeb *for all Israel*, with the statutes and judgements' (Mal. 4:4). In Numbers 15, God said the law applied to the Jews, and those who would be reckoned Jews – proselytes and sojourners.

***To say that the law applies to the entire human race, is to render these statements and demands utterly superfluous and***

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<sup>4</sup> If Ezek. 5:5-7 translation is right – but see footnote (NKJV, NIV) – Israel was worse than the pagans (Ezek. 16:47).

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***meaningless. What is more – and a glance at the passages quoted above will confirm it – we are talking about the law, the law of God, the law of Moses, the whole law, the law in its entirety. The law was given to Israel, for Israel, to distinguish Israel from all others.***

Nor was this a mere quirk of history. As I have noted, God treated the Jews as special, showing special regard for them in giving them his law. This was his *purpose*. He gave his law to the Jews *in order to* distinguish them from all others. Division was God's intention in giving the law to the Jews. Division! Separation! Distinction was God's great concern for Israel (Lev. 20:24,26).<sup>5</sup> And it was the law that especially marked the Jews out from the Gentiles, serving as a dividing wall, a partition, a demarcation between them and the pagans (Gal. 3:23-25 – note the 'we' and 'our'; Eph. 2:11-16). The law regulated their national and personal life in every respect. Finally, it was a temporary measure confining Israel until the coming of Christ (Gal. 3:19-24).

Moses, when repeating God's law in Moab, made it plain to whom it was given, declaring: 'Hear, O *Israel*... The LORD our God made a covenant with *us* in Horeb... He said: "I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage"' (Deut. 5:1-2,5-6). God said 'Israel', and he meant Israel, and only Israel. It was only Israel whom he had delivered from Egypt.<sup>6</sup> But not only was the preface to the ten commandments peculiar to Israel. The fourth commandment concerned the sabbath which was a special sign for Israel (Ex. 31:13,16-17; Ezek. 20:12,20),<sup>7</sup> and the fifth commandment referred to the land promised to Israel. In addition, the overwhelming bulk of the hundreds of other commandments contained in the law were spelled out in terms which belonged only to Israel. In short, Gentiles were not brought out of Egypt –

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<sup>5</sup> God's presence also distinguished them from all other people (Ex. 33:16).

<sup>6</sup> The exodus from Egypt continued to preface references to the law. See 2 Kings 17:36, for instance.

<sup>7</sup> See my *Sabbath Questions*.

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in fact many of them (that is, the Egyptians) perished in Egypt or the Red Sea.<sup>8</sup> Gentiles were not given the sabbath as a special sign that they were the people of God. Gentiles were not given the pillar of cloud and fire. Gentiles were not given the manna. Gentiles were not given the promised land – the truth is, they had to be removed from it. Gentiles were not given the ordinances of the tabernacle. And so on. As just one example of how these things are linked, take Nehemiah 9:5-15.

Sadly, all this has too often been forgotten, and the law which was given uniquely to Israel, and applied only to them, has been mistakenly applied to Gentiles in the gospel age, to the confusion of both law and gospel.<sup>9</sup>

What is more, not only did God at Sinai give his law to Israel, and only to Israel, but prior to Sinai, nobody had the law – not even the patriarchs (Deut. 5:3; Rom. 5:13).<sup>10</sup> Notice how explicit Moses was at the repetition of the law in Moab, when reminding the Israelites of the first giving (and its re-giving) of the law at Horeb (Sinai): God did not make the covenant ‘with our fathers, but with us’ (Deut. 5:3). Who were these ‘fathers’? and who were the ‘us’? The ‘fathers’ were the patriarchs and their descendants who had died before the giving of the law at Sinai; God did not give his law to them. The ‘us’ were the Israelites – the people (with their children) who, having been delivered from Egypt, were gathered as the nation of Israel at Sinai – it was to them that God originally gave the law, and it was to their children that he was now renewing it in Moab. That generation of Hebrews at Sinai, therefore, was the first to receive the law. The patriarchs – the ‘fathers’ – who lived before the children of Jacob even entered Egypt, let alone left it – did not have the law. The song of Moses, when he ‘blessed the children of Israel before his death’, is plain: ‘The LORD came from Sinai, and dawned on them from Seir... from his right hand came a fiery law for them... Moses

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<sup>8</sup> Some pagans had joined the Israelites as proselytes (Ex. 12:38,48-49; see Neh. 10:28; Est. 8:17; Isa. 56:3).

<sup>9</sup> See my *Christ* pp99-110,392-408.

<sup>10</sup> As I have said, Israel *as a nation* did not exist before the exodus and the giving of the law. The giving of the law was a vital aspect of *making* them into a nation.

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commanded a law for us, a heritage of the congregation of Jacob... Levi... shall teach Jacob your judgements, and Israel your law' (Deut. 33:1-4,8,10).<sup>11</sup> (See also Deut. 11:1-7; 29:9-15).<sup>12</sup>

That nobody had the law before Sinai is clear – since Paul expressly pointed out that the law came – ‘was added’ – 430 years after God’s covenant with Abraham (Gal. 3:16-17,19). It was *revealed* at Sinai; it was not *renewed*. How can it be claimed that God gave the law to Adam at creation, or to the patriarchs? Yet many do say it! No! As Christ said, when replying to the Pharisees’ question over the divorce-certificate regulation introduced by Moses (Deut. 24:1-4): ‘From the beginning [Adam] it was not so’ (Matt. 19:7-8). The law was given to Moses 430 years *after* the promise to Abraham, not given to Adam hundreds of years *before* Abraham. In stressing this, I am not straining out arithmetical or historical gnats. To say that Adam was given the Mosaic law is to miss a point of major consequence, contradicting Paul’s argument in Romans 5 and Galatians 3.<sup>13</sup> The law was given to Moses long after God had revealed his saving purpose in and to Abraham.

This is a point of such importance, I must take a few moments to explain what I am talking about.

### ***The eschatological importance of the epoch of the law***

This point – the place of the law in salvation history, the eschatological importance of the epoch of the law – cannot be over-stressed. This word ‘eschatological’ will come again and

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<sup>11</sup> Not only did the law have a beginning on Sinai; it had an end-point also, and that by God’s intention. Paul said the law ‘entered’ the Jewish world at the time of the exodus (Rom. 5:20; Gal. 3:17,19), as a temporary system for the Jews, to last only until Christ came (Gal. 3:19), when he fulfilled it, thus bringing it to the end God had designed for it (Matt. 5:17-18; Rom. 10:4; 2 Cor. 3:7,11; Heb. 7:18; 8:13; 9:8-9). Right from the start, it was ‘fading away’ (2 Cor. 3:11,13, NIV). See my ‘Three Verses Misunderstood’.

<sup>12</sup> The words, ‘him who is not here with us today’ (Deut. 29:14-15), refer to the descendants of the Israelites, not to all the rest of the human race.

<sup>13</sup> See my *Christ* pp116-177,412-468. Adam, of course, was given his own commandment which he broke (Rom. 5:14).

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again in these pages. Let me explain how I am using it. I am thinking of the way in which God, in time, works out his eternal decree to save his elect, and thus exalt his Son in their final glorification. I have in mind the way God arranges everything to bring about his purpose, the place every last thing has in that great plan. ‘Salvation history’ is one of the great themes (the *greatest* theme?) of the Bible. It permeates Romans 3 – 11 and Galatians 3 – 4, for example. So what is this ‘salvation history’ that I am talking about? The ‘salvation’ aspect is God’s redemption of his elect, culminating in their eternal glorification in the image of Christ. But what of the ‘history’? This needs nuancing. God decreed the redemption of his elect – the purpose, means and ends of their redemption – in eternity, but he is accomplishing it in time, as a part of history. Adam, the promise to Abraham, the law at Sinai, the coming, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, Pentecost, the return of Christ, and so on, are ‘milestones’ in this historical process which is divided into two great ages, two great eras, two great dispensations or epochs – before Christ and after Christ.<sup>14</sup> Everything centres on Christ and his work. He (in his death, burial and resurrection) is the watershed of the two ages, the climax of all history, including and especially salvation history.

The two ages in question are very different. Adam is the head, the founder, of one age; Christ, of the other (Rom. 5:12-19). Adam’s age is characterised by flesh, sin, law and death.<sup>15</sup> Christ’s age is characterised by the Spirit, righteousness, grace and life. All humanity is by birth united to Adam, and comes under the regime of the first age through Adam’s sin. All the elect are united to Christ (from eternity, by God’s decree; in experience, through faith in Christ), and come under the regime of the new age in, by and through Christ’s death, burial and resurrection.

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<sup>14</sup> I am leaving aside the eternal age following the second coming of Christ – which lies outside history – to concentrate on ‘this present time’ (Rom. 8:18) in contrast to the age preceding it.

<sup>15</sup> I am not contradicting myself; law characterised Adam’s age even though he was not given the law of Moses. See my ‘All Men Under Law’.

## *To Whom Did God Give the Law?*

It is at this point that the time element of the word ‘history’ needs nuancing. The truth is, the two ages are running alongside each other, and have done so since the beginning of salvation history. It is not that Adam’s age lasted until Christ’s resurrection; Adam’s age is still with us. That is why I am using the present tense: Adam’s age *is* characterised by flesh, sin and law. All humanity *is* by birth united to Adam and *comes* under the regime of the first age through Adam’s sin – *is* not *was*. So when I speak about salvation history, I am thinking of two ages, yes, but not merely in the sense of time. Rather, I am thinking more particularly in terms of their characteristics. I am thinking of two realms, two regimes. The old, Adamic, age or realm is the age or realm of the flesh, sin, law and death. The new, Christian, age or realm is the age or realm of the Spirit, righteousness, grace and life. The work of Christ took place in time, in history, and was the historical break-point or watershed for these two ages or realms, certainly, but for any particular individual the transformation comes at the point of saving faith. Conversion brings a change of regime, a change of age, a change of covenant. ‘If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new’ (2 Cor. 5:17). Speaking to believers, Paul could declare: ‘The Father... has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed [transferred] us into the kingdom of the Son of his love’ (Col. 1:12-13). Peter: ‘You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, his own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy’ (1 Pet. 2:9-10).

And when and what will be the culmination of salvation history? That, too, centres on Christ. The culmination will be when Christ ‘delivers the kingdom to God the Father... that God may be all in all’ (1 Cor. 15:24-28).

So when I talk of the ‘eschatological significance of the epoch of the law in salvation history’, I mean the status of the law in this scheme of salvation, how it fits into God’s accomplishment of salvation – that is, its place both in time and characteristics.

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The law was given at a particular time and lasted for a limited time and for a specified purpose. What was its role? What is its role today? In other words, I am speaking about the law in two senses – historical and experiential – historical, for humanity; experiential, for the individual.

Having explained what I mean by the place of the law in salvation history, let me take up my main theme once again. The law, the whole law, was given to the Jews, for the Jews, at Sinai. How fitting, therefore, for Paul to call it ‘our fathers’ law’, ‘the law of the Jews’ (Acts 22:3; 25:8).<sup>16</sup> When addressing Felix, Paul could easily link his ‘worship [of] the God of my fathers’ with ‘the law and... the prophets’ (Acts 24:14). How apt, therefore, was his reminder to the Jews – as distinct from the Gentiles – that they had the law (Rom. 2:27). How pointless if all men had it!

Think of the way in which Paul preached to the Gentiles.<sup>17</sup> Think of his experience at Lystra (Acts 14:11-18). The Gentiles were about to worship him and Barnabas. How did the brothers stop the pagans? What arguments did they use? Did they cite the first and second commandments? They did not! Instead, from nature they challenged pagan folly in trying to worship them. In effect, they asked: ‘Does not nature teach you?’<sup>18</sup> If the Gentiles had been given the law, why did Paul not quote it against them? The fact is, since the Gentiles did not have the law, Paul could not use it in his approach to them, and he made no attempt to do so. The same goes for his preaching to the Athenians in the Areopagus (Acts 17:18-34). Paul used what the pagans were familiar with.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Peter called it ‘our law’ (that is, of the Jews, as opposed to belonging to you) when speaking to a Gentile (Acts 10:28, NIV).

<sup>17</sup> See my *Christ* pp51-63, 116-157, 348-368, 412-447, where I more fully question and probe the Reformed claim that the preaching of the law must precede the preaching of the gospel to Gentile sinners.

<sup>18</sup> Compare 1 Cor. 11:14.

<sup>19</sup> I do not say there are no Old Testament echoes whatsoever in these addresses. After all, Paul, a converted Jew, was steeped in those Scriptures, including the law. Naturally, he thought and spoke in such terms. Compare, for instance, Acts 14:15 with Ex. 20:11. But although he *thought* like this, never once in these addresses did Paul explicitly

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Compare this approach with Christ addressing the rich young Jew (Matt. 19:16-22).<sup>20</sup> Think of Peter preaching to ‘Jews and proselytes’ (Acts 2:10); he was able to quote freely from the Old Testament (Acts 2:16-21,25-31,34-35). Again, when preaching to the Jews in the temple (Acts 3:11-26), he referred to Moses and ‘all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken’. In particular, he pointed them to ‘the covenant which God made with our fathers’ (Acts 3:18,22-26), and later quoted the Psalms (Acts 4:11). Think of Stephen’s approach when he was preaching to the Jews: ‘You... who have received the law’, he said (Acts 7:52-53). Likewise, Paul used the law when preaching to the Jews (Acts 13:39; 22:3,12; 23:3,5; 28:23, for instance) – as in his defence against the Jews (Acts 24:14; 25:7-8), speaking of ‘our people’ and ‘the customs of our fathers’ (Acts 28:17). *But never once did he use the law when addressing Gentile unbelievers.* Why not? Because he only used the law when he could say: ‘I speak to those who know the law’ (Rom. 7:1).

None of this was an accident. The preachers of the New Testament knew where their unconverted hearers were coming from. They knew that the Jews had the law, and therefore the gospel preachers were able to use it. The Gentiles did not have the law, so they did not refer them to it. In this, they were following Amos who, addressing the nations, Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, Judah and Israel, reproved them for their sins (Amos 1:1 – 2:16).<sup>21</sup> Not once did the prophet mention the law when speaking to pagans, but on turning to Judah he

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quote the Old Testament – which the pagans did not know – yet he quoted a Greek poet (Acts 17:28) – which they did know. See also Tit. 1:12. Paul’s *arguments*, of course, were Christian, not pagan. Here is the lesson. A preacher must use terms which his hearers can understand – or else explain them. He has to adjust his language to suit his hearers, not the other way around. On preparationism, see my *Christ* pp51-63,116-157,348-368,412-447, and throughout my works.

<sup>20</sup> Incidentally, the Reformed like to think preaching what they like to call ‘the moral law’ (the ten commandments) prepares sinners for Christ. But when addressing the rich young Jew, Christ used all the law, not just sixteen verses of it! Note his use of Lev. 19:18.

<sup>21</sup> See also Ezek. 25 – 30, for instance.

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immediately complained that ‘they have despised the law of the LORD, and have not kept his commandments’ (Amos 2:4).<sup>22</sup>

The overtones of James’ statement in Acts 15 are unmistakable: ‘Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every sabbath’, he declared (Acts 15:21). ‘Synagogues’ and ‘sabbath’ are not Gentiles terms!<sup>23</sup> Years later, when Paul arrived at Jerusalem, James told him about the believing Jews in Jerusalem who ‘have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses’ (Acts 21:21-25). Paul did not deny it.<sup>24</sup> The implication is clear. The Jews were under Moses; the Gentiles were not.<sup>25</sup> Note further the contrast between Paul’s actions (as a Jew) and the requirements laid upon Gentiles, as recorded in Acts 21:21-25. As the apostle explained: ‘To the Jews I became as a Jew... to those who are

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<sup>22</sup> I admit Amos did not explicitly refer to the law when addressing Israel at this time, although he alluded to it. The point is, however, the prophets often reproved Israel, but never pagan nations, for breaking the law. When Isaiah spoke to the ‘rulers of Sodom’ and told them to ‘give ear to the law of our God’, and to the ‘people of Gomorrah’ concerning sacrifices (Isa. 1:10-11), he was being ironical. He was in fact addressing Judah, calling Judah a virtual Sodom and Gomorrah – as the context makes plain. ‘They declare their sin *as* Sodom’ (Isa. 3:9). As God, through Jeremiah, said of Jerusalem: ‘All of them are *like* Sodom to me, and her inhabitants *like* Gomorrah’ (Jer. 23:14). See Deut. 29:23; Amos 9:7; Rev. 11:8. Returning to Amos, while it is true the prophet did not reprove Israel specifically for breaking the law, he did speak of them as distinct from the nations in having the prophets (Amos 2:11; 3:7-8), being chosen (Amos 3:2); having the feasts (Amos 5:21-22,25), being the chief nation (Amos 6:1).

<sup>23</sup> See Acts 22:12,19; 26:11; *etc.*

<sup>24</sup> A week later, catching sight of Paul in the temple, the (unbelieving) Jews from Asia stirred up the crowd, vociferously complaining that ‘this is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place’ (Acts 21:28).

<sup>25</sup> To develop this: Would Paul tell Jews to forsake Moses, and yet – allowing for sake of argument that they were under Moses – tell Gentiles to stay under his law? Even worse: would Paul tell believing Jews to leave Moses, yet make believing Gentiles come under Moses? This is the nub of the question I address in my *Christ*.

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under the law, as under the law... to those who are without law, as without law'. Why? In order to 'win the more... I do [this] for the gospel's sake' (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

Acts 2:23 is very interesting in this connection. Peter, preaching Christ, told the Jewish crowd on the day of Pentecost: 'You have taken [him] by lawless hands, have crucified [him], and put [him] to death'. The Jews were responsible for crucifying Christ but, to do the dirty work, they used Roman hands, Gentile hands, 'lawless hands'. The NASB, translating the phrase, 'by the hands of godless men', has a marginal note: 'Lawless hands, or, men without the law; that is, heathen'. The NIV correctly notes: 'Of those not having the law (that is, Gentiles)'. Christ had already foretold this is what would happen: 'The Son of Man... will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. They will scourge him and kill him' (Luke 18:31-33). Peter, steeped in Jewish thought, was using the phrase, 'lawless men', in the Jewish sense. The men he was talking about were 'men without the law'. That is to say, they were law-less, outside the law of God, Gentiles. The Jews boasted of their having the law. They were the only people to have it. All the rest were 'law-less'. So, as Peter said, Christ was crucified by the Jews (who had the law) making use of the Gentiles (who did not have the law, the without-the-law people) to do the work. See also Matthew 20:18-19; and Galatians 2:15, where 'Jews by nature' are contrasted with 'sinners of the Gentiles' or 'Gentile sinners' (NIV). 'Sinners' and 'Gentiles', in such a context, means those who are law-less, lawless, outside the law, beyond the pale.

When the Jews wanted Christ put to death, they could tell Pilate: '*We* have a law, and according to *our* law he ought to die' (John 19:7; see Lev. 24:16), but the Roman governor had already told them: '*You* take him and judge him according to *your* law' (John 18:31). When the Jews of Corinth brought Paul to court before Gallio, accusing him of persuading 'men to worship God contrary to the law' (Acts 18:11-16),<sup>26</sup> Gallio refused to entertain the case, on the grounds that it was none of his business. He roundly told them he would not get involved in 'a question of

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<sup>26</sup> The law of Moses, they meant, not the law of Corinth.

## *To Whom Did God Give the Law?*

words and names and your own law'; 'your own law', I emphasise. With a dismissive, 'Look to it yourselves; for I do not want to be a judge of such matters', he cleared the court. Claudius Lysias spoke in a similar way when writing to Felix, calling the accusation laid against Paul by the Jews, 'questions of *their* law' (Acts 23:29), no concern of his, something outside his jurisdiction, comprehension and competence. The Jews confirmed this by telling Felix they had 'wanted to judge [Paul] according to *our* law' (Acts 24:6). Festus was in the same quandary as Felix. While he was familiar with 'the custom of the Romans', he was 'uncertain of such questions' as he was now being asked, 'questions... about *their own* religion' (Acts 25:16,19-20). Paul, standing before Agrippa, was happy to think his judge was an 'expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews', including the words of the prophets. 'Our religion', he called it (Acts 26:1-5,26-27) – with the clear implication that Gentiles generally speaking had at best only a limited knowledge of God's revelation to the Jews, and their customs, religion and *law*. All this is strange, to put it mildly, *if these Gentiles had been as much under the law as the Jews*. I realise these Gentiles were politicians as well as magistrates, soldiers or kings, and I would not treat their words as the final authority on biblical principles, but they do nothing to contradict the claim that the law was given only to the Jews.<sup>27</sup>

And what of Hebrews 7:11? We are told that 'under [the levitical priesthood] the people received the law'. While it is not easy to determine precisely what the writer meant, at the very least we may speak of a link between the levitical priesthood, the Israelites and the law. In fact, it is much stronger than this. It was *under* the levitical priesthood that Israel received the law. The NIV and the NASB use the word *basis*; Israel received the law *on the basis* of the levitical priesthood. Now who received the levitical priesthood? The Jews. The Jews and no others. No Gentiles had the levitical priesthood. Consequently, only the Jews could have received the law, since no people could have the law

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<sup>27</sup> In my *Christ* pp99-110,392-408, I deal with the objection that such passages are concerned with the ceremonial or judicial law. They are not! As I keep saying, we are talking about the whole law.

## *To Whom Did God Give the Law?*

without the levitical priesthood, and *vice-versa*. The two were inextricably linked (Heb. 7:11-12,14,18-19,22,28). The two stood or fell together: ‘The priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law’ (Heb. 7:12). Under this system – unique to the Jews – the law required Levi to collect the tithe from his brothers – not all men (Heb. 7:5). And so on.

Therefore, of all nations, Israel alone received the law.

*But what about Romans 3:19?*

### ***What about Romans 3:19?***

The verse reads: ‘Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God’. Surely this teaches that all men – Jews and Gentiles – are under the law? But, no, it does not, even though at first glance it seems like it.

As I have shown, the context proves that ‘the law’ here includes at least the ten commandments, but more; it is the Old Testament as a whole. It is the law, the law in its entirety. Furthermore, note how Paul said that the law speaks to those who are under it. This ought to give pause for thought. If all men are under the law, then Paul wrote what amounts to a truism. The fact that he made such an observation at all – the law speaks to those who are under it – indicates there is something to be taken notice of. To whom was he referring? Who were those who were ‘under the law’, those to whom the law speaks? The context from Romans 2:1 and on is conclusive. He was clearly referring to the Jews. *They* were under it. It was given to *them*. The law certainly stopped their mouths. They had the law, they were under it, but since they failed to keep it, it condemned them. It took away all their excuse. Pharisees might think that *knowing* the law, *having* the law, was all that counted (John 5:39,45; 7:49; 9:28; Rom. 2:17-29), but, far from being justified by possession of the law, they would ‘be judged by the law’, ‘for’, as the apostle explained, ‘not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified’ (Rom. 2:12-13).

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But what of the Gentiles in Romans 3:19? The words, ‘to those who are under the law’, imply there are others who are *not* under the law. The Gentiles, Paul explained, did not have the Jews’ advantage – they were not given the law, they were not under it (Rom. 2:12-15). Even so, some of them, at least, were living up to the light they had – and ‘by nature do the things in the law... who show the work of the law written in their hearts’ – and in this respect did better than the Jews.<sup>28</sup> This does not mean that some Gentiles by their works were free of sin and so avoided God’s wrath. No! The point is, God is impartial. The Jews who had the law will be judged, and the Gentiles who did not have the law will also be judged, and both will be judged fairly by God (Rom. 1:18 – 3:20). What is more, if the Gentiles, who never had the advantage of receiving the law, were unable to voice any excuse for their sin, how much more guilty were the Jews – who had the law, and boasted about it (Rom. 2:17-24)! The Jews had the light of God’s word (Ps. 119:130). The Gentiles did not. But even so, all sinned and were ‘guilty before God’ (Rom. 3:19,23); the Jews against the law, and the Gentiles against some sort<sup>29</sup> of moral consciousness. And both were responsible. The principle is clear: more light, more responsibility!

*This* is Paul’s argument. Whether or not men had the law, Paul had already ‘charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin’ (Rom. 3:9). As he said, quoting and citing the Old Testament (the law): ‘There is none righteous, no, not one... none... none... none... For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God’ (Rom. 3:9-23). And as with sin, so with salvation, there is no difference between Jew and Gentile (Rom. 3:28-31; 10:12-13). God is impartial between them. In short: ‘Now we know that whatsoever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God’ (Rom. 3:19). The Jews – who had the law – were silenced by it. The Gentiles – who did not have the law – had no excuse in any case. Hence, all the world is guilty before God. ‘God has bound all men over to

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<sup>28</sup> See the next article for a thorough examination of Rom. 2:14-15.

<sup>29</sup> I admit my expression is (deliberately) vague. I will go into it further in the next article.

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disobedience' (Rom. 11:32, NIV). 'The Scripture has confined all under sin' (Gal. 3:22) – all men, 'all things' (Gal. 3:22, NASB margin), 'the creation... the creation... the creation... the whole creation' (Rom. 8:19-22). In short: 'Both Jews and Greeks... are all under sin... For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God' (Rom. 3:9,23).

In other words, Romans 3:19 supports the claim that the law was given to the Jews, and not to the Gentiles.

Many Reformed teachers will have none of it. The law was given to all men in Adam, they say; it was reinstated to all men through Moses; and all men are under the law today. Some go further. Men will be under it in eternity.<sup>30</sup>

These statements are wrong on several counts. Although it is claimed that men know the law of God by nature, and have done so from Adam, it is significant that such teachers never include the sabbath in trying to justify their claim. Let us think about this for a minute. Are we really to believe that pagans know they must rest from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset? Can anybody tell us of a pagan people, completely without Scripture, which keeps the sabbath? or feels guilty for not keeping it? Can anyone point to any man – including the patriarchs – before Exodus 16, who kept the sabbath?

Furthermore, the notion that the moral law was *reinstated* or *reinstated* or *restated* on Sinai because it had fallen into obscurity, is without a shred of evidence. Romans 5:20 disproves

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<sup>30</sup> A staggering – not to say, ridiculous – claim. The law is 'made', 'not... for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate' (1 Tim. 1:9-12). Will the eternal glory be populated by men and women who need a law against murder, sodomy and 'any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine', and glory in it? Reformed writers refer to 'the permanence and glory of the moral law'. My *Christ* is my attempt to write on the permanence and the glory of the *gospel*. The glory of the law was fading and passing away even as it was given (2 Cor. 3:7-18). As the New Testament expressly states, it was a temporary measure, 'added' until the Christ's fulfilment of his Father's will in his first coming, and has no glory now in comparison to the gospel since Christ fulfilled and thus abolished it (Gal. 3:19; Eph. 2:15; Heb. 7:18; 8:7-13; 9:5-10).

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it: the law – the whole law – *entered* at Sinai; it was not *restated* because it had fallen into obscurity! It entered the world at that time. More of this anon. Much more!

But the simple point I wish to make in this article is that the law was given to the Jews at Sinai. It was not given to the Gentiles, either at Sinai or at creation. It was not given to the Gentiles, full stop.

*But what of those places in the New Testament where Paul addresses believers as those no longer under the law?* Since he must have been including Gentiles in at least some of the passages, does this not mean that the Gentiles *were* under the law, after all? The answer is, No! As I come to the passages, I will deal with the question in detail, but for now I simply state that on several occasions, Paul was speaking either of his own personal experience as a Jew, or else he was speaking of the Jews and not Gentiles. And even when he was clearly addressing Gentiles, he was often rebuking them for seeking to go under the law, allowing themselves to be put under it by false teachers, Judaisers, or going back to the slavery of pagan principles – this last, having nothing to do with the law of Moses at all! Christ has redeemed his people from all bondage.

Even so, reader, there are some passages where such explanations still do not satisfy. Romans 2:14-15 is the explanation of all such. In another article, I will look at those very important verses.



## *Unasked Questions*

Unasked by whom? Unasked by consistent covenant-theologians.<sup>1</sup>

But the two questions I have in mind have been asked. Both were raised by Paul when he was setting out his doctrine of the believer and the law. He thought these two questions vital. And so he asked them. Vital? Yes, indeed. At key points in his teaching, having made an amazing statement, a statement that was bound to raise questions that objectors to his doctrine – objectors who could hardly believe their ears – would be thinking of, he immediately posed a question for his readers. Why? Since he was arguing against those who wanted to impose the law on believers, he knew they would have criticisms of his doctrine, and he had to answer them. Master teacher that he was, he himself raised the very issues that would have been passing through their minds. Even more pressing, he wanted to make sure his readers did not miss what he was saying.

Significantly, having raised the objections, the apostle did not retract the statements which had provoked them. Nor did he respond by saying: ‘Oops! Made a mistake there! Let me re-phrase that’. Nor did he call on the politician’s ploy: ‘You’ve taken me out of context!’ No! In fact, on both occasions he gave the supposed questioner short shrift, dismissing his objection out of hand, and driving home his doctrine even harder: ‘You heard me! You got it! That’s what I said, and that’s what I meant!’

What are these questions? Let me give the apostle’s statement followed by the question it provoked:

### ***The first statement***

‘Sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace’ (Rom. 6:14).

### ***The question which it provoked***

‘What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?’ (Rom. 6:15).

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<sup>1</sup> For my supporting arguments for this article, see my works.

***The second statement***

‘My brothers, you... 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... We are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code’ (Rom. 7:4-6).

***The question which it provoked***

‘What then shall we say? That the law is sin?’ (Rom. 7:7).

These two statements and the respective questions they aroused go right to the heart of scriptural teaching on the believer and the law. I repeat my assertion: consistent covenant-theologians never ask these questions. Why is it that they do not – cannot – provoke these questions? The answer is patent: these questions make no sense whatever to covenant theologians. In their system, such objections simply do not arise. No covenant theologian would ever think of them.

So, what is it about Paul’s teaching that is so radically different to that of covenant theologians? Paul declared that the believer is not under the law of Moses, that he is released from the law of Moses – indeed, that he has died to the law of Moses. Covenant theologians say the opposite. They claim that the believer is under the law of Moses for progressive sanctification. Consequently, no covenant theologian would ever dream of asking such a questions as: ‘Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?’ Covenant theologians would never say anything that might give rise to any doubt about the permanency of the Mosaic law<sup>2</sup> over believers as their perfect rule of life. No covenant theologian would give the impression that the believer is not under the law of Moses. The very suggestion is the high road to ‘antinomianism’.

***Yet Paul did ask these very questions! Indeed, his doctrine demanded that he ask them!***

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<sup>2</sup> Limited, in their case, without scriptural warrant to the ten commandments which they call ‘the moral law’.

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Furthermore, his answers, like his statements and the questions they provoked, are full of interest. Look how he responds to both questions: ‘By no means! God forbid! Out of the question! Unthinkable!’

In neither case did Paul back off. Read the entire passage (Rom. 6:14 – 7:6) and see. According to apostle, the believer is not under the law of Moses. But he is under Christ, under his headship, rule, governance and law. The believer, having the Spirit, is moved to love Christ and his law – which he finds written in Scripture – and moved to obey it to the glory of his Redeemer.

I leave the matter there. All I want to do in this article is to encourage covenant theologians and their followers to ask themselves a question: ‘Why is that Paul’s doctrine demanded these questions, and yet my system not only does not demand the same, but actually looks upon them as nonsense?’

‘Ridiculous! Misrepresentation! Of course we raise these questions and answer them!’ I can hear the chorus!

Really? Well, certainly not in my experience! Yes, the questions are ‘raised’ by covenant theologians – as they have to be when such teachers are reading (and especially expounding) Romans. But they are raised only to brush them aside, brush them aside by glossing Paul’s statements – ‘the law for justification’, ‘the ceremonial law’, ‘the law as a covenant but not as a rule’, and such like. This means that the questions remain, in reality, unasked. It means that Paul is insulted by the explaining away of his doctrine. And it means that covenant theologians are not facing up to the glorious truth about the believer and the law as set out by the apostle. And what a loss that is! Moreover, in what grim bondage does it leave any believer who adopts covenant theology!



## *Where Will It Stop?*

In January 2017, I felt honoured to be asked by the elders of a church in the Philippines to write a Foreword to their *Manual*. I warned them that my name would not do them a lot of good, but I was willing – and more than willing – to meet their request, as long as I could concentrate on the new-covenant theology aspect of their publication. The following is the result. So strongly do I feel about what I wrote, I have decided to offer it to a wider audience. Hence this article.

The issue for me is this: new-covenant theology must not be confined to the realm of theological debate. Like the doctrines of grace – indeed, like the entire revelation of God – God’s truth is not just a feast for the mind. It must penetrate the heart – and warm it. It must reach into the life and the experience – and be lived out, day by day. It must do this for the individual and – and this is very important – we must see thriving *churches* that are new-covenant in practice as well as in doctrine.

With all that in mind, this is the Foreword I gave to the elders in Cebu.

I am delighted to write this Foreword for *New Creation Manual*, a book which has been produced by the elders of New Covenant Church, Cebu, a church which is, in the elders’ own words, ‘a distinctly new-covenant church in the Philippines’. It is this fact – that we are talking about a new-covenant *church* – that especially gives me great joy.

Let me briefly say what I understand by new-covenant theology. It is not covenant theology writ new. It is nothing other than the theology of the new covenant, that crowning covenant brought in by Christ, the covenant which God decreed from before the foundation of the world to accomplish his saving purpose for his elect. He revealed this glorious covenant to men by means of a series of covenants in history – the Noahic, the Abrahamic, the Mosaic and the Davidic covenants – all leading up to, foreshadowing and pointing to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, the great Seed of the Abrahamic covenant. Christ

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was born under the Mosaic covenant, and by his life, death and resurrection fulfilled all the promises and shadows of those earlier covenants, to bring in their eternal reality for all his people for all time. New-covenant theologians not only rightly understand the biblical teaching on the continuity of this revelation – which is Christ himself – but they see and declare the great contrasts within these covenants. It is at this point that they disagree so markedly with covenant theologians – those who see all these covenants as being merely different administrations of one covenant of grace. Not so, according to Scripture! New-covenant theologians set out, in particular, the biblical contrast between what the Bible calls the first or old covenant – that is the Mosaic covenant – and the second, the new or better covenant – which is the gospel. To distinguish law and grace is one of the great essentials. New-covenant theology sets out this scriptural contrast along with all its ramifications and consequences for sinners and saints.

In brief, then, new-covenant theology is nothing less than the gospel unfettered by Confessions or man-made formulations. New-covenant theologians want to read, understand, interpret and apply Scripture unfiltered.

But while I am pleased to have witnessed the recovery and world-wide spread of new-covenant theology in these past forty years, especially in a growing number of books, conference papers, articles, videos and all the rest, and while it is gratifying to know that an increasing number of teachers are now openly advocating new-covenant theology, these things in themselves are not enough. We must see the theology of the new covenant permeating the heart and life (as well as the mind) of the individual believer. In tandem with that, we need to see new-covenant churches formed, churches which are new covenant not only their doctrine, but in their practice also. To have new-covenant theology on the platform and in the pulpit is one thing, and to have it in books is another, and both are necessary – indeed excellent – but what we must see is the theology of the new covenant worked out in daily life, both individually and corporately. And this is why I am delighted to endorse this effort to see such a church established in the Philippines. May God

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bless it. May many sinners come to salvation in Christ by the labours of this assembly. May the saints be edified, and the fruits of Christ's glorious new covenant be displayed in and among the members in abundance by the Spirit. And may it all be for the glory of the triune God.

David H.J.Gay  
9th January 2017



