

NEW-COVENANT ARTICLES
VOLUME ONE

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

Assurance in The New Covenant.

Battle for the Church.

Christ is All: No Sanctification by the Law.

Conversion Ruined: The New Perspective and the Conversion of Sinners.

Four 'Antinomians' Tried and Vindicated.

Grace Not Law!: The Answer to Antinomianism.

Infant Baptism Tested.

Psalm 119 and The New Covenant.

Romans 11: A Suggested Exegesis.

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Sabbath Questions: An open letter to Iain Murray.

The Glorious New-Covenant Ministry: Its Basis and Practice.

The Hinge in Romans 1 – 8: A critique of N.T.Wright's view of Baptism and Conversion.

The Pastor: Does He Exist?

The Priesthood of All Believers: Slogan or Substance?

New-Covenant Articles

Volume One

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

David H.J.Gay

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davidhjgay@googlemail.com

Scripture quotations come from a variety of versions

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by David H.J.Gay
are available on
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are available in 'Links' at
David H J Gay Ministry (sermonaudio.com)

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Foreword

Since the late 1970's, to the present, we have by God's grace, witnessed a steady increase of interest in the biblical covenants. What began in the English-speaking church, and in particular among the non-sabbatarian Sovereign Grace Baptists and independents in North America and Britain, has now become a movement that is nicknamed by many as 'NCT' or New Covenant Theology. This movement has moved beyond the controversial issue of the Jewish sabbath as continuing moral law to be obeyed under the new covenant, to a much more robust conversation about the essence of the new covenant itself. Questions abound including: 'What is the substance of the inscribed law that is taught in 2 Corinthians 3?'; 'What is the believer's 'rule of life'?'; 'What then is the role of the Old Testament's law?' These are but examples. There are many more questions that need to be considered and answered with clear teaching from Scripture. Confessional statements that are derived from man-made theological constructs are insufficient.

This is why I believe we must applaud the work of David Gay and others who labour along these lines. We live in a day when most Christians would agree that the law of Moses which was inscribed upon tablets of stone by the finger of God is the old covenant. We would also agree that it was inaugurated with the blood of animals. Yet, when we speak of the new covenant, it is a rare Christian who knows the substance of what Christ has inaugurated in his blood beyond gospel. Now consider how Reformed ministers stand Communion Sunday after Communion Sunday before their people with cup in hand while repeating Jesus' words: 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood' (Luke 22:20, ESV) when these ministers haven't a clue as to the substance of the new covenant Christ has ratified at so great a price. One thing is obvious. Christ's blood did not ratify the old covenant that was given at Sinai. There is so much ignorance! Only the enemy is smiling. David Gay would love to see you step into a full-orbed understanding of the new covenant. I pray you do as well.

Foreword

Our author, David H.J.Gay, stands out as a writer who does not hesitate to invite others to openly critique his work. He is anxious to know what God has said. His desire is to rightly discern the word of truth. This is why I cheer the efforts of David H.J.Gay. Read his work and be challenged. He is eager to uncover the springs that were covered over by our common enemy. It is my prayer you are equally eager.

Moe Bergeron
Sovereign Grace Fellowship
Publisher of ChristMyCovenant.com

Note to the Reader

Although my articles will continue to be posted under the eDocs link on David H J Gay Ministry (sermonaudio.com), and on christmycovenant.com, I publish a dozen of them in this book to set my work in a more permanent form for those who have already discovered it. More, 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, which are available on Amazon and Kindle. As I have indicated in the subtitle, I have every intention, in due course, of producing a second volume; that is, if I continue to find, as John Bunyan (I make no further comparison) said he found:

*Still as I pull'd, it came; and so I penned
It down; until it came at last to be,
For length and breadth, the bigness which you see.*¹

As for these articles, they may be read in any order – except ‘The Prophets and the New Covenant’ which should be read before ‘The Law on the Believer’s Heart’.

Finally, I express my gratitude to Ace and Peggy Staggs for all the internet work they do behind the scenes. My thanks also to Moe Bergeron for his Foreword, particularly since he (through christmycovenant.com) is making my articles available to a wider public, and doing so in such a stimulating way.

¹ Bunyan’s ‘Apology’ for his *Pilgrim’s Progress*.

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.

Assurance Instead of Doubt

When Paul declared: ‘The Son of God... loved me and gave himself for me’ (Gal. 2:20), he was speaking with resounding confidence, telling us that he had a solid assurance that he was Christ’s, and that Christ was his. But was he speaking as an apostle, as one specially favoured to be able to make such a declaration, or was he speaking as a typical believer? Can we, as believers, be as sure as Paul? Or was he simply telling the Galatians a wonderful fact about himself, but one which they could hardly hope to share, even after years of struggle?

Such scriptural examples and consequent questions could be multiplied. Is it only Paul, and a select few with him, who can say: ‘In [Christ] and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence’ (Eph. 3:12)?

Is it only the select few who can declare: ‘I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day’ (2 Tim. 1:12)?

Of whom, and to whom, was John speaking when he said: ‘We know and rely on the love God has for us... We will have confidence on the day of judgement... There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment’ (1 John 4:15-18)?

Of whom was Paul speaking when he declared: ‘God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline’ (2 Tim. 1:7)?

And when he told the Romans: ‘You did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship’ (Rom. 8:15), were the Romans special – or did the apostle’s words apply to all believers in his day? Indeed, do they apply to all believers today?

Or do these words apply to a spiritual elite only: ‘Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come’ (2 Cor. 1:21-22)?

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Is it only the favoured few who can be addressed like this: ‘You greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials... Though you have not seen [Jesus Christ], you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls’ (1 Pet. 1:6,8-9)?

And so on.

Can there be any doubt? These words, all of them, were applicable to all believers at the time they were written, they remained so for all believers in all succeeding generations, and they are still applicable to all believers today. Or should be. It’s clear that the New Testament speaks of believers as assured, confident of their position in Christ, full of joy – even in the most dire of circumstances, suffering and persecution – and very far from being wretched, doubting and lacking assurance.

Very well. New Testament believers were assured. That, surely, is a given. And this should be the lot of all true believers today. Sadly, many believers are in serious and debilitating trouble over this vital issue. While there is more than one reason for this grievous state of affairs, the one I wish to address at this time is this: too many believers are in doubt because they have far too low a view of their position and privileges in Christ in the new covenant. And this comes about because they are locked in a system of legal preaching, confined in that dark place by a Confession of faith, a Confession which, in reality, is heavy on law, and all that goes with it.

What am I talking about? Under this legal system, we are told that we must preach the law to sinners to prepare them for Christ, bringing them to a sufficient sense of their sin to make them fit for trusting Christ.¹ Then, once they are converted, we have to take them back to the law for sanctification. Believers, so we are told, are lazy asses, and must be whipped by the law, driven by the law into sanctification.² Then, we are told, for his assurance the believer must look to his sanctification – which he gets under the law. When he can discover sufficient evidence in his works,

¹ This is known as preparationism.

² For full documentation, see my *Christ*.

Assurance Instead of Doubt

then, and only then, may he be assured. In describing this, I have (as far as I know) coined an expression, calling it ‘legal assurance’.

This legal system is scripturally wrong, and damaging both for the unbeliever and believer. In particular, for his assurance and sanctification (and in that order), the believer ought not to look to himself, ought not to look to his feelings, ought not to look to his works, ought not to look to the law. He ought to look to Christ. He must look to Christ for all. That is where the Spirit will take the believer, if he will listen to *him*. To Christ!

Just a minute! How does this square with John’s first letter? Didn’t the apostle set out a series of tests for the believer, tests which involve the believer in self-examination, making him look at his sanctification, and all in order to gain assurance? And what about passages such as: ‘Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realise that Christ Jesus is in you – unless, of course, you fail the test?’ (2 Cor. 13:5)? Or: ‘A man ought to examine himself’ (1 Cor. 11:28)? Don’t these passages tell a believer to look to himself and his works, and do so for his assurance? And what about Peter’s command: ‘My brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure’ (2 Pet. 1:10)?³ How can my teaching survive when confronted by such scriptures?

In this short article, I cannot possibly deal with such major questions in detail. *But I have not run away from them*. See my book: *Assurance in The New Covenant*. I invite you to read it. All I can do in this short article is to open up the conversation.

The common view of assurance today – if it’s thought about in any depth at all! – has three steps or levels, each rising in importance. *First*, the believer rests himself upon the bare word of God. The Scriptures promise that if I believe I shall be saved (Acts 16:31); I do believe; therefore I am saved. *Secondly*, the

³ And what about the warning passages (Heb. 6:4-20; 10:26 – 11:1; 12:14-29)? I take these warnings as real, and apply them to sanctification as an essential mark of conversion (Heb. 6:11-12; 10:14), though they might refer to rewards (1 Cor. 3:12-15; 4:5). In either case, the writer to the Hebrews included immediate assurances for his readers concerning their salvation (Heb. 6:9; 10:39; 12:22-24,28).

believer tests his life by various evidences spelled out in Scripture – in 1 John, for instance. I love the brothers; therefore, I must be saved (1 John 3:14). And, *thirdly*, there is the direct evidence of the inner witness of the Spirit (Rom. 8:16), the sealing of the Spirit (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30), the ‘anointing’ (2 Cor. 1:21-22; 1 John 2:20,27). ‘He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself’ (1 John 5:10). And we have the repeated experience of ‘being filled with the Spirit’ (Luke 1:15,41,67; 4:1; Acts 2:4; 4:8,31; 6:3,5; 9:17; 11:24; 13:52; Eph. 5:18).

Building on that,⁴ the majority of Reformed teachers argue that assurance is beyond the reach of most believers. A few may get it, late in life, but most will not. Being reared on a diet of law (in some form or another), living in fear, tied to a grinding treadmill of rule and regulation and consequent introspection, most believers are plodding along, gritting their teeth, burdened with doubt, poring over their lack of sanctification, hoping against hope that on their death-bed they might – just might – get full assurance and be able to say: ‘Christ is mine’.⁵ Actually, according to some of their teachers, the height of a believer’s spirituality is to be in doubt and, consequently, to be miserable and fearful! And when such doubting saints come across someone who claims he is assured, ‘presumption!’ can often spring to their lips or into their mind.⁶

⁴ Often following the later Puritans, with whom this legal assurance originated.

⁵ ‘Full assurance’ needs care. The phrase gives the impression that some believers get *full* assurance but, perhaps, most believers have to put up with a *lesser* assurance. This is quite wrong. The ‘full assurance’ in certain versions of Col. 2:2; 4:12; Heb. 6:11; 10:22 means ‘complete, to make full, having been made full’ – yes, ‘assured’, ‘confident’, *but not in the sense we are thinking about*; namely, personal assurance of being in a state of grace. The context in each case makes this clear. Take Col. 2:2, for instance. Believers must be fully confident in their understanding and knowledge of the mystery of God; namely, Christ. Take Heb. 6:11. Believers should always be diligent to make sure they persevere, and so guarantee their entrance into all that God has prepared for his people.

⁶ A reader told me that, when she was converted as a teenager, she wrote to her former Sunday School superintendent to let him know the good

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A few believers, however, take a different route. They claim to have gone further, much further. Being specially favoured, they claim to have had some sort of mystical experience that transcends rational thought, a kind of one-off spiritual hammer-blow, and this has given them ‘assurance’.

All this is quite wrong. According to the New Testament, everyone who believes God’s promise in the gospel, repents of his sin and trusts Christ, has the Spirit. He must have the Spirit (John 14:17; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:13). He could only have repented and believed by the power of the Spirit (John 6:44; Eph. 2:8). Furthermore, the Spirit having enabled the sinner to repent and believe, indwells him (John 14:17; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 3:16; 1 John 4:13), taking away his fear, giving him the spirit of sonship, enabling him to call God his Father, sealing him, anointing him, and witnessing with his spirit that he is indeed a child of God, having adopted him into his family. He does this by taking him to Christ. Moreover, the Spirit goes on leading the believer to Christ, and speaking to him of Christ, glorifying Christ to him, making Christ precious to him: ‘To you who believe, [Christ] is precious’ (1 Pet. 2:7). In this way, the believer is assured, and given inexpressible joy and glory, with an increasing sense of it (Rom. 8:9-17; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; 2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 3:26 – 4:7; 5:1,13; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30; 1 Pet. 1:8; 1 John 2:20-27; 3:24; 4:13; 5:6,9-11, for instance). All this was true of New Testament believers.

This is how the believer gets his assurance – not by his works. The believer’s assurance arises, therefore, not from his sanctification under the law, but by the Spirit taking him to Christ in the gospel. Hence my rejection of ‘legal assurance’, and my emphasis on ‘new-covenant assurance’.

For the majority of believers today, however, talk like this is virtually a foreign language; worse, it is a foreign experience, at least consciously speaking. Indeed, even to talk like this is almost certain to bring the dismissing retort: ‘Charismatic!’ If so, let me remind you, reader, of the apostle’s warnings: ‘Do not grieve the

news. The gentleman replied with ‘a blistering letter’ telling her ‘she should not be concerned to know she had an interest in Christ, but whether or not he had an interest in her’!

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Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption' (Eph. 4:30). 'Do not put out the Spirit's fire' (1 Thess. 5:19). And fire, warmth, the burning heart, is precisely what the downcast disciples experienced on the road to Emmaus when Christ revealed himself to them through the Scriptures (Luke 24:32). And it is this warmth which believers should have today. Sadly, however, most seem to have lost it. Many have never even heard of it.

Believer, if you are being reared on a diet of law, rule and regulation, give it up! Instead of trying to exist on prison rations, feast your soul by meditating upon such scriptures as these:

If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ... Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry: 'Abba, Father'. The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory (Rom. 8:9,14-17).

You also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed,⁷ you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory (Eph. 1:13-14).

More than meditate upon such scriptures. Listen to the Spirit taking you to Christ. Keep your mind and heart fixed on Jesus:

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory... Christ is all, and is in all (Col. 3:1-4,11).

If you do, you will be assured. More than that, you will then go on to live a sanctified life to the glory of God in Christ by the Spirit.⁸

⁷ Do not insert a gap here. 'As you believe, in your believing...'. This is what the apostle is saying. See my *Assurance*.

⁸ Read the verses I have omitted, and see.

Covenant Theology Tested

Reformed covenant-theology and new-covenant theology are two very different ‘beasts’. Very different! In this article,¹ I want to play the spotlight of Scripture on covenant theology, and show that it cannot stand that searching light.

But I am not interested in merely proving a point. True, Reformed covenant-theology is a logical system imposed on Scripture – worse, it distorts Scripture – and this in turn means that covenant theology leads to very serious damage; not least, in the lives of those believers who are reared on it. So, in order to help those believers who are in bondage under the law as a result of Calvin’s system, a system which is bolstered by covenant theology, I need to show them the wrongness of that theology, thereby helping them to come into the liberty of the gospel under the law of Christ.

The law, say Reformed teachers, is binding on all men, and has been so since God gave it to Adam. In particular, it is binding on believers now; not for justification, of course, but as the perfect rule of their sanctification. The Reformed go further. It is the motive, the spur, the force, the driving power behind that sanctification. That is the Reformed claim. What is the buttress for it? What underpins their position on the law? It is something they call covenant theology. What is this? And what underpins covenant theology?

As I set out to answer these questions, reader, let me offer both an explanation and an apology. You will find what follows complicated, muddled, confused, even contradictory. I apologise for this, but there is little I can do about it. No matter how hard I try to make the Reformed theology for their claims on the law easy to follow, I am faced with an impossible task, and this because of the very nature of the arguments which they use. The confusion and contradiction is not of my making; it is theirs. And this will be even more apparent if you read their original works.²

¹ Which is the substance of chapter 6 of my *Christ*.

² In my *Christ*, I give extensive extracts.

The fact is, since they themselves are unable to sort it out, no wonder I cannot unravel the Reformed tangle! But I fear that this might well make some readers give up, and put my article aside. I trust not! I hope, reader, you might be prepared to grapple with the human *illogic* you find in what follows. Taking Paul as our example, just as he knew that he had to tackle the faulty theology of the Judaisers of his day, we have no choice. If we want to help believers who are locked – imprisoned – under the law – *and I use the word ‘imprisoned’ advisedly; see Galatians 3:23; 4:2-3* – and see them brought into freedom in Christ in the new covenant, we, too, have to expose the fault lines in Reformed covenant-theology in our time. Even so, since that theology is so complicated, it will inevitably prove rather a tortuous experience. You have been warned!

So, to start at the end and work backwards, covenant theology is the buttress of the Reformed view of the law, but what underpins covenant theology? This can be discovered by answering another question, a question of immense importance: Are the two Testaments continuous or discontinuous? To put it another way: Is every part of the Bible of equal weight and importance? Reader, do not be frightened by such questions. I am not for a moment suggesting that the Bible – all of it – is not equally inspired. It is! The entire Bible is the word of God – from Genesis to Revelation, including both! Nevertheless, the question must be asked, and answered: Does every verse of Scripture have the same weight in the life of the believer today?

Are the two Testaments continuous or discontinuous?

Let me summarise the scriptural position before I start this vital section. It is important that I do so since I intend to approach the Reformed, as it were, on their own terms, even though those terms are unscriptural. Indeed, if this summary were to be grasped, the continuity/discontinuity debate would be over. Alas, the Reformed will insist on imposing their covenant-theology template on Scripture. If only they would let Scripture speak for itself, shorn of their constructs! Here is the scriptural summary:

Covenant Theology Tested

The two Testaments are strictly continuous (apart from the 400 year gap), but the two 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; Romans 8:3; 10:4; 2 Corinthians 3:6-11; Galatians 3:19; Hebrews 7:12,18,22,28; 8:7-13. This is precisely what the Reformed will not face up to.³

Now for the continuity/discontinuity question.

God did not reveal his word all at once. Not only did he spread that revelation over hundreds of years, but he gave us his word in two Testaments. How are these Testaments related to one another? How should believers use them in formulating doctrine and practice? Do they draw principles equally from both, or from the New Testament only? Or... what? This is what I mean by asking if the Testaments are continuous or discontinuous.

It is dangerously simplistic, of course, to polarise such an important debate in this way – as though it must be one or the other. The Testaments are neither continuous nor discontinuous; they are both. The proper way to read the Testaments is to grasp their unity in their discontinuity. Christ is that unity. As Calvin said on Galatians 3:16:

‘Now to Abraham, and his seed’. Before pursuing his argument, [Paul] introduces an observation about the substance of the covenant, that it rests on Christ alone. But if Christ is the foundation of the bargain, it follows that it is of free grace; and this too is the meaning of the word ‘promise’. As the law has respect to men and to their works, so the promise has respect to the grace of God and to faith.

³ This represents a highly significant improvement on, refinement of, the equivalent passage in my *Christ*. I am grateful to some North American new-covenant friends for pointing me in the right direction to help me reach this important clarification. This summary is so important, I will re-state it at the end of this section.

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‘He says not: “And to seeds”’. To prove that in this place God speaks of Christ, [the apostle] calls attention to the singular number as denoting some particular seed. I have often been astonished that Christians... pass it slightly... In proving... that this prediction applies to a single individual, Paul does not make his argument rest on the use of the singular number. He merely shows that the word ‘seed’ must denote one who was not only descended from Abraham according to the flesh, but had been likewise appointed for this purpose by the calling of God... As Paul likewise argues from these words, that a covenant had been made in Christ, or to Christ, let us inquire into the force of that expression: ‘In your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed’ (Gen. 22:18)... Whoever... laying disputing aside, shall inquire into the truth, will readily acknowledge that the words here signify not a mere comparison but a cause; and hence it follows that Paul had good ground for saying that the covenant was made in Christ, or in reference to Christ.

Just so! The Old Testament (covenant) pointed to Christ, revealing him in prophecies and shadows. The New reveals him as the fulfiller of those prophecies, the reality of the shadows (Luke 24:27; John 5:46; 1 Pet. 1:10-12; *etc.*). As a consequence, when we read the Bible, we should be looking for Christ, and reading everything through Christ, whose person and work is the unifying factor of Scripture. Granting that, the debate, therefore, really hinges on where the *emphasis* should fall. Should it be on the continuity or the discontinuity?

There is no doubt – or shouldn’t be! Discontinuity! We have abundant scriptural evidence for emphasising the discontinuity of the Testaments. For now, take just one place, just one – Romans 3:20-22; note the vital *but now*. The passage reads:

Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in his sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. *But now* the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.

These verses show at once the difference between the two Testaments – that is, the discontinuity between them – but at the same time they show their continuity. As for the discontinuity, nothing could be plainer. The ages of law and grace, flesh and Spirit, are very different ages because law and grace, flesh and

Spirit, are very different systems. As for the continuity, grace was foretold and prefigured by the law and the prophets, but the emphasis of this passage in particular – and the New Testament in general – comes down firmly on the side of the discontinuity. I am not, of course, for a moment suggesting that there was no grace in the Old Testament, and that no sinner was saved in those days. But the fact remains, there is a discontinuity between the Testaments, and *that* is where the weight falls.

Note the contrast. Note the time factor: *now* Christ has come, *now* we are not under the law. The coming of Christ, and our coming to him in repentance and faith, has altered everything – in the former case, historically speaking; in the latter, in a personal sense. Because of the *but now*, all things are new. The coming of Christ is the great turning point, the momentous watershed of history, and the contrast between this age and the old age is written large across the pages of Scripture. And this discontinuity *must* be emphasised. While Paul in Romans 3:20-22 was safeguarding the continuity between the two Testaments, *this was not his primary purpose*. Far from it! Rather, he was setting out the discontinuity between the two. And it is this discontinuity which is of far greater importance than the continuity. Believers ought to recognise – and rejoice in – the differences between the two Testaments (better, covenants), the changes brought about by the eschatological ‘but now’. After all, their hope depends – absolutely – on the differences (1 Pet. 2:10)! In speaking of the discontinuity of the two Testaments (better, covenants), I have, in fact, been speaking of the differences between two ages, two systems, two covenants – especially this last; the discontinuity between the old and new covenants.

Scripture puts the weight on the new-ness of the new covenant – and when it says ‘new’ it does not mean something which was ‘old’ but is now renewed or amended. It really does mean a *new* covenant, accentuating the distinction between the age of the law and the age of the Spirit. Although it is an over-simplification to put it like this, in moving from the age of the Old Testament to the age of the New there was a fundamental change of covenant; the old gave way to the new (Heb. 7:11-12, 18-22; 8:13; 9:15;

10:9; 12:18-24).⁴ This is an over-simplification. We know that some people in the Old Testament belonged to the new covenant, and that the believers under the old covenant were looking forward to Christ (John 8:56; 1 Pet. 1:10-12). Some sinners were justified in the Old Testament (see Rom. 4; Gal. 3:6-9), but the doctrine itself was not written so clearly as in the New. This would seem to be stating the obvious. If not, why do we have the New Testament? The position of Old Testament believers was anomalous. They were in the new covenant and therefore delighted in God's law (Ps. 119), but at the same time they were under its burden in the old covenant. But the basic truth stands. There was a fundamental change of covenant with the change of Testament. It did not take place at the first verse of Matthew, of course. It came into effect with the death of Christ; or, more particularly, with the glorification of Christ in his resurrection, and the gift of the Spirit (John 7:39; 12:16,23; 13:31-32; 16:7; 1 Pet. 1:10-12,21). A definite and irreversible change of covenant took place through Christ.

And here is the nub of the debate. Many Reformed people do not accept this discontinuity, or at least its emphasis. They read their Bibles through very different spectacles. Very different!

This was a (the?) bone of contention between the Anabaptists and the Reformers, at the very heart of their disagreements. The Anabaptists rightly put the differences between the old and the new covenants, and the consequent distinction between the Testaments, at the centre of the debate. The Reformers, on the other hand, stressing the continuity of the two Testaments, were confused over the two great biblical covenants, often arguing for their one-ness, and much of their practical theology flowed from it.⁵

Rejecting human logic, the Anabaptists' rule of faith and practice was the Bible alone, especially the New Testament. God has revealed himself in the Bible in a progressive way, they said;

⁴ Melchizedek collected the tithe from Levi, and this showed his superiority over Levi (Heb. 7:4-10). Similarly, Christ and his law are superior to Moses and his law.

⁵ Although Michael Servetus was not an Anabaptist, in some respects he was close – and Calvin lumped him with them.

the Old Testament is not on a parity with the New; the new covenant is supreme; believers are not the children of the Old Testament or covenant, but of the New; the weapons of their warfare are of the New, not the Old. Arguing out these principles, they stressed the differences in the two ages. Believers, they argued, are under the authority of the Old Testament, but only as far as it testifies of Christ, only insofar as he did not abolish it, and only insofar as it serves the purpose of Christian living. In short, believers are under the authority of the law insofar as it does not contradict the gospel. In this way they distinguished between the Testaments. In about 1544, for instance, Pilgram Marpeck produced a massive book of more than 800 pages contrasting the two Testaments on many topics including forgiveness, rest, faith, sword, offerings, *etc.* The Old Testament, the Anabaptists argued, was temporary; the New, abiding. The Old is symbol; the New, fulfilment. The Old was preparatory and partial; the New is final and complete. The Old speaks of Adam, sin, death and law; the New speaks of Christ and redemption through him. All Scripture must be interpreted Christologically; that is, it must be seen in and through him and his work. If the Old Testament is given the wrong place or status in church and theology, all sorts of dire consequences follow, as could be seen in both Münster and Geneva. Yes, both! Such were the views of most Anabaptists. A few did not see it entirely this way, however; some were sabbatarians who sought to apply Old Testament laws to believers.

The Reformers, on the other hand, propounding a continuous history encompassing one age since the covenant with Abraham, saw only minor differences between the two Testaments – arising out of their time sequence. The Reformers saw no difference in substance between the Testaments. As a result, they responded bitterly to the Anabaptists. Not giving sufficient weight to the relevant passages in Romans, Galatians and Hebrews, they made the mistake of saying (when it suited them) that the Testaments were continuous and not discontinuous, and viewed the Bible as a flat revelation, with every passage having the same authority, regardless of its place in the Bible. Thus Israel and the church

became one, and the government of Israel was made to serve as a guide for the State Church in the 16th century.

Here were two distinct approaches to Scripture, still with us. Not all go as far as those reconstructionists who talk of the *Older* and not the *Old* Testament, but those who come down on the continuity side talk about the *Jewish* church as the infant form of the *gospel* church. Further, they base infant baptism on Jewish circumcision, *etc.* All this has large and dire consequences. Reader, to cope with it you will need to be nimble in sorting out the logic and language of covenant theology – the double covenant, the external and the internal covenant, the elect and the church seed, the visible godly, federal faithfulness, and so on. Having done that you will have to come to terms with church members who are acknowledged to be profane and chaffy hypocrites, but, nevertheless, remain glass-eyed ornaments to the church.⁶ And so on.

So, how do the Reformed cope with the biblical evidence? Here we reach the heart of the debate. Many Reformed people do not accept the clear discontinuity; or, at least, deny its emphasis. When they read their Bibles, they look down the wrong end of the telescope, viewing the New Testament through the Old. All sorts of troubles follow. In particular, how does it affect their interpretation of Romans 3:21-22? Some think that the words ‘but now’ signal a mere change of paragraph, or simply a small matter of timing. They do not! To enfeeble the ‘but now’ in such a way is tragic. The ‘but’ and the ‘now’ must be emphasised, the ‘but’ as a contrast, and the ‘now’ in its historical sense. And it is far more than mere history. Paul was speaking of the great eschatological ‘now’, the time of the new epoch, the ‘but now’ of the new era – the time of the gospel instead of the law, the age of the gospel contrasted with the age of the law, the age and realm of the Spirit and not law, the age of faith and not works.⁷ No wonder these two words ‘but now’ have been justly called the

⁶ Words used by men like John Cotton and Thomas Shepard in 17th-century New England.

⁷ I repeat: I am not saying there was no grace or faith in the Old Testament. I am, I say again, talking about emphasis, overwhelming emphasis.

most wonderful words in the entire Bible. Lloyd-Jones, for one, did. Quite right, too! As Paul thundered elsewhere: ‘Behold, *now* is the accepted time; behold, *now* is the day of salvation’ (2 Cor. 6:2). Now! But now!

If anybody should try to dismiss this by saying I am making a mountain out of the mole-hill of one passage, in addition to Romans 3:21, he ought to weigh Romans 5:9,11; 6:22; 7:6; 8:1; 11:30; 11:31 (second ‘now’ in NIV, NASB); 16:26; along with John 15:22,24; Acts 17:30; 1 Corinthians 15:20; Galatians 4:9; Ephesians 2:12-13; 5:8; Colossians 1:26; Hebrews 8:6; 9:26; 12:26; 1 Peter 2:10.

Note the contrast between the two ages, the two systems, in Romans 4:13-17. The promise to Abraham ‘was not... through the *law*, but through... *faith*. For if those who are of the *law* are heirs, *faith* is made void and the promise made of no effect, because the *law* brings about wrath; for where there is no *law* there is no transgression. Therefore it is of *faith* that it might be according to *grace*... not only to those who are of the *law*, but also to those who are of the *faith* of Abraham’. Paul’s argument collapses if law is not contrasted with grace and faith. This would seem to be obvious. Sadly, not all can see it. On justification, the Reformers were clear about the distinction between law and gospel, but otherwise they were confused about the two. While they rightly forsook the legal ground for justification, they kept to it for sanctification. And where we find this muddle, we find believers who are virtual ‘Mosesians’ instead of Christians. In their covenant theology, over-emphasising the *continuity* as they do, they fail to do justice to the revealed *discontinuity* of the two covenants.⁸ This I will prove, first by glancing at the biblical teaching on the covenants, and then trying to set out the arguments used by Reformed covenant-theologians.

In all this, a nice point of translation from the Greek arises – should we be talking about *covenant* or *testament*? Almost certainly, the former. The Testaments should have been called the Old and New *Covenants*. And in the text itself, *covenant* should have almost always have been used instead of *testament*, since it

⁸ Dispensationalists err the other way.

would have more truly conveyed the (almost-universal) meaning of the word to readers of the English Bible.⁹ And this in itself might well have prevented much of the trouble addressed in this article.

In closing this vital section, I repeat that vital note: The two Testaments are strictly continuous (apart from the 400 year gap), but the two 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; Romans 8:3; 10:4; 2 Corinthians 3:6-9; Galatians 3:19; Hebrews 7:18,22; 8:13. This is precisely what the Reformed will not face up to.

Biblical teaching on the covenants: 1. The covenant within the Godhead

Let me start with Scripture, and let me begin at the beginning, where I and Reformed writers are agreed. In eternity past, the triune God determined and decreed to save the elect. This is written large in Scripture. For instance, Paul said he was ‘a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God’s elect and the acknowledgement of the truth which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life which God,

⁹ Heb. 9:16-17 is the *only* place where *testament* is the right translation; the NIV happily uses *will*. In 2 Cor. 3:14, I disagree with NKJV and AV; see NIV, NASB. Gal. 3:15 could be either – but ‘covenant’ is the better. Speaking historically, the original use of ‘new testament’ was for the new covenant. It was only in the 3rd century that ‘New Testament’, as we now use it, became widespread. Indeed, my AV consistently uses small case for both ‘old testament’ and ‘new testament’.

who cannot lie, promised before time began, but has in due time manifested his word through preaching, which was committed to me according to the commandment of God our Saviour' (Tit. 1:1-3). Since God 'promised before time began', he could not have promised to any created being. Therefore he must have promised to himself, within the Godhead. In other words, because of his sovereign grace, love and will, all within himself, God agreed, within the Godhead, to save his elect through his Son, Jesus Christ, by the effectual working of his Holy Spirit. I am willing to call this a covenant – the covenant of grace, no less, except this term is not used in Scripture, but is an invention of covenant theologians. Not only that, their use of the term is far more complicated than the way in which I would want to use it. Leaving that aside, as I say, throughout the word of God there is abundant evidence of this agreement within the Godhead, but since I and Reformed writers are of one mind on this – except on the use of the phrase 'the covenant of grace' – I will say little more on it.¹⁰ This determination, compact, agreement, or promise within the Godhead is not at issue here. It has nothing to do with man. It is an agreement, a decree, a promise within the Godhead. It has nothing to do with the question of the believer and the law. If this was all that covenant theology amounted to, I would have no quarrel with it. But it isn't, and I do.

To move on: the need for salvation arose out of Adam's fall. Through Adam, sin entered the world, and in Adam all the human race sinned and fell. In accordance with God's own determination within the Godhead, at the right time Christ came into the world and earned salvation for all his elect. All in Adam die, and all in Christ live (Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:21-23,45-49). In all this I am sure there is no difference between me and the Reformed.¹¹

¹⁰ From the plethora of other passages which could be cited, see Ps. 2:8; 40:6-8; 89:3; John 17:6; Eph. 1:11; 3:11; 2 Tim. 1:9; Heb. 13:20. See below for a 'little more'.

¹¹ Having said that, many Reformed writers push the comparison between Christ and Adam too far. Other Reformed teachers have dissented (see, for instance, John Murray: *Collected Writings of John Murray, Volume 2: Systematic Theology*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1977 pp49-50,58).

Biblical teaching on the covenants: 2. God's covenants with men

Down the ages, God has made various covenants with men. He made a covenant with Noah, with Abraham, with Isaac, with Jacob, with Israel at Sinai, with Phinehas, with David, and so on. He also made a covenant which he calls the new covenant.

Biblical teaching on the covenants: 3. The two great covenants with men

The two great covenants which God has made with men are the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant (Gal. 4:21-31; Heb. 7:18-22; 8:6-13; 9:11-28; 10:1-10; *etc.*). In saying this, I do not dismiss the Abrahamic covenant. Certainly not! The fact is, that covenant had two strands to it. One concerned Abraham's physical seed, Israel; the other, his spiritual seed, the church. The first strand was encompassed in the Mosaic covenant; the second in the new covenant. So, as I say, the two great scriptural covenants are the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant.

The Mosaic law is called the old or first covenant. This includes, but is not confined to, the ten commandments (Ex. 19:5; Deut. 4:13; Jer. 31:31-33; Heb. 8:7-9) – those ten commandments being delineated as the 'words of the covenant': 'And [God] wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the ten commandments' (Ex. 34:28). 'So [God] declared to you his covenant which he commanded you to perform, the ten commandments; and he wrote them on two tablets of stone' (Deut. 4:13). The ten commandments constituted God's covenant given on Sinai.¹² But the fact is, the old covenant was *all* the law,

¹² 'The ten commandments' – as a phrase – comes only three times in all the Bible, but is synonymous with the law on 'the tablets of stone' (Ex. 24:12; Deut. 4:13; 9:10; 1 Kings 8:9; 2 Cor. 3:3), 'the tablets of the testimony' (Ex. 31:18; 34:29), 'the testimony' (Ex. 25:15-16; 40:20), 'the words of the covenant' (Ex. 34:28) and 'the tablets of the covenant' (Deut. 9:9-11; Heb. 9:4). Whether this synonymity is strictly true in every case, is debatable.

and not merely the ten commandments.¹³ To despise any of God's statutes, to abhor any of his judgements, to fail to perform all his commandments, was to break his covenant (Lev. 26:15). The 'book of the covenant' contained '*all* the words of the LORD', all his judgements or ordinances, commandments, testimonies and statutes (Ex. 24:3-7; 2 Kings 23:2-3; 2 Chron. 34:30-32; see also, for instance, 1 Kings 2:3; 6:12; 8:58,61; 9:4; 11:11,33-38; 2 Kings 17:13-16,19,34-38; 18:6,12). So the first or old covenant is the law, the law of Moses.

What is the second or new covenant? It is grace in Christ, the gospel (Heb. 7:18-19,22,28; 8:6-13; 9:15; 10:1,8-9,16-17,28; 12:22-24).

Now we are expressly told that Christ removed the old covenant that he might set up the new. He brought in 'the time of reformation' (Heb. 9:10), 'the time of the new order' (NIV). 'He takes away the first that he may establish the second' (Heb. 10:9), 'having abolished in his flesh the enmity; that is the law of commandments contained in ordinances' (Eph. 2:15), 'having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And he has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross' (Col. 2:14). Having annulled 'the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness', he brought in 'a better hope, through which we draw near to God' (Heb. 7:18-19). Christ is 'mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises... He has made the first obsolete' (Heb. 8:6-7,13). 'The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ' (John 1:17).

These are the two covenants which lie at the heart of this debate. While there is some continuity between the old covenant and the new,¹⁴ the Bible speaks of vast differences between them.

¹³ The 'even' of Deut. 4:13 (AV) is in italics; the translators added it because they thought it made the meaning clear. I am not saying they were wrong to do it, but just pointing out the fact. The NKJV translators did the same with 'that is' in Eph. 2:15, which I quote immediately below.

¹⁴ God wrote both; love for God, love for neighbour, honour for parents, faithfulness in marriage, truthfulness, and so on, are common to both.

The old was temporary,¹⁵ it was a ministry of death and condemnation (Rom. 7:7-11; 2 Cor. 3:6-11; Gal. 3:17,19,23-25; 4:1-7,21-31; Heb. 7:18-22; 8:6-13), and was introduced with ‘blackness and darkness and tempest... [so that] they could not endure what was commanded... And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said: “I am exceedingly afraid and trembling”’ (Heb. 12:18-21). The new covenant, however, is permanent, the ministry of life, of the Spirit, of righteousness (2 Cor. 3:6-11). ‘But you have come to... Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel’ (Heb. 12:22-24). In short, the old required man’s obedience; the new is God’s promise. The old was external ritual and ceremonial; the new, inward and spiritual. The old was ruled by fear; the new, by love. The old was bondage, slavery to law and works; the new, freedom, liberty in Christ. The old was for the Jew; the new, for the elect throughout the world. The old said: ‘Stay away’; the new says: ‘Come’. The old was breakable – and was broken by every man under it except Christ; the new is unbreakable.

This, in brief, is the biblical doctrine on the covenants. As I have noted, some Reformed teachers disagree with what I have said about the two great covenants, but this is only the tip of the iceberg. Covenant theology, I contend, diverges markedly from Scripture, being a logical system¹⁶ invented by men,¹⁷ and

¹⁵ This must not be glossed. The law, the old covenant, was temporary. God always intended it to be so. See Rom. 7; 2 Cor. 3; Gal. 3; Hebrews.

¹⁶ The Reformers and the Puritans, depending far too much on human logic, were not always *biblical* in their reasoning. In too many cases they became Reformed schoolmen, where logical distinctions and terms drawn from rationalism and philosophy, based on Aristotle’s logical system, came to be regarded as authoritative as Scripture. This led to scholasticism among the Puritans and their followers. It was a sad mistake.

¹⁷ Although Johann Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575) was probably the first to publish a work containing the concept of federal salvation, Kaspar Olevianus (1536-1587) was its inventor, in Germany, when he and Zacharias Ursinus (1534-1583) drafted the final version of the Heidelberg Catechism (1562). William Ames (1576-1633) was the leading British exponent of covenant theology, which dominated the

imposed on Scripture. But since it underpins the Reformed view of the law, we must look at it, and try to get to grips with it. A word of warning, however! It is like wrestling in a fog with an octopus which has been liberally smeared in Vaseline!

Covenant theology: 1. The covenant of works and the covenant of grace

What is the Reformed idea of a covenant? They say it is an agreement between two or more parties, whether or not the parties are equal.

Covenant theologians say God made a covenant with Adam. But where are we told this in Scripture? They go on to say God made a covenant with all men in Adam. Where are we told this in Scripture? Further, they give this so-called covenant a name, a name which looms large in their writings; namely, ‘the covenant of works’. But you will not find this in Scripture.¹⁸ I am not being silly or pedantic. I am well aware that the word ‘trinity’ does not appear in the Bible. For the moment, I am simply stating a fact. ‘The covenant of works’ does not appear in Scripture as a term. My contention is, of course, neither does it appear as a concept.¹⁹

As I have already mentioned, the Reformed have also invented another covenant – ‘the covenant of grace’ – which is far more complicated than the covenant of works (which is problematical enough), so I will leave further explanation of it until we come across it. Just to say, this covenant of grace – as covenant theologians have developed it – does not appear in Scripture either – either in name or concept. What is more, it is impossible to speak of *the* Reformed idea of the covenant of

Westminster Confession of the Presbyterians (1643-1646) and the Savoy Declaration of the Independents (1661).

¹⁸ Nor will you find it in Calvin, most Reformed creeds, the 39 Articles or the Heidelberg Catechism. This may surprise some Reformed readers.

¹⁹ To try to justify this by reference to ‘trinity’ is fruitless. The difference is patent. The Bible does not use the word ‘trinity’, so we have to invent it. But the Bible does use the word ‘covenant’, and we should not stray from the way it uses it.

grace'. The simple fact is, covenant theologians do not see eye to eye with each other on what this so-called covenant of grace is.

Let me summarise so far. Most Reformed writers argue on the basis of a logical system they have invented ('covenant theology'), and in the process they have coined two phrases,²⁰ 'the covenant of works' and 'the covenant of grace'. These phrases – and the principles behind them – are fundamental, pivotal to covenant theology, and are, so it is said, the heart of Calvinism.²¹

Sadly, this logical contrivance – the covenant of works, and the covenant of grace – invented by Reformed theologians, dominating their theology, has greatly complicated the simplicity of the Bible, and muddled the waters dreadfully.²² Things have got worse in the past five hundred years as covenant theologians have continued to elaborate and embellish their system, piling confusion upon confusion.

I remind you, reader, the Bible speaks of two covenants – the Mosaic and the new. Notice how the Bible and covenant theology are beginning to diverge already. They sound similar – both are based on two covenants – but they are very different covenants!

Covenant theology: 2. The covenant of grace

Since it is the so-called covenant of works which is the cardinal point, I will say only a few words about the so-called covenant of grace. As I hinted, Reformed teachers are themselves far from clear about it – which some will admit to. They are not sure, for instance, about who is in the covenant of grace – some think even

²⁰ 'Coining' does not mean, as so often it is assumed to mean, 'copying'. It means, 'inventing'. Inevitably, therefore, they are unbiblical phrases, even though they have a biblical air about them.

²¹ Calvin was not a covenant theologian – he died before the notion had been invented. Apparently, therefore, Calvin would have failed his examination paper on Calvinism!

²² And not only in a doctrinal sense. The antinomian controversy in New England in the 1630s arose out of it, and preparationism came from it. Antinomianism and preparationism were linked in the New England crisis.

the unregenerate may be in it. Some think there is not one, but two covenants of grace – one called ‘the covenant of redemption’ to distinguish it from ‘the covenant of grace’. It makes one wonder – as one of their most influential teachers recognised in print – why ever the notion of the covenant of grace caught on. Other problems exist. In addition to who is the second party of the covenant, is the covenant conditional or unconditional? Is it internal or external? What about the difference between the essence and the administration of the covenant? Is it an absolute covenant? Is it a legal question or does it involve life? These are not my questions, I hasten to add. I have culled them from Louis Berkhof’s *Systematic Theology*, widely distributed over several decades by the Banner of Truth Trust. All such questions have perplexed Reformed theologians for centuries, and still do. But they are of their own making.

And what about the covenant of redemption which I mentioned in passing a moment ago? What is this? What about the problems Reformed logicians love to invent and try to solve concerning *this* covenant? Problems such as: On what basis do some Reformed theologians speak of a covenant between the Father and the Son, with no place for the Holy Spirit? Is this non-trinitarian covenant a threat to the doctrine of the trinity or not? Or is it a trinitarian covenant after all – even though it doesn’t look like it? What is the connection between the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace? Are they different or one and the same? These, too, are questions of their own making. Reformed teachers might try to say that their terminology need not confuse us, but the fact is they are themselves confused and divided. They may say it all can be ‘put simply’, but experience proves otherwise. Leading Reformed theologians disagree among themselves, saying they cannot understand each other’s scheme – so what hopes for the average believer under Reformed teachers? The truth is, covenant theology solves nothing. Although those who started it wanted to avoid scholastic definitions, that’s where it has ended up, openly ambiguous.²³

²³ See below for more on the idea of one covenant, but different *administrations*.

The supreme problem for covenant theologians, however, does not concern the so-called covenant of grace. No! The main problem is with what they call ‘the covenant of works’. The great question is, was the Mosaic covenant (the one I am concerned with in this book) the covenant of grace or the covenant of works? Opinions are sharply divided, self-contradictory and, at best, muddled among Reformed teachers. They might wonder why covenant theology has not caught on outside their own circle, but the answer would seem self-evident.

Covenant theology: 3. The biblical covenants, covenant theologians claim, are one and the same covenant

It is at this point that we run into massive trouble. As I said, Reformed teachers say that the various covenants in Scripture are really one and the same – just different administrations of the one covenant of grace. In particular, the Mosaic covenant was essentially the same as that covenant which was established with Abraham.

Judged by Scripture, the suggestion – that all the covenants are one and the same – is incredible. For one thing, the word ‘covenant’ really speaks of discontinuity, a change, something different, so whatever covenant theology deals with, it must deal with change. ‘For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law’ (Heb. 7:12). Do not miss the ‘of necessity’!

Take the covenants Reformed teachers try to synthesise. Genesis 3:15 was a promise, not a covenant at all; the covenant with Noah was a covenant with all mankind; the covenant with Abraham, as I have explained, had two aspects, one applicable to his physical descendants, and the other to his spiritual descendants; the Mosaic covenant at Sinai was a covenant of law-works which concerned Israel; the new covenant concerns believers. And there were other covenants down the ages besides these. One would think, judging by Reformed writers, that Paul spoke of the *covenant* (singular) in both Romans 9:4 and Ephesians 2:12. He did not! Take the latter. He spoke of ‘the

covenants of promise’!²⁴ Note the plural! The Bible makes much of an ‘s’ on the end of a word (Gal. 3:16).

But many Reformed writers claim that the Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant are virtually one and the same, and all are covenants of grace and not works. This is staggering. If the covenant of Sinai did not demand law-works, what did it demand? I will have much more to say about this. There again, how can references to the Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant all apply to *the* covenant? After all, the Jeremiah passage could not be plainer. The new covenant is the *new* covenant, and is expressly said to be ‘not according to’ the Mosaic covenant (Jer. 31:32). These two, at least, cannot be the same covenant, can they? Let me stress once again the new-ness of the new covenant. Christians are under the new covenant, that covenant which is expressly said to be unlike the Mosaic covenant, the old covenant. Yet Calvin accused the Anabaptists of madness for what he dismissed as the ‘pestilential error’ of questioning the one-ness of the covenants!

Are we not plainly told that the old covenant has been abolished and the new has come? that believers are not under the law? (See Rom. 6:14-15; 7:1-6; 8:2-11; 2 Cor. 3:7-11; Heb. 7:11-19; 8:6-13; 9:15;²⁵ 10:16-20). We know the Mosaic covenant has been abolished (2 Cor. 3:7-11). What is more, as the old covenant was abolished and the new covenant came in, a comparison, even a stark contrast, was drawn between the two. Far from being

²⁴ It is not unknown for covenant theologians, and Baptists who wish to go as far as they can with covenant theology, to misquote Eph. 2:12 as ‘the covenant of promise’. As for such Baptists, they should recall the bad and far-reaching effect covenant theology will have on church life. Sadly, some of them, even though they admit differences in the covenants – especially the greatest of all – namely, that the new covenant is new! – attribute panic and some sort of dispensationalism to those of us who will not take the same route as they; that is, we will not opt for covenant theology.

²⁵ Christ ‘is the mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant’ (Heb. 9:15). Brown thought that these were the sins which were not expiated under the old covenant (John Brown: *An Exposition of Hebrews*, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1961 p413).

Covenant Theology Tested

altogether one and the same covenant, they are very, very different. How different can be easily seen in Paul's words:

God... made us... ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious... which glory was passing away, how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious (2 Cor. 3:5-11).

This is vital. The Bible contrasts the two covenants, the old and the new, and contrasts them very sharply indeed. In the following quotations, please observe the use of the words *but*, *yet* and *on the other hand*. These are words of contrast. Powerful words! Words which must not be glossed! Nor should we miss the apostle's hyperbole: 'glorious... glory... more glorious... glory... exceeds much more in glory... glorious... glory... the glory that excels... glorious... more glorious'. And on which covenant does the weight of glory resoundingly fall?

The two covenants are clearly contrasted in the following passages:

For the law was given through Moses, *but* grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (John 1:17).

You are not under law *but* under grace (Rom. 6:14).

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law: 'The man who does those things shall live by them'. *But* the righteousness of faith speaks in this way... If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved (Rom. 10:4-9).

For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them'. *But* that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for 'the just shall live by faith'. *Yet* the law is not of faith, *but* 'the man who does them shall live by them'. Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us... that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith (Gal. 3:10-14).

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For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar – for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children – *but* the Jerusalem above is free... (Gal. 4:24-26).

For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the law made nothing perfect; *on the other hand*, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God (Heb. 7:18-19). *But* now²⁶ he has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as he is also mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second (Heb. 8:6-7).

Are these quotations not sufficient to prove that the old and new covenants are very different? Do they not show that the new is far superior to the old, and plainly so? How can they be the same? If they are, how could Paul say: ‘For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh’ (Rom. 8:2-3)? Here we have it; two laws, two systems, two economies, two covenants. The old, the law of sin and death; the new, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. The contrast, I say again, could not be greater. The old was a covenant of death, the new is a covenant of life. There is no greater contrast than between death and life! No wonder we are told: ‘In that [God] says: “A new covenant”, he has made the first obsolete’ (Heb. 8:13), and that Christ has taken ‘away the first that he may establish the second’ (Heb. 10:9). Some Reformed teachers censure those of us who dare assert that the old covenant is abolished. But the letter to the Hebrews says it is!

Christ draws a very clear contrast between the old and the new covenants (Mark 2:18-22), illustrating this in two ways: it is futile both to sew a piece of new cloth on to an old garment, and to put new wine into old wineskins. The two covenants are very different. They cannot be cobbled together. Although covenant theologians claim the covenants (the Abrahamic, the Mosaic, and

²⁶ Note the ‘now’. It is the eschatological key to all this argument.

the new, the last two in particular) are one covenant, they are mistaken.

Covenant theology: 4. The covenant of works

But what of the Reformed covenant of works? Though its advocates have to admit its development is ‘something of a mystery’, those of us who reject the concept are dismissed as thinking unbiblically. This, of course, needs proof, not mere assertion. Advocates of the covenant of works, aware of the need to be clear about its biblical basis, have to admit its name cannot be found in the first three chapters of Genesis. But why worry about the non-mention of its name? There are bigger problems with it than that! Neither the name – *nor the concept itself* – is found in the entire Bible! Even so, the lack of the term – while this, I freely concede, is not conclusive – should give pause for thought. Yes, if the principle can be found in Scripture, the absence of its name is not important. But is the principle in Scripture? This *is* the question!

Romans 5:12-21, so it seems, is the only passage which, at first glance, can be used to establish the covenant of works, the covenant said to be made with all the human race in Adam. If this is right, and Romans 5:12-21 does speak of the covenant of works, it can only mean that the law is not this covenant of works – since John 1:17, Romans 5:13-14 and Galatians 3:10-29 teach that the law was not given to men until Sinai, 430 years after Abraham, let alone Adam! It could not, therefore, have been given to Adam and the patriarchs. This, in turn, can only mean that the law is the covenant of grace – which, as I will show, is nonsense.

So what about Romans 5:12-21? Reader, as I have made clear, I fully accept – I am convinced, biblically – that in eternity past the triune Godhead agreed to save the elect in Christ. I am also convinced that in Adam all the human race fell into sin. Both Adam and Christ acted as representative heads, acting for all their descendants – that is, in Adam, all the human race; in Christ, all the elect. Adam fell; all the human race fell in and with him. Christ was born under the law, kept the law, died under the law, and was raised from the dead; all the elect are constituted and

accounted righteous by God in him, they receiving all the benefits he earned for them by his life, sufferings and resurrection. I find these truths unmistakably taught in Romans 5:12-21 and 1 Corinthians 15:21-23,45-49.

But this is a far cry from the covenant theology invented by Reformed scholars. If truth be told, not all of them accept the usual deductions made by covenant theologians from the passages.

Romans 7:10 is another passage which is sometimes called on to justify the covenant of works. But this verse, according to the immediate context, clearly speaks of the ten commandments (in truth, the law) which, on Sinai, had been addressed to Jews, all of whom, naturally, were sinners. Even so, some Reformed writers claim that, in Romans 7:10, Paul was speaking of the covenant of works given to Adam before he fell. In other words, the law was given to a man who had not sinned. Allowing it to be so for the moment, what Adam made of prohibitions against murder and adultery, and so on, *before he had sinned*, I simply cannot comprehend. And what of 1 Timothy 1:9? ‘The law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers...’. In which of these categories did Adam find himself *before he fell*?

The main confusion concerning the Reformed covenant of works, as can be seen, arises over the Mosaic covenant. Was the Mosaic covenant the covenant of works or was it the covenant of grace? I mean, of course, in Reformed terms. The Bible knows nothing of either. But this is a fundamental question for covenant theology. Was Sinai a works covenant or a grace covenant? Covenant theologians ought to be able to give us a clear, unequivocal answer to that question. Can they? Will they? The Bible does. Let me prove it.

Covenant theology: 5. Sinai – was it a works covenant or a grace covenant?

Take Galatians 4:21-31. In the allegory of Sarah and Hagar,²⁷ we are expressly told that the law on Mount Sinai was a covenant of bondage, in contrast to another covenant (Gal. 4:21,24-27), the two women representing these two covenants. What covenant did Sarah represent? The answer is patent. The Abrahamic covenant fulfilled in the new covenant. How do we know? Well, how would the Galatians have understood Paul's allusion? Not having the benefit of 2 Corinthians 3 or Hebrews 8, and limited to what they knew from the apostle's letter they were reading (or having read to them), nevertheless their minds would have leapt to the covenant with Abraham, and for two reasons. First, Paul had already stressed the Abrahamic covenant of promise (Gal. 3:6-9,14-19,29). Secondly, the allegory itself contains the explicit reference to Abraham, Hagar and Isaac, and the implied reference to Sarah (Gal. 4:21-31). Paul, in referring to Sarah, was speaking of the Abrahamic covenant fulfilled in the new. *That* is how the Galatians would have read the apostle. That is how we must read him.

Now whatever view is taken of the covenant represented by Sarah, the covenant represented by Hagar is the law, the Mosaic covenant. Paul was writing to those who desired 'to be under the law'. The allegory spoke of 'two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar – for this Hagar is [represents] Mount Sinai... and corresponds to... bondage' (Gal. 4:21-25). And this covenant is expressly called a covenant of bondage. In other words, it was a works covenant which no sinner could keep, but which enslaved those under it. Note further, *contrast* was Paul's theme; contrast between law, bondage and flesh, in the one covenant – and promise, freedom and the Spirit, in the other. Paul's argument was directed against the Judaisers who wanted believers to go under the Mosaic covenant. Indeed, as I have shown, they argued that the

²⁷ 'Allegory' (AV), 'allegorically speaking' (NASB), 'are symbolic' (NKJV), 'taken figuratively' (NIV). From *allēgoreō*, 'to speak allegorically or in a figure' (Thayer).

Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants were one and the same. Not for a moment would he countenance the thought! The Mosaic covenant, being a covenant of bondage, Paul would have none of it. This puts covenant theologians on the side of the Judaisers, and, therefore, against Paul.

Let me prove it. Many Reformed writers will not have it at any price. In one respect, they have the same faulty theology as the Judaisers. Flying in the face of Scripture, they say there are not two covenants here in Galatians 4, but one; the two women do not represent two covenants, but two *aspects* of one covenant; the slavery of the Mosaic covenant was not really a part of that covenant at all; it was all a misunderstanding, a Jewish misinterpretation of the covenant. So it is claimed. But Paul said no such thing. He said it was the covenant itself which enslaved! It was no misunderstanding! The Mosaic covenant was based on a slavish principle, ‘do and live’ – with its corollary, ‘fail and die’. Those under it, the Jews, ‘were held prisoners by the law, locked up’ by it (Gal. 3:23, NIV).

The law could bring life (Lev. 18:5; Ezek. 18:19; 20:11-25; Matt. 19:17; Luke 10:28; 18:18-20; Rom. 7:10; 10:5), yes, but the obedience had to be perfect (Gal. 3:10; Jas. 2:10). Now, since all men (apart from Christ) are sinners (Rom. 3:23; 1 John 1:8; 3:4-5), no man can be saved by law (Acts 13:39; Gal. 2:16; 3:11). If he could, ‘if righteousness comes through the law’ – that is, through a sinner keeping the law – ‘then Christ died in vain’ (Gal. 2:21)! But no sinner can be saved by law. The fault, however, is not with the law, for the law is ‘perfect’ (Ps. 19:7), ‘good’ (1 Tim. 1:8), ‘holy and just and good’ (Rom. 7:12). The fault is with man (Rom. 7:14; 8:3; Heb. 8:7-8). ‘If there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law [of God]’ (Gal. 3:21).

The law *itself* was a works covenant. It was not a case of the Jews turning a grace covenant into a works covenant! Even so, many Reformed teachers continue to insist the law *was* a (indeed, the) covenant of grace. To confuse the Mosaic covenant with the covenant of works – to deny it is the covenant of grace – is, so it is alleged, the most common error in interpreting the allegory! The ‘first covenant’ and ‘old covenant’ are said to refer, not to the

Mosaic covenant, but to the whole age between Adam's fall and Christ's [first] coming; the Mosaic covenant and Abrahamic covenant being one and the same.

This is quite wrong. In Galatians 4:21-25, Paul was speaking of two covenants – the old and the new (within the Abrahamic covenant). Those under the law are slaves, those under grace are saints. The two covenants, and those under them, are chalk and cheese. These two covenants cannot be the same covenant. 2 Corinthians 3:6-17, Galatians 3:10-29 and many other places, utterly refute it.

In fact, Reformed theologians themselves deep down – despite their seemingly confident assertions – have a real problem, a massive problem, an intractable problem, with the Mosaic covenant, and are guilty of double-speak. Some admit the Mosaic covenant certainly looks as though it is the covenant of works, but even so, they claim, it is, after all, the covenant of grace. But, reader, the law did not merely look like the law – it was the law; the word of God says so! Other Reformed teachers say the law was the covenant of grace 'more legally defined' at Sinai. But how can *grace* be 'legally defined', let alone '*more* legally defined'? Another writer wants it both ways. The law was the covenant of works – a 'modified' version of the Abrahamic covenant – but also a 'renewal' of the single covenant of grace spanning all time from Adam to the eternal state to come. Grace, law, gospel and curse all jumbled together, it seems! Some grace! Some muddle! There have been many versions of the theme. Some argue the point from the two givings of the law. The first, so they say, was a works covenant, whereas the second was as a rule to those who are in Christ.

Let Thomas Boston speak for them. (I quote from his republication – with extensive Notes – of Edward Fisher's *The Marrow Of Modern Divinity*. Let us ask Boston the question raised by Fisher: "Were the ten commandments, as they were delivered to [the Israelites] on Mount Sinai, the covenant of works or not?")

Boston replied:

As to this point, there are different sentiments among orthodox divines... It is evident to me that the covenant of grace was delivered

to the Israelites on Mt Sinai... But that the covenant of works was also... delivered to the Israelites on Mt Sinai, I cannot refuse.

And Fisher: ‘The covenant of grace and... the covenant of works... the ten commandments were the [substance] of both covenants’.

Boston again:

I conceive the two covenants to have been both delivered on Mt Sinai to the Israelites... [both] the covenant of grace... [and] the covenant of works... There is no confounding of the two covenants of grace and works... According to this account of the Sinai transaction, the ten commands, there delivered, must come under a twofold notion or consideration; namely, as the law of Christ, and as the law of works... The transaction at Sinai... was a mixed dispensation; there was the promise or covenant of grace, and also the law; the one a covenant to be believed, the other a covenant to be done.

But, of course, as Fisher noted: ‘The Lord never delivers the covenant of works to any that are under the covenant of grace’, to which he himself replied: ‘Indeed it is true’, but...! Boston himself ‘answered’ the question: Since God gave the commandments twice on Sinai, this means it ‘is not strange’ that the ten commandments fulfil these two contradictory roles. Even so, Boston realised he was clutching at straws: ‘Whether or not... some such thing is intimated, by the double accentuation of the decalogue, let the learned determine’.²⁸

Reader, learned or not, can you ‘determine’ what Boston was on about? If you are a Reformed believer, which covenant are you under? As you know, according to your teachers and your Confessions, you are under the law – but are you under it as the covenant of works or the covenant of grace? Are you under the law as given to Moses the first time, or the second? Do you know? Does it matter? Where does the New Testament talk like this?

²⁸ Edward Fisher: *The Marrow of Modern Divinity: in two parts. Part I. The Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace. Part II. An Exposition of the Ten Commandments*, with notes by Thomas Boston, Still Waters Revival Books, Edmonton, Canada, reprint edition 1991 pp53-59,76-77.

Boston again:

The law of works is the law [which is to] be done, that one may be saved [whereas]... the law of Christ is the law of the Saviour, binding his saved people to all the duties of obedience... [Yet] the law of works, and the law of Christ, are in substance but one law, even the ten commandments... [There is] a difference [however]... between the ten commandments as coming from an absolute God out of Christ to sinners, and the same ten commandments as coming from God in Christ to them. [But it is] utterly groundless [to say] that the original indispensable obligation of the law of the ten commandments is in any measure weakened by the believer's taking it as the law of Christ, and not as the law of works. [The ten commandments as the law of works come] from... God... out of Christ, [while the ten commandments as the law of Christ come] from God in Christ. The law of the ten commandments, [remaining the same throughout, issued by the same God, was first] the natural law... written on Adam's heart on his creation, while as yet it was neither the law of works nor the law of Christ... Then it became the law of works... The natural law of the ten commandments (which can never expire... but is obligatory in all possible states of the creature...) is, from the moment the law of works expires as to believers, issued forth to them [again]... in the channel of the covenant of grace... Thus it [now] becomes the law of Christ to them; of which law also the same ten commandments are likewise the [substance]... In the threatening of this law [the law of Christ, that is] there is no revenging wrath; and in the promises of it no proper conditionality of works; but here is the order of the covenant of grace... Thus the ten commandments stand, both in the law of works and in the law of Christ at the same time... but as they are the [substance]... of the law of works, they are actually a part of the law of works; howbeit, as they are the [substance]... of the law of Christ, they are actually a part, not of the law of works, but the law of Christ. And as they stand in the law of Christ... they ought to be a rule of life to a believer... they ought [not, however] to be a rule of life to a believer, as they stand in the law of works.²⁹

Schizophrenic nonsense!

But what about Hebrews 8:13 and 9:15? Do these passages have any bearing on the so-called covenant of works said to be

²⁹ Fisher pp24-27,155-171. Incidentally, Boston made a mistake which is all too common. The believer has died to the law; the law has not died or, to use his word, 'expired', to the believer.

given to Adam? Certainly not! When God says he has made ‘a new covenant’, and thus, as the writer immediately adds by way of deduction and explanation, ‘he has made the first obsolete’ (Heb. 8:13), it does not mean that after Adam fell, God instituted a ‘new covenant of grace’ with him. The writer to the Hebrews was not talking about Adam at all! There is not the remotest possibility of it! Why, he does not even mention Adam in his entire letter! And in Hebrews 8:13, he was not saying that an old covenant with Adam was replaced by a new covenant with Adam. Nor was he declaring that an old covenant with Adam was replaced by a new covenant with Moses. Nor was he saying that an old covenant of grace was replaced by a new covenant of grace. When the writer to the Hebrews spoke of the old covenant, the first covenant which was made old and replaced, he was referring not to Adam and Eden, but to Moses and Sinai. And when speaking of the new covenant, that altogether different covenant, he was not referring to Moses and Sinai, but to Christ and Calvary. He was asserting that the old covenant of Moses – the law – given at Sinai, has been replaced by the new covenant – a grace covenant – made by Christ on Calvary. This is the simple, undeniable and stubborn (and glorious) fact about Hebrews 8:13. The entire context of Hebrews is incontestable proof of it.

The Puritans, the masters of (or mastered by) covenant theology, certainly showed confusion over all this. They simply could not agree as to what the New Testament means when it refers to the first and second covenants, the old and new covenants. They could not agree as to, in their terms, how many covenants of grace there are. In particular, some said the Mosaic covenant was the covenant of works. Others thought it subservient to the covenant of grace. Others, a mixed covenant of works and grace.³⁰ Yet others, the majority, thought it was the covenant of grace. And since the Puritans played (and are still playing) such an important role in this debate on the law in general, and covenant theology in particular, this obvious flaw

³⁰ How that can be reconciled with the apostle’s declaration baffles me: ‘And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work’ (Rom. 11:6).

and glaring confusion which lies at the very foundation of their case should give their earnest advocates pause for thought. As covenant theologians have to admit, such divisions and differences of interpretation are ‘discouraging’; and so they must be – for those who want to follow the Puritans in their views on the law. Perhaps the edifice Reformed teachers have erected, though outwardly very impressive, might in fact be totally unstable right from the start? Shaky foundations, it seems to me.

Covenant theology is confused – right at its heart. Is the Mosaic covenant the covenant of grace or works, neither or both, or one looking like the other? Is it all to do with the two givings of the law? Is it all a Jewish misunderstanding? Or what? This much is clear: Reformed theologians are able, apparently, to live with this tangle of illogicality, and they seem more-than happy to castigate those (the Jews in their time, and now, me and others like me) who cannot. The truth is, of course, their logic, and its conundrums, are not found in the covenant of Sinai, and have nothing to do with the Jews, but are entirely the province of covenant theologians themselves.

Let me give just one example of the sort of thing I am talking about. Listen to Boston:

The unbelieving Israelites were under the covenant of grace made with their father Abraham externally... but under the covenant of works made with their father Adam internally... Further, as to believers among them, they were internally... as well as externally, under the covenant of grace; and only externally under the covenant of works, and that, not as a covenant coordinate with, but subordinate and subservient to, the covenant of grace.³¹

So said Boston. Did you get it, reader? Did you get it when you re-read it? Do you think you will ever really get it? I wonder if Boston got it?

The consequences did not stop with Israel, of course. Every adherent of covenant theology today has to sort out such matters – that is, if they want to be sure about how they and their offspring stand. Are their infant children in the covenant of grace or works? If they are in the covenant of grace, are they in it

³¹ Fisher p54.

externally? Or internally? I know from sad experience how an unbeliever can rebuff the call of the gospel, and push aside its warnings, by saying he is (or his father was) ‘in the covenant’. I wonder, however, does such an unbeliever know which covenant he is talking about?

The question remains, according to Reformed theologians, was the Mosaic covenant the covenant of grace, or of works, or of grace looking like works, or... what? Since it is fundamental to covenant theology, we have a right to know, surely! Reader, I think I have provided evidence³² enough to justify my claim: Reformed theologians are divided and confused over the Mosaic covenant. Some think it was the covenant of grace. Some think it was the covenant of works. Some think it was both. Some think it was the covenant of grace looking like the covenant of works. In short, there is no such thing as *the* Reformed view of the Mosaic covenant. They simply cannot tell. As I have observed, this would not matter so much, but according to their own statements, the covenant of works is pivotal to their system. If so, and if *they* cannot decide whether or not the law is the covenant of works, what confidence should others place in their arguments on the believer and the law?

Of far greater importance, what does Scripture say about the Mosaic covenant? Was the law a works covenant? Note, I did not say ‘the covenant of works’. I hope I have said enough to make it plain that it was nothing to do with Adam and the Reformed notion of *the* covenant of works. The answer is, of course, the law *was* a works covenant. After all, the Bible speaks of ‘the works [or deeds] of the law’ (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 2:16; 3:2,5). But there are two principal passages which prove the point. I refer to Romans 10:5-6, and Galatians 4:4-5. This last I regard as the clinching argument.

³² I am referring here to the extensive extracts given in my *Christ*. Some readers may well be astonished to read what men, with (Reformed) household names, published by top Reformed publishing houses, have been prepared to write.

Proof that the law was a works covenant: 1. Romans 10:5-6

Let me quote the verses: ‘Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law: “The man who does those things shall live by them”. But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way...’.

Paul speaks of two ways of attaining righteousness – ‘the righteousness which is of *the law*’, and ‘the righteousness of *faith*’. But the apostle more than *speaks* of two ways. He *contrasts* them: ‘The righteousness which is of the law... *but* the righteousness of faith’. Moreover, Paul contrasts them very strongly. In truth, he opposes them. Justification by law, by works, he sets against justification by grace, through faith. Thus it is clear, the law is a works covenant, opposed to grace.

All this is to do with justification. I quite accept the fact. I go further. It is essential for what I want to say. On the question of justification, law and faith (grace) are contrasted. I stress this once again, even though it is obvious, and for the same reason as before; namely, some teachers want us to believe that law and grace go hand in hand. As a matter of fact, some of them, it seems to me, see hardly any difference between the two; and some say they are one and the same. Clearly they are not!

But there is an even bigger point to be made. To which law was Paul referring? The passage, of course, has very close links with Galatians 3:12. Paul quoted Leviticus 18:5 in both places. ‘The law’ in question, therefore, is the Mosaic law. The upshot? The law of Moses was a works covenant. The law of Moses, I stress. All of it.

This is not the only place where justification is linked with obedience to the law: ‘The doers of the law will be justified’ (Rom. 2:13). True, because of sin, ‘the commandment, which was to bring life’, brought ‘death’ (Rom. 7:10),³³ cursing those under it (Gal. 3:10,13), and ‘therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified’ (Rom. 3:20). Consequently, ‘a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ... No

³³ And the law was made only for sinners (1 Tim. 1:9) – sinners before and after their receiving the law. Israel certainly proved it (Deut. 4:1 – 6:25; Neh. 9:13-37; Ezek. 20:11-44; Rom. 9:30 – 10:5).

one is justified by the law... the law is not of faith' (Gal. 2:16; 3:11-12).³⁴ Yes, all this is true. *But the fact that Paul needed to say it shows that perfect obedience would have earned salvation.* Paul would never have needed to make such statements, nor written Romans 4:1-5, Ephesians 2:8-10 or Philippians 3:9, if law and justification had not been linked.³⁵ The law required works, which if accomplished, would have earned salvation. Note the connection between the law, the doing of the law – note the various 'doing' words, such as *practice, do, obey, deeds, works, keep* – and life, eternal life, in Leviticus 18:5; Ezekiel 20:11,13; Matthew 19:16-17; Luke 10:25-28; 18:18-20; Romans 2:13,17-25; 10:5-10, for instance.

The law, if kept perfectly, would have merited salvation. Indeed, in one case, the law *was* kept and justification *was* earned – by Christ for his people (Gal. 4:4-5). If perfect law-keeping could not have brought righteousness, then Christ could never have earned salvation for his people through the law (Gal. 4:4-5). This is the 'bigger point' I noted a moment ago. The man Christ Jesus, and only the man Christ Jesus, has attained life by keeping the law. *This* is the point. Perfect obedience to the law brought the reward, because the law demanded works, and promised righteousness for obedience. It is the core of Paul's argument in Romans 4:4; 11:6. The principle applies precisely in Christ's case (Gal. 4:4-5). Christ coming under the law amounts to far more than saying Jesus was a Jew. Of course, 'born under the law' does mean that Jesus was a Jew, but it means far more than that. When

³⁴ See Ps. 143:2; Gal. 3:21. But the fact that no sinner could keep the law has no bearing on the issue. The fact remains: perfect obedience would have brought righteousness. Indeed, if Reformed teachers push the point, I would observe how once again they destroy their case by inadvertently exposing yet another difference between law and grace. The law could not bring salvation for any sinner without exception, but grace brings salvation for all the elect without exception! And, of course, the way of salvation has *always* been by faith: 'The just shall live by faith' was first stated in the Old Testament, and thereafter quoted in the New (Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38).

³⁵ I admit the principle is of wider application than the law, but Rom. 4 comes immediately after Rom. 2 and 3; Eph. 2:11-18 after Eph. 2:8-10; Phil. 3:9 is explicit; as is Rom. 4:13-16.

combined with the following verse, the purpose of Christ's coming, and his being under the law, is spelled out: Christ came to set elect Jews (and Gentiles) free from being confined and condemned under the law, 'to redeem those who were under the law' (Gal. 4:5). Nor must we forget, Paul has already told us that Christ bore the curse of the law in his death (Gal. 3:13). The curse of the law, I repeat, the curse of the entire Mosaic law!

In short, Romans 10:5-6 proves that the law was a works covenant.

Reference to Galatians 4 leads me on to what I have called 'the clinching passage' to prove that the law was a works covenant. Before I come to that, however, let me repeat what I said at the start. I realise this article is involved and difficult. At the risk of being wearisome, let me pause to explain, once again, what I am trying to do. In face of Reformed opposition, I am trying to show that the law was a works covenant. It was not the gospel. To this end, I am providing evidence to support my claim that the law promised the Jews justification for perfect obedience. And it really did promise justification. It was not a figment of Jewish imagination (though, of course, justification by the law was in practice not possible to fallen man – no sinner can keep the law perfectly).³⁶ Perfect obedience to the law would merit justification. That is what the Bible teaches. And this establishes that the law was a works covenant. It was not the gospel. All this has considerable bearing on the way Reformed theology speaks of 'the covenant of works', and what part the law plays in that covenant, itself a pillar of covenant theology, which in turn leads to the idea that sanctification is by the law. And this is why I am tackling it here. Many Puritans, however, were in a muddle over this. Even though they could argue that Christ earned and merited and worked righteousness for his people by keeping the law and dying under the curse of God, they also argued that justification could not come by the law. This is true, of course, in the sense that nobody, but Christ, could or did keep it, but the fact is, *perfect obedience to the law would have brought justification.*

³⁶ Nor is it a figment of (some) Reformed imagination, contrary to advocates of the New Perspective. Perfect obedience to the law would merit justification.

Indeed, Christ's perfect obedience *did* earn righteousness for all his people. Not all Reformed writers give Romans 7:10 its proper weight. Indeed, not all Reformed writers refer to the verse or even quote it in their books on the law. This is very odd, or worse, since at first glance it has something to say in contradiction of the Reformed claim that the law was a grace covenant.

Now for 'the clinching passage'.

Proof that the law was a works covenant: 2. Galatians 4:4-5

Let me quote the verses:

When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law.

Let us begin by reminding ourselves that a sinner is justified by faith without the works of the law:

Now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed... even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ... Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law (Rom. 3:21-22,28).

As I have shown above, however, perfect obedience to the law would bring justification; but it would have to be perfect! If a man offends in one point, he brings the entire system crashing about his ears (Jas. 2:10-11). Paul felt the sting of his breaking the tenth commandment – but in the breaking of the tenth, he broke all the law (Rom. 7:7-12). Perfect obedience, in all points, at every turn, is required!

A sinner, therefore, who seeks justification 'by the works of the law' (Rom. 9:32), is attempting an utter impossibility. *But Jesus Christ, the sinless one, could and did keep the law, and thus establish righteousness for the elect!* As a consequence, justifying righteousness, accomplished by the works of Christ, is imputed to the sinner through faith without his works:

To him who does not work but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness... There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not

walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: he condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Rom. 4:5; 8:1-4).

God's law demanded works; Christ provided them. The law demanded perfection; Christ provided it. The law demanded atonement by blood (Heb. 9:22); Christ died as a sin offering under the law, shedding his blood on the cross (Rom. 3:25; 4:25; 8:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13). 'By one man's obedience many will be made righteous' (Rom. 5:19). This is what enabled Paul to exclaim: 'We establish the law' (Rom. 3:31).³⁷ And this is the teaching of Galatians 4:4-5.

God sent Christ his Son into the world to redeem those who were under the law. Consequently, the Lord Jesus came as a man (John 1:14), to redeem men (Heb. 2:14). But not only did the Son of God become human. He became a Jew – which meant he was born under the law – born, 'taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men' so that he might be 'obedient to... death, even the death of the cross' (Phil. 2:6-8), 'having become a curse for us', cursed by the law, so that he might redeem us from it (Gal. 3:13). What law is this? The same law as throughout Galatians 3, of course. Let me summarise the position: Christ was born under the very law which the Jews were under prior to the coming of Christ; that is, the Mosaic law. And Christ, by keeping that law, and suffering the curse of that law, redeemed the elect who were under it. In other words, Christ accomplished salvation by works. By the works of the law, he earned it.

This can only mean that the law was a works covenant. If not, how did Christ redeem those under the law by going under the law? Would Reformed teachers say Christ was born under what they call the covenant of grace? Was he cursed by the covenant of

³⁷ What is more, the grace of God in the gospel inevitably moves the believer to sanctification; that is, obedience to all God's revelation – thus honouring God in his entire word, including the law.

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grace? Some try to avoid this by saying the curse is to do only with the ceremonial law. This distinction is without biblical warrant, as I will show. But allowing the distinction for sake of argument, is the curse attached to this so-called ceremonial law, or to the law itself? Was Christ made under, and cursed under, the ceremonial law only? Of course not!

Christ came into the world, born a Jew under the law, a works covenant, in order to earn, work, deserve and merit salvation for his people. Did he *earn* it by *works* under a *grace* covenant? The answer is self-evident. The believer's righteousness is an earned righteousness, earned by Christ, earned by keeping the law, earned by suffering under the law, *but only if the law is a works covenant*. Which it is! Of course, no sinner could keep the law and so earn salvation. As Horatius Bonar put it:

*Not what these hands have done
Can save this guilty soul;
Not what this toiling flesh has borne
Can make my spirit whole.*

*Not what I feel or do
Can give me peace with God;
Not all my prayers, and sighs, and tears
Can bear my awful load.*

But Christ could and did, and there the believer rests his soul for ever:

*On merit not my own I stand;
On doings which I have not done,
Merit beyond what I can claim,
Doings more³⁸ perfect than my own.*

*Upon a life I have not lived,
Upon a death I did not die,
Another's life, another's death,
I stake my whole eternity.³⁹*

³⁸ I take this to be poetic licence. Nothing can be *more* perfect! In this matter, how could God accept anything less than *perfect* obedience under the law? What commandment did Christ not keep? What shadow of himself did he not fulfil? What penalty did he not suffer?

Believers are justified by resting on this finished work of Christ (John 19:30), the one who did all the doing which the holy God required under his law. As a result: ‘Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes’ (Rom. 10:4).

‘What must I do to be saved?’ is the question. As we have seen: ‘Work’, the law thunders. ‘Keep me perfectly’. What does the gospel say? ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved’ (Acts 16:30-31). ‘Trust the Redeemer, who, under the law, by his works, earned salvation (see Gal. 4:4)’. If the law was not a works covenant... bang goes our salvation!

Think of the precious promise John gives to all believers: ‘If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness’ (1 John 1:9). It is, I say, precious. But it is more. It is truly amazing, staggering. One would expect John to have said something like: ‘If we confess our sins, [God] is kind, merciful, loving to forgive us our sins’. But he did not say that! Rather, he spoke of God’s faithfulness and justice. Why did he say that God is *‘faithful and just* to forgive us our sins’? Faithful? Just? The answer is, of course, God *is* faithful and just to forgive us; he is not only *kind* to forgive us. It is his faithfulness and justice which *demand and ensure* forgiveness. Why? Because Christ has earned it, because Christ has merited it. In that great, eternal agreement, of which I spoke at the beginning of this article, God demanded obedience, promising life for that perfect obedience. ‘Do and live’ was the essence of God’s commandment and promise (Lev. 18:5; Rom. 7:10; 10:4-6; Gal. 3:12). It is impossible for God to affirm black is white. He cannot acquit the wicked: ‘I will not justify the wicked’ (Ex. 23:7; Nah. 1:3). To do so would be to break his own law: ‘He who justifies the wicked... [is] an abomination to the LORD’ (Prov. 17:15). *But he must justify the righteous!* Just as he cannot justify the wicked, so he must justify the righteous. He can only justify on the basis of righteousness, however, on the basis of work, on the basis of merit, on the basis of perfect obedience. And all this Christ freely accepted in that agreement

³⁹ Both hymns by Horatius Bonar. Some versions have: ‘Upon a life I did not live’. Horatius Bonar entitled the hymn: ‘Christ for us’. As he put it in his hymn, ‘Complete in him’: ‘He [Christ] did the work!’.

made within the Godhead in eternity past. And so, in time, at the appointed time, having come into the world, having been made under the law, Christ died under the law in order to accomplish this eternal purpose of God.

Christ said: ‘Do not think that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled’ (Matt. 5:17-18). Let me emphasise this. Christ did not come to destroy the law or the prophets; that is, ‘to invalidate, to represent as of no authority, or of diminished authority, those former revelations of the divine will’. In addition to not ‘invalidating’ the law, Christ did not destroy it, demolish it, dismantle it, or repeal it for the law now plays the role of a paradigm in the believer’s sanctification.⁴⁰ Rather, speaking of the law in particular, Christ came to fulfil it; that is, he came in order to obey it to the full, and complete it.⁴¹ This he did to the letter, to the jot and to the tittle! And in keeping this works covenant in its entirety, he merited the everlasting salvation of all his people.

‘Wait a moment’, says an objector. ‘Look at Romans 4:5: “[God] who justifies the ungodly”. How can this be reconciled with what you have just said? You have been arguing that justification under the law comes by works. How, then, can God justify the ungodly, since no ungodly person can produce the necessary law-works?’ What is the answer, the explanation? Just

⁴⁰ Note that Christ fulfilled both the law and the prophets, which means, of course, that we must now regard the law in the same way as we regard the prophecies of Christ’s first coming.

⁴¹ It will not do to try to limit Matt. 5:17-18 to ‘the moral law’. Christ came to fulfil and abrogate the law of Moses – the law of Moses entirely – not some artificially designated subsection of the law. The law was both temporary and typical. From Gal. 3:19,25; Eph. 2:14-15; Col. 2:14, it is clear that the law, having served its purpose, ceased. The word ‘fulfil’ means ‘complete’, ‘fill up’, ‘perfect’. Christ came to complete divine revelation, carry it forward. So much so, the law, the entire law, having served its purpose, ceased to be of obligation. As a system, it passed away in its entirety. That ‘middle wall of partition’ was completely taken down. Christ brought the law to its maturity as it found its realisation in him.

this: Romans 4:5 is speaking about justification under the gospel, not the law. And *this* is the gospel: Christ came under the old covenant, and kept the law (Gal. 4:4-5), thus earning the salvation of the elect, earning it by his works. This is the principle that Christ came under: 'Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as [according to] grace but as debt' (Rom. 4:4). Christ obtained redemption for the elect, earning it, not by grace ('earn' and 'grace' are a contradiction in terms, Rom. 4:4; 11:6), but by his law-works, in order to grant it, by grace, to the elect upon their believing, that they might be 'justified freely by [God's] grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by his blood, through faith, to demonstrate his righteousness... that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus' (Rom. 3:24-26). In this way God 'justifies the ungodly'; that is, justifies 'him who does not work but believes on him who justifies the ungodly' (Rom. 4:5). He did this 'that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus' (Rom. 3:26). But this justification had to be earned by law work. Under the gospel, God justifies the sinner, who does not do the work, who cannot do the work, when the sinner trusts the Christ who, under the law, did the work.

Christ did all this in perfect obedience to the will of his Father. Christ came into the world with the express purpose of saving sinners (1 Tim. 1:15), in order to complete the work given him by the Father: 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to finish his work' (John 4:34). To the Jews, he said: 'I do not seek my own will but the will of the Father who sent me... I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me' (John 5:30; 6:38). He could speak of 'the works which the Father has given me to finish – the very works that I do' (John 5:36). These works included the miracles, yes, but, above all, they included the work of salvation. The Lord Jesus could say to the Father: 'I have finished the work which you have given me to do' (John 17:4). And, above all, his final shout of triumph on the cross: 'It is finished' (John 19:30); it is accomplished. This is the gospel – God's 'eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Eph. 3:11). In the person and work of Christ, God can declare: 'It pleased the

LORD for the sake of his righteousness to make his law great and glorious' (Isa. 42:21, NIV). Christ was born a Jew and lived under the Mosaic law (Luke 2:21-24,27,39; Gal. 4:4). He obeyed the Mosaic law (Matt. 8:4; 19:17-19). He was cursed under the law (Gal. 3:13). In all this, Christ established and magnified the law (Rom. 3:31). He honoured his Father in the law, and in so doing merited the salvation of his people. 'Amazing grace', indeed!

Thus, while forgiveness is an act of God's grace towards the sinner, it is based entirely and only upon the merit, the work, the obedience of Christ. God, therefore, *is* faithful and just to forgive the one who believes and confesses his sin. Why? Because if God did not, he would be unjust, he would be unfaithful. He would fail to keep his promise. Unthinkable! Impossible! Under the law, he promised life upon obedience. It was the will of God that Christ should come under the law, obey it, keep it and fulfil it (Matt. 5:17-18). This demand Christ met. As a consequence, when the sinner cries out to God through faith in Christ, trusting the person, merit and work of Christ, God *must* forgive. Do not misunderstand me, reader, when I say *must*. Very near the start of this article, I reminded you that 'God, who cannot lie, promised before time began' (Tit. 1:2), promised the Son that he would justify all the elect on the basis of the Son's obedience. And since God has promised, he has tied himself to his word. And because he has tied himself to his promised word, God must keep his promise. 'He remains faithful; he cannot deny himself' (2 Tim. 2:13). This is the *must*. Under the law, he said: 'Do this and live'. Christ did the doing, and God keeps his promise.

All this proves that the law was a works covenant, a very different covenant to the new covenant. Not only that. It means that the two Testaments, though having a certain continuity, are discontinuous. In short, not only are Calvin's second and third uses of the law wrong, but so is the covenant theology on which those uses are defended and argued.

A few Reformed theologians have seen this. That covenant theology needs correction, modification, and explanation, even recasting, has been admitted by some Reformed teachers, John Murray for one. I would go further. Recasting? Rejecting, more

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like. Sadly, however, most Reformed theologians do not seem willing even to rethink or recast their covenant theology but have, instead, developed a system of escape routes to get round awkward passages of Scripture. To these escape routes I now turn...

That is, I turn to them in my *Christ Is All*.

Gadsby's Questions for Law Men

John Calvin set out three uses for the law of Moses. In particular, in his third use, Calvin alleged that the law is the believer's perfect rule of life, a whip to beat him into sanctification. According to the Reformer, the believer needs this whip because he is a lazy ass.

Millions of believers during the past 450 years have adopted Calvin's scheme. Many still do, even though most of them seem rather shy at using the most severe of Calvin's terms. Many more, even though they do not realise it, have been affected by Calvin, and are what I call 'incipient' law-men, 'recipe preachers'.

As a result, most believers are reared on a diet of law, either overt or incipient. Sadly, this brings many of them into bondage, fear and a lack of assurance, with a corresponding loss of joy in Christ. Those who argue Scripture to show that this is all wrong are usually dismissed by law men as antinomians.

William Gadsby, the first half of the 19th century, was one such to argue against the law being the believer's perfect rule. And, of course, he was duly lambasted for his pains. He responded in several works in which he wrote cogently on the biblical teaching concerning the believer and the law, thereby exposing the wrongness of Calvin's system. On one occasion, Gadsby replied to a critic by way of a series of questions. And it is those questions that I re-publish here.

Why do I re-publish Gadsby's questions now? Because, I am glad to say, there has been a resurgence of biblical teaching on the law. Although I am only a very small cog in this large engine, in company with a growing number of other teachers I am doing all I can to set out the freeness of the grace of God in Christ.¹ Naturally, this world-wide explosion of new-covenant teaching has aroused Calvin's advocates, and they are retaliating by bringing out all their old well-worn criticisms. In light of this, it

¹ My largest contribution thus far is my *Christ*. But there are several works. All may be found under David H J Gay both on Amazon and in Kindle (as well as on sermonaudio.com).

occurred to me that Gadsby might speak again, and speak with profit to a new generation. Hence this re-publication.

For William Gadsby's questions need to be faced by all who advocate the law as the perfect rule of life for the believer, the rule by which he is to be sanctified. When these teachers talk about 'law', however, they nearly always try to restrict it to the ten commandments, which they are pleased to call 'the moral law'. This stems from Thomas Aquinas. It has no scriptural warrant whatsoever. Nevertheless, for the sake of this article, I allow their terminology: they advocate sanctification by the law, calling it the believer's perfect rule of life.

As I say, Gadsby disagreed with Calvin and all who wanted to bring the believer under the law. He put his questions to a critic. Well, I, too, disagree with Calvin, and so, in re-publishing Gadsby's questions,² I respectfully ask all who think the believer *is* under the law for sanctification to face these questions and answer them. After all, to pose such questions – and to face and answer them – is to act entirely within the spirit of Acts 17:11: 'The Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true' (Acts 17:11, NIV). In this regard, I ask all who read my work: be a Berean and not a Thessalonian.

Gadsby's questions

Gadsby wrote to his critic, asking the following questions:

1. If the law is the believer's rule of life, I shall thank you to tell me what is intended by the letter written by the apostles and elders, and sent to the believing Gentiles, as recorded in Acts 15, and shall expect you to explain the chapter.
2. I hope you will tell me what the apostle means in the first six verses of Romans 7, where he says that the believer is dead to the law, and free from the law; and let me know how that law can be

² I have taken Gadsby's questions from my *Christ* pp519-520, slightly edited for this publication. In my *Christ*, I have included much more invaluable material from Gadsby on this subject.

his rule, when he is dead to it, and as free from it, as a woman is from her husband when she has him buried. Should you be disposed to say that the believer is dead to it as a COVENANT, but not as a RULE of life, you will no doubt, point to those scriptures which make a distinction between the law as a covenant and as a rule of life; for unless you do this, you will not move me.

3. You will have the goodness to inform me what is intended by the first four verses of Romans 8; and let me know how it comes to pass that the law of the Spirit of life in Christ has made me free from the law of death, and yet that law of death (called in other places the killing letter [Rom. 7:5; 2 Cor. 3:6-7,9]) is my rule of life; and how it is that it is my rule of life after it has killed me, and I am made free from it.

4. You will read 2 Corinthians 3, and let me know how it is that administration of death, written and engraven on stones, is the living man's rule of life, and how this can be consistent with what the apostle observes in verse 11, where he says 'it is done away', and in verse 13, where he says, 'it is abolished'. Now, my dear sir, you are to tell me how that law which is done away with and abolished still remains the believer's perfect rule of life.

5. [I have omitted this question].³

6. You will inform me how it is that if we are led by the Spirit we are not under the law, and yet that law is a perfect rule of life to that man who is led by the Spirit (Gal. 5:18). There are many things in the letter to the Galatians which you will find worthy of your attention in this business. I hope you will read the whole.

³ Here is Gadsby's question: 'You will also show me how it is that the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that when faith is come we are no longer under a schoolmaster, and yet that this schoolmaster is [alleged by the law men to be] our only rule of life after faith is come (Gal. 3:24-25)'. As I made clear in my *Christ* pp51-61,127-140,348-358,420-430, I disagree with Gadsby's preparationist view of Gal. 3:24-25, arising out of a mis-translation of the text. Nevertheless, Gal. 3:25 invincibly makes Gadsby's point.

Gadsby's Questions for Law Men

7. I shall expect you to tell me how it is that the handwriting which was against us, and contrary to us, is taken out of the way, and nailed to the cross (as Colossians 2:14), and yet remains a perfect rule of life. Should you be disposed to say that the ceremonial law is here intended,⁴ you will tell me how that law, which was the gospel in its day,⁵ came to be against the believer, and what there was in it contrary to him.

8. You will sure to inform me how it is that the law which was not made for a righteous man is the righteous man's rule (1 Tim. 1:9).

9. As Christ was made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law (as in Galatians 4:4-5), you will say how it comes to pass that they still remain under it in any sense that Christ was made under it, seeing he was made under it to redeem them from under it.

10. But as whatsoever the law says, it says to them who are under the law (as Romans 3:19), and as the believer is not under the law (as Romans 6:14; Galatians 5:18), you will inform me what the law says to them who are not under it.

11. If the law contains the whole of the revealed will of God, as to the matter of obedience...,⁶ you will let me know upon what ground you prove that unbelievers have no right to be baptised, and partake of the Lord's supper...

12. You will inform me how it is that while men contend for the law being a perfect rule of life to believers, and [use] ill names [to describe those] who do not, [many of them who do contend for the law being a perfect rule] can and do, openly, knowingly, and

⁴ I do not accept Gadsby's terminology: 'the ceremonial law'. There is no *scriptural* warrant for the threefold division of the law. See my *Christ* pp100-104,392-400.

⁵ That is, in the old covenant, the law (and the prophets) pointed the Jews to Christ in the new.

⁶ That is, if the law really is the believer's perfect rule, it must contain all the revealed will of God, all that the believer needs to know about everything to do with the Christian life. This is self-evidently false.

designedly, break the fourth commandment every week. You will inform me whether doing *every* sort of work on the seventh day is walking according to that rule which says: 'You shall not do *any* work, no, not so much as to kindle a fire' (Ex. 35:3).⁷

13. You will inform me how it is that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believes (Rom. 10:4), and yet that the believer, who is got to the end of the law (namely, by faith in Christ), at once must come back again, and begin at the beginning, by taking it for a perfect rule of life.

Gadsby said he received no reply. Indeed, he found it necessary to correct false reports which his critic had circulated about him. Gadsby still received no satisfaction on the points he had raised. I do not intend to be patronising when I respectfully ask Gadsby's questions of any reader who feels I have gone astray in setting out the believer's rule in my *Christ is All*. May I ask that you act as Priscilla and Aquila, and explain to me 'the way of God more accurately' (Acts 18:26, NKJV), and do so from Scripture? I will be grateful.

⁷ Gadsby is referring to the hypocrisy of sabbatarians who profess the highest possible regard for the sabbath, and threaten the direst of punishments for sabbath-breaking (as the Mosaic law truly did), yet they, themselves, regularly and constantly break sabbath laws. Their excuses and tortuous reasonings to get round the law are often ludicrous. If the matter were not so serious, it would be highly amusing.

Questions for Sabbatarians

By 'sabbatarians', I mean those who say that believers are obliged to keep the fourth commandment, but that the day has been changed from the seventh to the first, calling it 'the Christian sabbath'.¹ To them, I say:

You insist that believers must keep the sabbath, but is it not true that:

1. Believers have died to the law (Rom. 7:4-6; Gal. 2:19-20)?
2. Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes (Rom. 10:4)?
3. Through Jesus Christ the law of the Spirit of life has set believers free from the law of death (Rom. 8:2), and this includes the ten commandments (2 Cor. 3:7-11)?
4. Whatever the law says, it says to them who are under the law (Rom. 3:19), and believers, being led by the Spirit (Rom. 8:9,14), are not under the law (Rom. 6:14-15; Gal. 5:18), but have been released from it (Rom. 7:6)?
5. The handwriting which was against believers, and contrary to them, Christ has taken away, and nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14)?
6. The law is not of faith (Gal. 3:12)?
7. The law has been rendered obsolete, and been abolished by Christ (Eph. 2:14-15; Heb. 7:18-19; 8:13)?
8. Believers are expressly forbidden to listen to those who insist on burdening them with a yoke of slavery (Gal. 2:4; 5:1), and the law is that unbearable yoke of bondage (Acts 15:10)?
9. Believers are members of the new covenant, of the Spirit, and not the letter (2 Cor. 3:6)?

¹ Most of what follows, of course, is relevant to those who are more consistent and say the day is unchanged.

Questions for Sabbatarians

10. The law is not made for a righteous man (1 Tim. 1:9)?
11. The apostle spoke strongly against the observance of days, including 'sabbaths' (or, as it should be, 'sabbath') (Rom. 14:5-12; Gal. 4:10; Col. 2:16-17)?
12. The sabbath was given to Israel in the old covenant as their special distinguishing mark, separating Israel from all other peoples (Ex. 31:12-17; Ezek. 20:12,20), and believers (most of whom are Gentiles) are in the new covenant, which covenant is superior, being founded on better promises (2 Cor. 3:6; Heb. 7:22; 8:6)?

If your answer (in part) to these questions is that the 'seventh day' is 'ceremonial', and it is this which has been abolished by Christ, but 'one day in seven' is 'moral', and is, therefore, still binding, would you give me the scriptures that prove that the law can be divided into three sections, moral, ceremonial and judicial? Would you further give me the scriptures which prove that the 'seventh day' is 'ceremonial', while the 'one day in seven' is 'moral'? Indeed, would you give me the scriptures which speak of 'one day in seven'?

Furthermore:

Since Israel was often rebuked for sabbath breaking in the time of the old covenant, both directly (Neh. 13:15-22; Jer. 17:21-23; Ezek. 20:13-24; 22:8,26; *etc.*), and by implication (Isa. 56:2-6; 58:13; Jer. 17:27; *etc.*), if believers are obliged to keep the sabbath, why are there no similar examples in the new covenant?

Since there are many examples of apostolic instruction on a whole range of issues (family, children, work, the Lord's supper, *etc.*), if believers are obliged to keep the sabbath, why is there no corresponding instruction on sabbath keeping?

Why did the apostles and elders, when they wrote to believing Gentiles (Acts 15:23-29), fail to insist on sabbath keeping? I ask this for two reasons. (a) It was discussion of the law which prompted the letter. (b) Very serious consequences follow sabbath breaking (Ex. 31:14-15; 35:1-3; Num. 15:32-36).

Questions for Sabbatarians

If you plead ‘acts of necessity and mercy’ (in the spirit of Luke 13:15; 14:5), to justify your inevitable breaking of the sabbath, are you absolutely confident that, in every circumstance, the sort of things you feel free to do on what you call ‘the sabbath’, really are covered by ‘acts of necessity and mercy’, bearing in mind the sabbath strictures which are revealed in Scripture (Ex. 31:14-15; 35:1-3; Isa. 58:13; *etc.*)?

Who changed the sabbath from the seventh to the first day, and from sunset/sunset to midnight/midnight? Who was the first person to use the phrase: ‘the Christian sabbath’? Who first said that the Lord’s day (Sunday) is a day of rest?

While these questions are meant to be rhetorical, you are welcome to write to me in response if you wish.

The Invisible ‘But’ of John 1:17

The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

God gave Israel the law through Moses (John 7:19); and we know why: ‘The law entered that the offence might abound’ (Rom. 5:20). He also gave Israel the law to predict and foreshadow the coming of Christ and the new covenant (Deut. 18:15-18; Col. 2:16-17; Heb. 3:5; 8:5; 10:1). Then, in the fullness of time, God sent his Son into the world, born under the law (Mark 1:15; Gal. 4:4), in order to redeem those under the law; that is, to redeem the elect, adopt them as his sons and give them his Spirit as a witness (Gal. 4:5-6). In short: God sent grace into the world by his Son, Jesus Christ (John 1:14; Tit. 2:11-14). And we know why: ‘But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord’ (Rom. 5:20-21).¹

Paul did not leave it there. He went on to set out the glories of that reigning grace in Christ:

Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another – to him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter... There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: he condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit... As many as

¹ The original title of this article was ‘The “But” of John 1:17: Absent but Vital’.

The Invisible 'But' of John 1:17

are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out: 'Abba, Father'. The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ (Rom. 7:4-6; 8:1-4,14-17).

What a contrast, law and grace! What a contrast, Moses and Christ (Heb. 3:1-6)! And how wonderfully John shines the spotlight on the contrast: 'The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ' (John 1:17)! The translators did not use the word *but* for nothing in John 1:17. The apostle points to a very definite, clear, unmistakable contrast between law and grace.

He is not alone:

There is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness... There is the bringing in of a better hope... For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second... In that [God] says: 'A new covenant', he has made the first obsolete (Heb. 7:18-19; 8:7,13).

In short:

The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious... how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory (2 Cor. 3:6-9).²

Yet, despite all this weight of evidence, Reformed writers seldom give John 1:17 proper consideration in their works on the law. How sad this is! Worse, some have gone so far as to deny the apostle's contrast between law and grace! There is no contradiction between law and grace, so it is said. Even the *but* in John 1:17 has been dismissed as a delusion – a 'will o'the wisp'.³

How sad is this. How wrong!

² For more on all this, see my *Christ* pp113-115,409-411.

³ Are 2 Cor. 3:11; Heb. 7:18; 8:13 more of these 'will o'the wisps'?

The Invisible 'But' of John 1:17

True, there is no 'but' in the Greek,⁴ but this is far from conclusive. It is certainly there in spirit and by implication. In fact, the lack of the stated 'but' makes its presence even more felt. Its absence speaks louder than its (obvious) inclusion; the finesse in John's turn of phrase would have been blunted by the inclusion of the 'but'. Therefore, although precisely catching the spirit of John's words, our translators, in trying to help us more readily understand the apostle, by introducing the 'but', they have, in fact, taken some of the subtlety out of what he wrote. But whether in print, or in our head, the 'but' has to be understood.

Let me prove it. Take: 'God be thanked that *though* you were the slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered' (Rom. 6:17). To omit the *though* would be tantamount to making Paul say he was glad his readers had been the slaves of sin, when, in fact, he was thankful that *even though* they had been the slaves of sin, they had nevertheless obeyed the gospel. His argument hinges entirely on the *though*. If anybody dismisses the *though* as an English will o'the wisp, a mere technicality of the language, he virtually destroys what Paul actually said. Yet there is no 'though' in the Greek text! As with the 'but' in John 1:17, its absence speaks volumes.

Similarly: 'Though he was a Son, *yet* he learned obedience by the things which he suffered' (Heb. 5:8). The *yet* is supplied, it is not in the original Greek, but by no stretch of the imagination can it be dismissed as trivial. In fact, its inclusion emphasises the amazing nature of what is being said. It is the most important word in the verse, even though the writer did not use it. Though Jesus was the Son of God, *even so, staggeringly, even he, yet he – he of all people* – learned obedience by the things which he suffered.

A few more examples must suffice: 'Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath' (Rom. 12:19). The *rather* gives the proper emphasis, but it is not in the original. Again, try leaving out the second *must* in John 3:30, *his* in John 6:52 (*his* is vital – any butcher can provide meat, but how could

⁴ The NIV, strictly correct here, left it out.

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Jesus provide *his* own flesh for them to eat?), *as for* in John 9:29, *that is* in Ephesians 2:15, *rather* in 1 Timothy 4:7 (AV), *and escape* in 2 Timothy 2:26 (the verse becomes nonsense otherwise), *because* in 2 Timothy 4:3; and so on. None of these words are in the Greek!

Returning to John 1:17 – as I said, the *but* being left out, the verse is even more starkly powerful and blunt: ‘The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ’. In fact, we could – maybe, we should – use a full stop: ‘The law was given through Moses. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ’.

Clearly, however, a word or phrase is implied in the text, and has to be supplied. Reader, you may use *but*, or *whereas*, or *on the other hand*, or *in contrast*. You choose!

In addition, the context of John 1:17 demands the contrast. Read John 1:8,11-13,20. Above all, read John 1:18. There is no *but*, literally, in between the two sentences: ‘No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him’. Notwithstanding the lack of ‘*but*’, who would not agree that John here draws a remarkable contrast? In the past age – the age of law – God did not show his glory as now he has in the age of the gospel. Do not miss the eschatological ‘*but now*’ of Romans 3:21 once again.⁵

Let me take another passage of Scripture to underline the point. I refer to Hebrews 9. The inspired writer, opening the chapter with an exposition of the first or old covenant, soon sounds the note of its uselessness to cleanse the conscience (Heb. 9:1-10). ‘It was symbolic... imposed until the time of reformation’ (Heb. 9:9-10), ‘an illustration... applying until the time of the new order’ (NIV). What was this new order, this ‘reformation’? It was the coming of Christ, the gospel. How does the writer to the Hebrews state this fact? ‘*But Christ came*’, he said (Heb. 9:11), ‘*when Christ came*’ (NIV). These words should not be mumbled. They should be thundered: ‘**But Christ came!**’ ‘**When Christ came!**’ And the NIV caught the dramatic, stupendous sense of change at this watershed of the ages,

⁵ See my *Christ* pp76-79,378-379.

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exquisitely grasping the point of the 'now' in Hebrews 9:15: 'Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance – *now* that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant'. Once again, it is the eschatological 'but now', the great turning point of the ages. The shadow has gone, the reality has come. The external is finished, the inward is established. The weak is displaced by the mighty. The useless has been abolished by the effectual. It is John 1:17.

It is wrong to say that the gospel is a *clearer* way of salvation than the law. It is a *different* way, chalk and cheese! It will not do to say that John 1:17 *seems* to speak of the inferiority of the law when compared to the gospel. It does no such thing. The verse teaches that law and grace are very different things, two ages which are strongly contrasted. There is a distinction – more, an antithesis, an opposition, a contradiction – between the two, even as some Reformed writers admit, on occasion at great length.

Many Reformed commentators, however, are weak on the verse, or use their escape routes to say John was speaking about justification only, or about the ceremonial law. Furthermore, they are not averse to trying to uphold their system – that is, an excessive emphasis upon the continuity of the Testaments – by qualifying John, adding the proviso that, while, of course, the law *was* given through Moses, and grace and truth on the other hand *did come* by Jesus Christ, nevertheless, Moses brought some grace, and, in any case, believers are still under the moral law as a perfect rule of life.

John, of course, said nothing of the sort. What he said was: 'The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ'. And the verse says what it means, and means what it says to the reader of plain English. And it is full of contrast.

As I have said, by leaving out the 'but' John makes his point even stronger: 'The law was given through Moses. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ'. Leaving out the 'but' actually lays more stress on the *grace*, and emphasises the contrast between that and *law*. It lays more stress on the *came*, and emphasises the contrast between that and the *given*. It lays more

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stress on *Jesus Christ*, and emphasises the contrast between him and *Moses*:

The **law** was **given** through **Moses**
Grace and truth **came** through **Jesus Christ**

What is more, from John 1:17 we learn that whereas the law *was given through* Moses, Christ *brought* grace. Note the passive/active contrast. Note the contrast between *given* and *brought*. Above all, it is not simply that Moses *received* one thing, and Christ *brought* something else. Both Moses and Christ are associated with covenants, but the difference between their covenants is vast. Moses was given *the law*; Christ brought *grace*. Moses was given *God's* law; Christ brought *his own* grace. Moses was given the old covenant; Christ brought the new. Moses' covenant was written on stone; Christ's is written in the heart. It is not just that Christ gives his people the gospel, and Moses gave the Jews the law. Christ gives his people *grace*, he gives his people a *heart* to love his gospel, but Moses could offer no power to keep the law. This contrast of covenants is a major aspect of the debate on the believer, the law and sanctification.

Small as John 1:17 may appear to be, it plays a vital role in the question of the believer and the law. Any work which fails to take proper account of what it teaches, can hardly be considered a serious attempt to get to grips with the biblical evidence on the subject.

The Law and the Confessions

Introduction

Let me make myself clear right at the start. I do not publish this article because I regard any Confession as the authority for what I believe: that prerogative belongs solely to Scripture. Sadly, many believers do look upon one or other of the 17th century Confessions as the touchstone of orthodoxy – almost on a par with Scripture itself. I do not! Some even preach the Confession! And that includes Reformed Baptists as well as Presbyterians. I think all such practice is quite wrong and ought to be stopped. Let me hasten to add that I think the faith can be defined, and every man should be able to declare what he believes. Yes, indeed! But the notion that any body of men can set down and define the faith for all time for all believers is quite ridiculous, is it not? If the 17th century men thought they could do it, were they not being foolish as well as arrogant? And if people today think that such a body of men really did define the faith in that way – well, words fail! Just in case it needs saying: I fully accept that ‘the faith... was once for all entrusted to the saints’, and that we must ‘contend for’ it (Jude 3), but that’s a far cry from saying that ‘the faith’ has been once and for all defined by any Confession. I’m firmly with John Robinson on this. Addressing those sailing from Delfthaven in 1620, he told them bluntly: many stop where Luther and Calvin left them – good men, both of them – but God has more light to break out of his word!

Nevertheless, as I say, not a few believers really do think that one or other of the Confessions has set out the faith – full stop! Many Presbyterians, for instance, think that way about the Westminster Confession; they really believe it covers everything, is set in concrete, and must not be touched, dare not be touched. The Gospel Standard Strict Baptists went so far as to enrol their 19th century Articles in Chancery, hoping thereby to ensure that they never could be changed. Recently, the denomination’s bluff has been called, and they have had to acknowledge that the whole thing has been a myth (as long ago as 1921, James Kidwell

Popham told them it was), even so they have come out fighting, stating that they never will change their Articles! Hence my point: a Confession becomes an inviolate, unquestionable, unalterable definition of the faith. I'm sorry to say that not a few Particular Baptists get close to it with their 1689 Confession!

There it is. In this article, therefore, I'm not in the least interested in perpetuating the notion that any Confession is the final word. In fact, I want to do something to put a stop to this icon-making and icon-polishing!

So much for the negative. What's my positive aim?

I am mainly concerned with the hotly-debated topic of the law. The law! What an important subject! However, having already fully argued the case – that the believer is not under the law of Moses – I hope that what I say here will be read in conjunction with what I have written about it elsewhere.¹

Sadly, many teachers continue to advocate John Calvin's system, and think that believers are under the law² for sanctification.³ And when these believers consult their Confession – the Westminster, the Savoy, or the Particular Baptist 1689, as maybe – they are bolstered in that belief.

I want to do what I can to help such believers. And they need help! This is no academic nicety! The truth is, many believers are locked in the old covenant under the law of Moses; that is, they think that although, as sinners, they have come to Christ (not the law) for justification, having come to Christ, they have to be taken back immediately to the law for sanctification – and much else, including assurance. It's heartbreaking! These believers are locked – imprisoned – in this grim condition. *I use the word 'imprisoned' advisedly; see Galatians 3:23; 4:2-3.* This tragic state affairs needs to be put right. Calvin and these great Confessions are grievously mistaken on this matter, and yet many have followed them into bondage under the law.

¹ *Christ, Four, Grace.*

² They usually restrict 'the law', without the slightest warrant, to the ten commandments, which they like to call 'the moral law'.

³ They also think that the law must be preached to sinners to 'prepare' them – make them 'fit' for – Christ!

Having, as I said, set out biblical teaching on this question (see the afore-mentioned books), I now want to address those Particular Baptists who only know of the 1689 Confession. I want them to know that not all the Particular Baptists in the 17th century were old-covenant men! Some Particular Baptists in those days knew that the New Testament is clear: believers are not under the law of Moses, but under the law of Christ. They were also convinced that we do not have to preach the law to sinners in order to prepare them for Christ. Though the religious climate all around them was hostile to their view of the law, these Particular Baptists did not buckle and fall in with majority. And when they drew up their Confession, they made their disagreement with the majority very clear.

I say all that because I know some Particular Baptists are coming to appreciate new-covenant theology – having been convinced of the truth by the Spirit through Scripture. Well, I want to encourage them in their stance against the tide, by bringing to their attention – or reminding them of – certain events which took place in the 17th century. Not, I repeat, because I think that what those men said in those far off days is the last word. Not at all! But just to show those who know only the 1689 Confession that there is more to be said on the matter.

The background

During the 1640s, England was passing through a time of great unrest and change, the antinomian controversy being one of the causes. As a consequence, Parliament summoned the Westminster Assembly in 1643 – one of its aims being to raise a bulwark against antinomianism. Hence the polemical tone of the Westminster documents, with their heavy emphasis on the law. In the event, the Assembly more than dealt with antinomianism; it over-reacted to it. And, much as Calvin allowed his reaction against the Anabaptists to grossly distort his view of baptism, with grievous consequences, so the men at Westminster with antinomianism. The upshot was, instead of steering the right course between Scylla and Charybdis, in sheering away from antinomianism, they plunged far too much towards legalism, and

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ended up producing documents heavy with law.⁴ So much so, it's not an idle question as to whether or not those documents should be classified as gospel or law!

This is the background to what follows. It was the background at the time, and it must not be forgotten when we come to evaluate the various Confessions which 17th century Particular Baptists drew up.

The Particular Baptists who met in 1644 to draw up their Confession of Faith, were, it goes without saying, fully aware of the anti-antinomian fervour raging at the time, and the pressure that was being exerted at Westminster. And they responded! Excluded from the Westminster Assembly, they published their own Confession, now known as the First London Confession.

They did not start from scratch, but drew heavily on the 1596 Separatist Confession, just over half of its articles being virtually a repeat of the 1596, the tiny changes nearly always a question of wording. There were some differences, of course – baptism, the ministry and church-State relations. In addition, the 1644 also drew upon the Synod of Dort of 1619. The Particular Baptists, setting out their beliefs expressly to rebut unjust charges which had been levelled against them, wanted to show their Calvinistic credentials regarding salvation, as well as their particular view of the doctrine of the church. In light of this, and especially because of the controversy raging all around them at the time, the 1644 Confession is noteworthy; especially so, for my purposes in this book, because of its statements – or lack of them – on the law.

The Westminster men – the vast majority of whom were Presbyterians leavened by a handful of Independents – were, of course, covenant theologians.⁵ On the law, they were followers

⁴ Out of 196 questions, the Larger Catechism has more than 60 on the law, a staggering ratio for the age of the new covenant.

⁵ Reformed covenant-theology is very different to new-covenant theology. Very different! The former is an invented philosophy, a logical system imposed upon Scripture. The latter seeks to expound the New Testament in the way it handles the old covenant, and to take its teaching on the new covenant and apply it to believers. And what is that teaching? That believers are not under the law of Moses but under the law of Christ.

and developers of Calvin, a century having passed since he had promulgated his views. As a consequence, they incorporated Calvin's third use of the law in their Confession, in opposition to the view on the law put forward by those whom they dismissed as antinomians. As I have explained, one of the main purposes of the Assembly was to counter antinomianism; Calvin's third use of the law was regarded as the orthodox antidote.

The Particular Baptists of 1644, however, did not see eye to eye with the Westminster men on this; not only did they explicitly disagree with Calvin's first use of the law, they made no mention whatsoever of Calvin's second and third uses. In other words, they did not say the law is the believer's rule of life; they did not catch hold of Calvin's whip; they made no link whatsoever between the law and sanctification. I know it is dangerous to argue from silence, but in light of the controversy raging at the time, and in light of the Westminster Assembly meeting close by, and the reason for it, the inference is inescapable – *the Particular Baptists of 1644 did not adopt Calvin's uses of the law*. Indeed, their Confession does not even have a chapter devoted to the law. What is more, they stated:

The tenders of the gospel to the conversion of sinners, is absolutely free, no way requiring, as absolutely necessary, any qualifications, preparations, terrors of the law, or preceding ministry of the law, but only and alone the naked soul, as a sinner and ungodly to receive Christ, as crucified, dead, and buried, and risen again, being made a Prince and a Saviour for such sinners.

Again:

The same power that converts to faith in Christ, the same power carries on the soul still through all duties, temptations, conflicts, sufferings, and continually whatever a Christian is, he is by grace, and by a constant renewed operation from God, without which he cannot perform any duty to God, or undergo any temptations from Satan, the world, or men.

Again:

All believers are a holy and sanctified people, and that sanctification is a spiritual grace of the new covenant, and effect of the love of God, manifested to the soul, whereby the believer is in truth and reality separated, both in soul and body, from all sin and dead works,

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through the blood of the everlasting covenant, whereby he also presses after a heavenly and evangelical perfection, in obedience to all the commands, which Christ as head and King in his new covenant has prescribed to him.⁶

These are highly significant statements. In conversion, no place is given to a preparation work by the law; for the believer, sanctification is not by the law, but by faith, and the effect of the love of God. The absence of the law for sanctification is deafening. Not only that! When we couple it with the positive emphasis which the 1644 men made when talking about sanctification – an emphasis upon the new covenant, saying that it is the same power that sanctifies as that which converts and justifies, and putting weight on the love of God – the picture is clear. No talk here of the old-covenant law, and a whip with its consequent fear! No! These men, thinking about sanctification, talked about the love of God! Let Calvin and the men of Westminster say what they would about the law – and they said plenty! – the 1644 Particular Baptists would stick to Scripture!

I admit they distanced themselves from the Anabaptists, who, I agree were (overwhelmingly) against Calvin on the law. Does this mean that the Particular Baptists – even though they did not say so explicitly – did adopt Calvin’s position on the law, after all? No! The fact is, ‘Anabaptist’ in those days was a loose term, changing in meaning throughout the 16th and 17th centuries; it was a term of abuse, only vaguely defined, much like ‘bolshie’, ‘commie’, ‘black-leg’ or ‘scab’ of a later age. Indeed, it is much as Christ was labelled a ‘Samaritan’ (John 8:48). All this might equally be said of the pejorative label, ‘antinomian’.

So, just as English tourists abroad these days might wish to distance themselves from ‘lager-louts’ (or worse), in the 17th century Particular Baptists did not want to be tarred with the brush of Münster.⁷ And not only that. ‘Anabaptist’ meant ‘re-

⁶ Articles 25, 26 and 29.

⁷ Following Münster (1533-5), ‘Anabaptist’ was a term of virulent abuse, sinister and ugly in tone. And it lasted a long time. John Wesley used it abusively as late as 1788. Later still it was linked to the French invasion in Wales in 1797 and was mentioned in debate in Parliament in

baptiser'. It was these two slurs which 'the baptised churches' of 1644 wished to disown.⁸ What is more, the Particular Baptists did not disagree with *everything* the Anabaptists believed!⁹

Returning to the main point: although it is dangerous to argue from silence – but, as I have explained, and will further expand upon, 'silence' is too strong a word – we know that the 1644 men repudiated Calvin's first use of the law, and did not mention his second and third uses, but set out what they saw as the new-covenant way of sanctification.

In 1646, following an attack by Daniel Featly, the Particular Baptists revised their First London Confession. Featly, addressing Parliament, had reminded them of 'a book presented to you' – Parliament – 'in whose Dedicatory Epistle there are many heinous accusations unjustly and falsely laid against us'. The Particular Baptists responded – expressly revising their Confession to make their position crystal clear on the points raised by Featly. In so doing, they strengthened the Confession's Calvinistic tone, but made no changes to their position on the law. Once again, in light of the Westminster debates, this is very significant.

What is more, we do not have to argue from silence! In 1646, Benjamin Cox published an Appendix to the 1644 Confession. While it is true that no one else signed this document, Cox claimed he was speaking for the seven churches involved. He also stated that he was clarifying, strengthening certain points in the Confession: 'for the further clearing of truth'. And on the law, he explicitly stated:

Though we that believe in Christ are not under the law, but under grace (Rom. 6:14), yet we know that we are not lawless, or left to live without a rule: 'not without law to God, but under law to Christ' (1 Cor. 9:21). The gospel of Jesus Christ is a law, or commanding

1813. But, significantly perhaps, black Jamaican Baptists at the end of the 1700s were quite prepared to accept the name.

⁸ As confirmation of the second point, the Anabaptists themselves rejected the label; their baptism as believers, they insisted, was their first baptism.

⁹ But neither did the Anabaptists! I mean, of course, there is no such body as THE Anabaptists.

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rule unto us; whereby, and in obedience whereunto, we are taught to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world (Tit. 2:11-12), the directions of Christ in his evangelical word guiding us unto, and in this sober, righteous, and godly walking (1 Tim. 1:10-11). Though we are not now sent to the law as it was in the hand of Moses, to be commanded thereby, yet Christ in his gospel teaches and commands us to walk in the same way of righteousness and holiness that God by Moses did command the Israelites to walk in, all the commandments of the second table being still delivered unto us by Christ, and all the commandments of the first table also (as touching the life and spirit of them) in this epitome or brief sum: ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, *etc.*’ (Matt. 22:37-40; Rom. 13:8-10).

In short: believers are not under the law of Moses, but under the law of Christ.

Other revisions of the Confession followed, and for several reasons. The rise of Quakerism which threatened, if not ruined, many Baptist churches; the weakened Calvinism of Thomas Collier, an important figure among the Particular Baptists, whose book of 1674 caused alarm throughout their churches; on the opposite flank, the rise of hyper-Calvinism; and bitter persecution – for all these reasons, the Particular Baptists felt the need to re-state their position clearly.

In 1677, therefore, the Calvinistic Baptists drew up a new statement, the Second London Confession, and this was published – when the political climate was easier – in 1689. Although there is evidence that the 1677 men made use of the 1644 Confession, nevertheless they made several important changes. They strengthened their Calvinism. Above all, the 1677 (1689) Confession was clearly a revision, an adaptation, of the Savoy Confession of the Independents, which itself was mostly the Westminster Confession.

Now why did the 1677 Particular Baptists take this course? We do not have to guess. As they explained, they did not wish merely to set out what they believed, but they wanted to show how much they agreed with the Independents and Presbyterians.

This speaks of a radical departure from 1644 (and 1646). The tone of the 1644/1646 Confession is very different to that of the

1677/1689; so much was changed.¹⁰ Why? Copies of 1644 Confession and its revision had become scarce by 1677, but why did the Particular Baptists at that time turn to the Westminster Confession (and the Savoy) and make it the basis of their own, new, Confession? In 1646, when they revised their First Confession, they could have made use of the current deliberations at Westminster, but they did not, yet they made liberal use of the Westminster Confession in 1677 (1689). Why? There is serious disagreement today over the explanation.

Some allege, and it is my opinion also, the Particular Baptists of 1677 were concerned with ‘political correctness’, and especially so when they published their Confession in 1689. The ‘dissenting establishment’ was Presbyterian. The Particular Baptists wanted to show that they were mainstream Calvinists, that they were not going to rock the boat. It has been suggested that this is why they played down the contentious rules of restricted communion held by most of their represented churches. Their purpose was clear: ‘Hereby declaring... our hearty agreement with them (Presbyterians and Congregationalists), in that wholesome protestant doctrine’. Unity was uppermost in their minds.

I do not say the 1677 men copied the Westminster Confession blindly. For instance, the 1677 left out Westminster material on the covenants and several other topics. Nor do I wish to imply that the men of 1644 (the First Confession) and 1646 (its revision) did not use previous Confessions from non-Baptist sources. I have already noted how they went back to the 1596 Separatist Confession. Above all, I do not say the 1677 men were forced to adopt the Westminster Confession;¹¹ but ‘political correctness’ was a very strong pressure, no less in their day than ours.

This peer-pressure for ‘correctness’ has not always been given due weight, even though the evidence is there, plain for all to see. For instance, George Fox, the Quaker, died in 1691, and his *Journal* was first published in 1694, nearly twenty years after its

¹⁰ Although they claimed ‘the substance of the matter is the same’ as the earlier Confession.

¹¹ As the position I have put forward has been caricatured.

final entry, and more than fifty years after its earliest. These dates are significant – 1643, 1675 and 1694. With the passing of these decades, persecution of Dissenters had given way to toleration. Consequently, later Quakers, omitting or toning down many passages in the *Journal* which to them, in their more genteel age, seemed outrageous and fanatical, edited Fox's trenchant style and language to produce a sanitised, more acceptable version for public consumption. And not only Fox; John Reeve's writings were drastically altered, and Edmund Ludlow's millenarianism was left out of his, so as not to offend. Not only was much lost by this process of 'tidying up', it shows the pressure Nonconformists felt themselves under at the time, brought about with the change in the political climate in the last decades of the century compared with the 1640s and 50s.

I am not saying that the 1689 Particular Baptists did not sincerely and wholeheartedly believe their Confession. All I wish to point out is that the change in the political climate before and after 1661 must not be left out of the equation, since politics and religion were so inextricably linked in those days. The Particular Baptists of 1677 (and 1689) were facing very different political circumstances to the men of 1644 and 1646. I am convinced this showed itself in the 1677 (1689) Confession. Large political forces were at play throughout the 17th century, of course, but the pressure felt by Dissenters was different during its middle decades to those which dominated its close. In the former period, Dissenters took full advantage of their new-found liberty to express their differences; in the latter, unity was paramount. The Dissenters adapted to survive in face of a government which wanted them controlled. But when I say they adapted, I do not mean they were absorbed; I mean adapted.

Excluded from society – and they felt the sting of it – Dissenters, at the end of the 17th century and the start of the next, certainly had reason enough to be alarmed: the early 1700s brought an increasing pressure to bear on them all. In a sermon by Henry Sacheverell at Oxford in 1702, for instance, Nonconformists were labelled 'as enemies of the Commonwealth and State', 'greater monsters than Jews, Mohammedans, Socinians and Papists'. Daniel Defoe responded with his satire:

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The Shortest Way with the Dissenters – seemingly, he wanted them exterminated as vermin – but he was too subtle for many who thought, for a while, he meant it! Samuel Wesley, however, was not being satirical when he vented the bitterness felt towards Nonconformists, calling their academies immoral, and accusing them of disloyalty to the State. Such critics were following the pattern set by the throne itself. Queen Anne, who despised Dissenters, would have abolished their civil and religious liberties had she not providentially died when she did. In all this, Baptists were treated with less respect than either the Presbyterians or Independents, and thought more dangerous revolutionaries than Quakers. The Particular Baptists responded, in part, by writing their history to establish their credentials, having tried, as I have said, by their 1677/89 Confession to show the same in another way. They strongly desired to present a united front with Congregationalists and Presbyterians. Even so, Dissenters, in general, felt shut out, and had good reason for feeling it. Indeed, discrimination against them was still alive and kicking a century later.

When all is said and done, perhaps we will never know the rights and wrongs of this debate. Leaving this disputed politics to one side, let us get back to the incontrovertible on the 17th century Particular Baptists and the law of Moses.

The fact is, we have the two sets of Particular Baptist Confessions which radically differ on the law. Even though, I admit, I cannot explain how William Kiffin signed both the First and Second Confessions, and Hanserd Knollys signed both the 1646 revision and the Second Confession, there were profound changes in the Confession. But what is wrong, after all, in simply saying the Particular Baptists changed their mind between 1644 and 1689? The point for my purposes is this: The Particular Baptists of 1677 and 1689 agreed with Calvin on his uses of the law, but those of 1644 and 1646 did not. This much is irrefutable.

In the end, however, the issue of the law and the believer does not depend on what Particular Baptists said or did not say in the 17th century – or why they said or did not say it; the final authority is Scripture. That being said, I do not go to the opposite extreme and dismiss the Confessions of the 17th century. Indeed,

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since so many believers today are basing their view of the law on Calvin's third use, especially as incorporated in the Westminster Confession and the 1689 Particular Baptist Confession, we dare not ignore the history of the time, even if we wanted to. Above all, those contemporary Particular Baptists, who have come across only the 1689 Confession, ought at the very least to know of the earlier Confession, and the radical differences between the two. Not least on the vital question of the law.

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The Prophets and the New Covenant

This article, though it stands in its own right, is intended to be a lead-in to the one which follows; namely ‘The Law on the Believer’s Heart’.

I begin with the key text.¹

A look at 1 Peter 1:8-12

Peter, addressing believers, could say to them:

Believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith – the salvation of your souls. Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when he testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven (1 Pet. 1:8-12).

Peter speaks of ‘the prophets’. In fact, what we read here can be properly extended to ‘*all* the prophets’, as Peter himself observed (Acts 3:24; 10:43), and as Christ himself warranted (Luke 24:27).

Note the ‘now’ in Peter’s words: ‘The prophets... prophesied of the grace that would come to you... They were ministering the things which *now* have been reported to you’ – reported by the apostles to believers, he meant, of course. There is no question about what Peter has in mind when he uses ‘now’. He is referring to nothing less than the eschatological change brought about by the coming of Christ and his establishment of the new covenant, as predicted by the prophets and ‘reported’ by the apostles. Peter is certainly not writing about some supposed millennial age *after* this present gospel age. Not at all. He is talking about ‘now’, the ‘but now’ of the new covenant (John 15:22,24; Acts 17:30; Rom.

¹ What follows in this article is taken from my *Christ* pp301-312,549-552, lightly edited.

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3:21; 5:9,11; 6:22; 7:6; 8:1; 11:30; 11:31 [second ‘now’ in NIV, NASB]; 16:26; 1 Cor. 15:20; Gal. 4:9; Eph. 2:12-13; 5:8; Col. 1:26; Heb. 8:6; 9:26; 12:26; 1 Pet. 2:10). There is no doubt about Peter’s theme, I say. It is the sufferings of Christ, the salvation which those sufferings accomplished, and the glories that have *now* followed the finished work of Christ.

We know that the prophets – all of them – prophesied of these things (Matt. 1:22-23; 5:17; 13:17; 26:56; Mark 1:2-3; Luke 1:70; 10:24; 18:31; 24:25,27,44; John 1:45; 6:45; Acts 3:18-25; 10:43; 13:40; 24:14; 26:22; 28:23; Rom. 1:2; 3:21; 16:26; 2 Pet. 3:2). Interestingly, Peter informs us about the reaction of various parties to those prophecies. Angels, who had no personal interest in these matters, who could have no personal interest in them, nevertheless were curious. The prophets themselves, who would not live to see the fulfilment of their prophecies, even so were deeply interested, inquisitive and probed into it all. So, if angels were curious, and the prophets explored these things, how much more should we, as believers – those who inherit these benefits – how much more should we be taken up with them?

What is more, *we* have the enormous advantage of living in the time of the ‘but now’. ‘But now’ Christ has come, and because he has ‘now’ poured out his Spirit to teach us all truth, and to glorify the Son of God by declaring the truth to us through the apostles (John 14:26; 16:13-15; Heb. 2:3; 2 Pet. 1:16-21; 1 John 1:1-4), we ‘now’ have had all these things made clear to us by the Spirit through the apostles. So says Peter. We are living in the time of the ‘now’. If we could ask the prophets to explain their prophecies, they would not be able to help us much. Now... if only we could ask the apostles! They would be able to give us the definitive interpretation and explanation. If only!

Well... we *can* ask them. We can ask them how *they* read the prophets. They have told us, over and over again. All we have to do is open the New Testament and let them speak! This is the key. That is to say, to understand, interpret and apply the prophets, we must submit our minds to the apostles’ teaching drawn from those prophets, and their (the apostles’) exposition of the Old Testament prophecies. How did the Spirit teach the

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apostles to understand, explain and interpret the prophets? *That* must be definitive for us.

We have no lack of material to guide us. Take the prophecy of Amos 9:11-15. Its terms are old covenant, Jewish; that is, they concern David's tabernacle, Edom, the rebuilding of the cities of Israel in Canaan to form a settlement which will never come to an end, and so on. But the new-covenant fulfilment of Amos 9:11-15 is spiritual. It has nothing to do with tabernacle, temple or vineyards. It is gospel success among the Gentiles. This may surprise some, but James told us so (Acts 15:13-18). The issue which brought this to a head in the early church was conflict over the way Gentiles could be saved, enter the church and go on to sanctification, and, in particular, the part to be played in all this by the law (Acts 15:1-5,24; Gal. 1:7; 2:4; 3:1-5; 4:21; 5:1-12; 6:12-16). James cited Amos, indeed 'the prophets' (Acts 15:15), to show that God had predicted the very thing which was now taking place – namely, the calling of the Gentiles by grace, without the law. Thus James showed the way to read 'the prophets'.

Isaiah 2 speaks of 'the word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem' (Isa. 2:1). A literalist views this as for the Jews. 'In the latter days', Zion 'shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills' (Isa. 2:2). This must mean, to the literalist, that the physical hill of Zion will be higher than Everest! Some try to mitigate this by saying, without warrant, that it will be the highest mountain *in Israel*, which, in any case, is still considerable – Mount Hermon being over 9000 feet (3000m)! What is more, literally 'all nations shall flow to it', climbing this mountain (about 2 or 6 miles high! – depending on Hermon or Everest) to learn the ways of God (Isa. 2:2-3), 'for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem' (Isa. 2:3). And, to the literalist, this will apply to the Jews, 'the house of Jacob', who will say: 'Let us walk in the light of the LORD' (Isa. 2:5). So much for the literal interpretation of this Old Testament prophecy. How does the New Testament understand it?

In the first place, what is the reference to 'the latter days'? Isaiah declared these words in the Old Testament, of course, and

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he was referring to the age of the New Testament. ‘The last days’ started with the first coming of Christ (Heb. 1:1-2). Peter knew he was in ‘the last days’ when he preached at Pentecost (Acts 2:16-17). John could say ‘it is the last hour’ (1 John 2:18). ‘The last days’ or the ‘latter times’ or ‘the last time’ or ‘these last times’ all refer to the gospel age (1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1; 1 Pet. 1:20; 2 Pet. 3:3; Jude 18). Christ has come ‘at the end of the ages... to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself’ (Heb. 9:26); ‘the ends [fulfilment, NIV] of the ages have come’ upon us (1 Cor. 10:11). There is no biblical warrant whatsoever for saying ‘the last days’ refer to the millennium, allowing such an age to exist.

Next, take these two mountains, Sinai and Zion. Sinai is mentioned by name only four times in the New Testament; twice by Stephen when speaking of the physical location where God spoke to Moses (Acts 7:30,38), and twice by Paul when speaking of the old covenant (Gal. 4:24-25). Zion is mentioned seven times in the New Testament; twice in the phrase, ‘daughter of Zion’, in reference to the actual Jerusalem (Matt. 21:5; John 12:15), four times with reference to the gospel or the church (Rom. 9:33; 11:26; Heb. 12:22; 1 Pet. 2:6), and once where the prophetic view of the reader will colour his interpretation (Rev. 14:1). In Heb. 12:22, ‘Zion’ must be figurative; the ‘heavenly Jerusalem’ cannot be the literal city in the Middle East. Note the contrast between Israel and the church. Israel came historically to a physical mountain; believers do not – they come to Christ. Furthermore, nobody can believe that all those addressed in the letter to the Hebrews were actually living at Zion. And yet the writer speaks of them as having come to Mount Zion – not for a fleeting visit as tourists, but permanently living there. The verse cannot refer to believers going to heaven when they die, since that is future, and the verse speaks of a past experience (‘you have come’) which has led to their present salvation, and its consequences. The writer to the Hebrews goes on to explain this spiritual experience they are enjoying now. The context is the new covenant (Heb. 12:24).

So when the prophets promised that in the latter days God would elevate Zion and send his law out of Zion (Isa. 2:3; Mic. 4:2), they were not speaking literally of the Mosaic law being

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preached in a physically raised Jerusalem; they were predicting the worldwide advance of the gospel. The fact is, they were going further. They were making an implicit contrast between the old covenant from Sinai, and the new covenant from Zion. Sinai and Zion are two very different places; the law of Sinai and the law of Zion are two very different laws. But laws they both are! Let us not run away with the idea that just because they are not under the law of Sinai, believers are lawless. They are under the law of Zion, the law of Christ (1 Cor. 9:20-21; Gal. 6:2). And what a contrast there is between Sinai and Zion (Gal. 4:24-26). The same goes for the two laws. Moses ascended Mount Sinai to receive the law and so give it to Israel; Christ reigns on Mount Zion: 'I have set my King on my holy hill of Zion' (Ps. 2:6), from where he issues his law: 'For law will proceed from me' (Isa. 51:4), and will run throughout the world: 'The coastlands shall wait for his law' (Isa. 42:4). 'The LORD is well-pleased for his righteousness' sake; he will exalt the law and make it honourable' (Isa. 42:21). Who can think that this 'law' is just the ten commandments? Or even the entire books of Moses? Surely it must be the gospel. It is, beyond question, the entire word of God, particularly in its revelation of Christ. *This* is the way to read the prophets. Listen to Isaac Watts' hymn on the contrast between the law and the gospel:

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

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

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

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

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

*But I'll retire beneath the cross;
Saviour, at thy dear feet I'll lie!
And the keen sword that justice draws,
Flaming and red, shall pass me by.²*

The same goes for 'Jerusalem'. In Galatians 4:25-27, Paul distinguished two Jerusalems; namely, the literal, the earthly 'Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children', and the spiritual Jerusalem, the church, 'the Jerusalem above [which is] free, which is the mother of us all'. Then he quoted Isaiah 54:1, applying it to the spiritual – not the literal – Jerusalem. *This* is how to read the prophets.

Take the prophecy of Zion in Isaiah 28:16, 'Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; whoever believes will not act hastily'. The New Testament use of this (Rom. 9:33; 10:11; 1 Pet. 2:6) clearly indicates that the prophet was predicting gospel times, especially Christ himself. The literal, old Zion was destroyed in AD70 (completed in AD135). The Zion in question is the heavenly Jerusalem, the church.

Such things are repeated times without number. Prophecies in the days of the old covenant were given in Jewish terms – how else could they be given? – and often given figuratively. They must be interpreted with this in mind. To read them literally when they are written figuratively, would be to make a foolish, not to say grievous, mistake. Likewise, to read them as literal for the Jews, when the New Testament applies them spiritually to the church, is another bad mistake.

² *Gospel Hymns*, The Strict and Particular Baptist Society, Robert Stockwell, London, 1915, number 394.

For instance, a literal interpretation of Joel 2:28-32 demands remarkable astronomical signs; Acts 2:14-21 gives the right way to interpret the passage. Does anyone expect a literal fulfilment of Joel 3:1-2,12-16? If so, how deep will men be standing on one another's shoulders in the Valley of Jehoshaphat? Will the mountains of Judah literally run with wine and milk, and a fountain overflow from a newly-built temple (Joel 3:18)?

Take the prophet Hosea. A literalist must expect the establishment of a reunited and massively enlarged Israel, living in material abundance under king David (Hos. 1:10-11; 2:16-23; 3:5). The New Testament shows the proper interpretation of these passages, however; namely, the calling of Jews and Gentiles under Christ in the gospel (Rom. 9 – 11, especially Rom. 9:25-26). And the same goes for the other prophecies which the apostle quoted in writing those chapters. Paul applied Hosea 1:10 and 2:23 to the calling of the Gentiles (Rom. 9:24-26), yet Hosea 1:8-11 itself speaks only of the children of Israel. The context of Hosea 1 is the defection and judgment of Israel, and God's surprising mercy to them despite their departure from him. The same applies to Hosea 2:23. The word 'Gentiles' does not appear in Hosea, except in Hosea 8:8, and this has no connection whatsoever with their salvation. A literalist, an interpreter wedded to the old-covenant, Jewish explanation, would never see – could never see – the calling of the Gentiles in Hosea. *But Paul did.*³

Take Ezekiel: surely no one expects the setting up again of David as king, his reign to last for ever – which means he as Israel's king will never die (Ezek. 34:23-31; 37:24-25) – and the rebuilding of the temple with all its apparatus of priesthood and sacrifice, including altar, offerings, feasts and holy-days (Ezek. 37:26-28; 40:1 – 46:24). And, reader, please note, with regard to these sacrifices and offerings, if literally restored, they must be for atonement for sin (Ezek. 43:13-27; 45:17-25), not merely for commemoration, as some try to say. Are we to expect Israel to have a prince again, a prince who will have sons, who will have an allotment of land, the inheritance of which is to be maintained

³ See my *Romans 11*.

according to property laws which distinguish between royal sons and servants (Ezek. 44:3; 45:7-8; 46:2,16-18)? Is the land yet to be reallocated according to the tribes (Ezek. 45:1-8; 47:13 – 48:29)? Who will the aliens be (Ezek. 47:21-23)? Will the tribal settlement be in rectangles (Ezek. 45:1-8; 48:1-29)? Will the observance of the new moon and the sabbath be re-established, literally (Ezek. 44:24; 45:17; 46:1-4,6,12)? Of course not! Ezekiel's prophecy is fulfilled in the new covenant. See how it is applied to the believer in 2 Corinthians 6:14 – 7:1. The same goes for Isaiah 52:7-12; 61:4-7 and 66:20-21, and so on.

Again, take Zechariah: surely no one expects a restoration of Jewish fasts and feasts (Zech. 8:19; 14:16), the setting up of the tribes again (Zech. 12:12-14),⁴ and annual visits by all the peoples of the earth to Jerusalem for worship at the Feast of Tabernacles (Zech. 14:16-19), including sacrifices on the temple altar (Zech. 14:20-21), do they? If so, what do they make of: 'The Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands' (Acts 7:48)? What do they make of Hebrews 7 – 10; in particular, Heb. 9:10; 10:9,18?

God swore to his 'servant David': 'Your seed I will establish for ever, and build up your throne to all generations... His seed also I will make to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven... His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me; it shall be established for ever like the moon' (Ps. 89:3-4,29,36-37). How are we to understand this? Was God saying the kingdom of Israel would last for ever, with one of David's descendants reigning as king? This cannot be. The kingdom, ruined, its royal line broken by the captivity (which was spoken of in the immediate context, Ps. 89:38-51), was not restored after the Jews' return. Even if it had been, still it would have fallen far short of the categorical terms of the prophecy. Nor, allowing the possibility for sake of argument, will a temporary restoration of the kingdom in the millennium – albeit

⁴ Those who think Rev. 7:4-8 refers to the literal tribes of Israel have to explain why none from the tribe of Dan will be included, why both Joseph and Manasseh are included, but not Ephraim, and whether or not they take the 12,000 to be literal, and, therefore, exact.

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lasting for a thousand years – and which will end in ruin, meet the case.

God was speaking of the *endless* reign of *Christ* – *he* is the seed of David (Gal. 3:16) – the endless reign of Christ over his seed, his elect (Isa. 53:10). The angel, speaking to Mary, before the birth of her son, said of Jesus: ‘He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end’ (Luke 1:32-33). This is none other than that which was prophesied by Isaiah: ‘Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder... Of the increase of his government... there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over his kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice’ (Isa. 9:6-7).

The point is that the new-covenant fulfilment and application of old-covenant language, terms, ordinances, promises, prophecies and commandments, strips out the external, Jewish element as we pass from the Old to the New Testament, since it has been abolished in the change of covenant. The writer to the Hebrews, writing nearly two thousand years ago, described these things as then being ‘obsolete and growing old... ready to vanish away’ (Heb. 8:13). This is how the New Testament reads the Old. It is the way *we* must do it. The application is to be spiritual and inward, not literal and external. No longer is there any concern over land, an earthly kingdom, a physical temple, physical circumcision, and so on. Such things pale into insignificance – indeed, into oblivion – in the light of the true interpretation, which is Christ and the gospel. The New Testament is its own interpreter.

Let me say just a little more on this. We must allow the New Testament to set the agenda. It is quite wrong, for instance, to read the New Testament in light of the Old. We understand and appreciate the Old through the lens of the New. And there is a further point. We all have our systems of theology, and our schemes of prophecy. Very well. But, where necessary, those systems and schemes must fall before Scripture. As we have seen repeatedly, we must resist the temptation to trim Scripture to

make it fit our system or scheme. Sadly, for many, the system comes first. It is a temptation to us all. But if we force Scripture to fit our scheme, not only are we committing a wrong, we are bringing grievous trouble and misery, not only to ourselves, but to those who adopt our scheme and follow the track we have marked out. We must not do it! 'Let God be true...'.

A vital point

Now for another point. And a big one, at that. In all this, the apostles did not, as is sometimes claimed, draw a *parallel* between Jews and Gentiles. I stress this. The New Testament way of using these prophecies is not by drawing a parallel; it talks about their *fulfilment*. 'Fulfilment'! This is *the* word, as we have seen time and again. Nor does the New Testament ever say it is making just a local application of these prophecies, a mere interpretation of them, leaving the fulfilment to a later age. No! It always talks in terms of 'just as it is written', 'this is what was spoken', 'this is' (Acts 2:16,25,34; 3:22; 4:11,25; 8:32; 13:33-35,40,47; 15:15; 28:25-26, for instance); that is, events in apostolic days were the fulfilment of the prophecies. By no stretch of the imagination can a temporary (albeit 1000 years long) Jewish kingdom, which will end in ruin, be greater than the everlasting kingdom of believers under the gospel. For that to happen, we should have to regard a temporary (albeit 1000 years long) Jewish kingdom, which will end in ruin, as being the *fulfilment* of the prophecies, while the gospel (which has already lasted for nearly 2000 years) is a mere local *application* of them. Fantastic nonsense!

Take Hosea, whose prophecy I referred to earlier. The prophet spoke of the northern tribes of Israel. He did not include the Gentiles in his prophecy; Paul applied this to the church. Paul was speaking of Gentiles and not Jews. Paul was *not* merely drawing an analogy.⁵

⁵ But what about his use (Rom. 10:20-21) of Isa. 65:1-2? If Isaiah was speaking of Israel, once again we have an Old Testament promise of blessing for Israel (Isa. 65:1) fulfilled in the church. Yet if, in fact, in Isa. 65:1, the prophet was speaking about the Gentiles, but, in Isa. 65:2, was

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So, I say again, the New Testament writers did not, as is claimed, draw a *parallel* between Jews and Gentiles, or draw an *analogy*. Rather, rightly *interpreting* the verses, they showed us the way to read the prophets and their prophecies. Let me restate this. The New Testament way of using these prophecies is not by drawing a parallel. It talks about their fulfilment. Fulfilment, I say again. Let ‘fulfilment’ ring in our ears. It is vital (Matt. 5:17-18 – all of Matthew!; Acts 3:18; Rom. 8:4; Gal. 5:14; 6:2, for instance). Nor does the New Testament ever say it is making a local application of these prophecies, a mere *interpretation* of them, leaving the *fulfilment* to a later age. No! It always talks in terms of ‘just as it is written’; that is, events in apostolic days were the *fulfilment* of the prophecies. Which is? When the Old Testament predicts a renewed Israel and the expansion of the kingdom, it is, in fact, predicting Christ, the gospel and the church. And in so doing, the apostles gave us the definitive way to understand the Old Testament in this matter. We know the apostles set out God’s final revelation, his last word, in Christ. As a consequence, the key with which the apostles unlocked and applied the Old Testament must be our key also. And, bear in mind, never once do we come across any evidence of apostolic practice to the contrary.

What I am saying is sometimes dismissed with the pejorative, ‘Replacement Theology’! Replacing what with what? Replacing Israel by the church. Well, if it is a ‘replacement’, who did the replacing? *I* didn’t! The writers of the New Testament did it – men who were led into all truth! I am simply repeating and enforcing their words. For my part, that is enough to silence all dismissive talk of ‘Replacement Theology’. The apostles who could write, for instance – and this is just a sample – the words of Romans 2:28-29; 9:6-8; Galatians 3:7,9,28-29; 5:6; 6:15; Ephesians 2:11-18; Philippians 3:3; Colossians 3:11 and 1 Peter 2:9-10, have, I am convinced, made their position perfectly clear.

speaking about Israel – as I think – then no explanation of Paul’s use of the passage is required. In 1 Pet. 2:10, Peter applied Hos. 1:10; 2:23 in the same way as Paul in Rom. 9:25-26, which seems to suggest that Hos. 1:10; 2:23 were a kind of ‘proof-texts’ in New Testament times.

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Abuse may make a smoke screen, but Scripture shines through the fog!

Notice, once again, that all this applies to ‘*all* the prophets’ (Luke 24:27; Acts 3:24; 10:43). In every prophet, therefore, we may find Christ and the gospel. More, in every prophet we *must* find Christ and the gospel. So much so, even before the full revelation of the new covenant, before the ‘but now’, Christ could speak severely to his disciples:

O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken. Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into his glory?... These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms concerning me (Luke 24:25-26,44).

No wonder Christ, ‘beginning at Moses and all the prophets... expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself’ (Luke 24:27). No wonder, also, that Paul, informing the Jews in Antioch in Pisidia of the atrocious sin of the Jews in Jerusalem in crucifying Christ, could put it like this: ‘Those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know’ – that is, because they were ignorant, because they did not recognise (1 Cor. 2:8), because they would not recognise – ‘those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know him [Christ], nor even the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath, have fulfilled them in condemning him’ (Acts 13:27-28). Note that. The Jews should have known; they had ‘the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath’. The prophets told them what to expect – if they had had eyes to see it. And what goes for the Jews in Christ’s day, goes for us today – and more so. We have the Scriptures fully revealed and completed. The ‘but now’ has come. More light? More responsibility!

The evidence, I submit, is overwhelming. *This* is the way to read the old covenant today; namely, to look for its spiritual fulfilment in Christ. And, at the very least, therefore, it encourages us to search for Christ in all the Scriptures: ‘You

search the Scriptures’, or ‘Search the Scriptures’; ‘these are they which testify of me’ (John 5:39).⁶

An objection

But what of Ephesians 3:1-6? Since Paul called the church ‘a mystery’, ‘which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men’, how, it is asked, could it have been revealed in the Old Testament? As a matter of fact, some go so far as to allege that the Old Testament contains no information about the church at all. Is this right? Certainly not! Scripture uses ‘mystery’ as a precise technical term, speaking of something which cannot be known by man unless God reveals it to him, something beyond discovery by human effort or ability (see Eph. 1:9; 6:19; Col. 1:27; 2:2; 4:3; 2 Thess. 2:7; 1 Tim. 3:9,16). It is *not* something hard to grasp, or vague, abstract or indefinite. To claim that ‘the mystery’ is the church, and that the church therefore was not revealed in the Old Testament, is wrong on more than one count. First, the mystery, said Paul, was not the church, but *something about the church*; namely, ‘that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, of the same body, and partakers of [God’s] promise in Christ through the gospel’ (Eph. 3:6), and that God had planned this from all eternity. The mystery was not simply that Gentiles would be saved, but that in the new covenant, God in Christ would form believing Jews and Gentiles into one body, the church, breaking down the separating wall between them. *That* was the mystery.⁷ In the second place, Paul did not say that the fact that Jews and Gentiles would form one body was *totally unknown* in the Old Testament. Far from it! He said this mystery ‘in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, *as it has now been revealed* by the Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets’

⁶ I am reminded of the man who commented on a sermon he heard: ‘Not enough of Christ in it for me’. ‘But Christ was not mentioned in the text’, came the reply. ‘Wherever you are in England, you will find a road that will take you to London’, the man responded. ‘Every text has a way to Christ. It is the preacher’s job to find it’. Spurgeon commended Robert Hawker for the way he always saw Christ in the Psalms – even though, as Spurgeon said, he sometimes saw him where he was not!

⁷ Compare my *Romans 11*.

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(Eph. 3:5). As? The word means ‘in the same manner as, just as, exactly like’, ‘in such a way as’. In other words, it had been made known before, but not to the same extent, not with the same clarity as it is under the apostles.

And this is entirely consistent with 1 Peter 1:8-12, to which I will return in a few moments. As Peter assures us, the prophets knew they were handling things they did not entirely comprehend, and it was only when the Holy Spirit made these things fully known to the apostles and the New Testament prophets – ‘but now’ – that men really began to understand many of the Old Testament prophecies. But it is wrong to say that the Old Testament made no mention at all of the church. The fact is, the Old Testament prophets were continually pointing men to Christ, the gospel and the church, even though the prophets themselves did not fully grasp what they were speaking about, and knew they had not grasped it.

In short, Eph. 3:1-6 does not in the slightest militate against the claim that we must read the prophets through new-covenant eyes, and see Christ, the gospel and the church in them. Not at all. It enforces it. In light of it, we should expect to find the glories of the gospel and the church spoken of in the Old Testament, but not so clearly as in the New. None of this, of course, supports the Reformed system of ordering the affairs of the church by the Old Testament. I have fully explained my position elsewhere.⁸

I go back to the key passage, 1 Peter 1:8-12. Speaking of ‘the salvation of your souls’, received through faith in Christ, Peter said:

Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when he testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now

⁸ See my *Infant; Pastor; and Christ* pp75-98,369-391, in particular. By claiming that Israel was the Old Testament church, covenant theologians inevitably open a Pandora’s box, less the ‘Elpis’.

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have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven (1 Pet. 1:10-12).

If we could have asked the prophets: ‘Of what are you prophesying when you speak of the elevation of Zion, the going forth of the law from Zion, and the worldwide effect of it?’, and so on, there is no doubt as to their reply: ‘There are things we do not know. We do not know the precise timing and circumstances of the events we predict (1 Pet. 1:11), but we know the suffering Messiah is coming, and following hard upon his death and as a consequence of it, unspeakable glories will come, salvation is coming, grace is coming’ (1 Pet. 1:10-12). Isaiah, for instance, would have said that the coming Messiah must suffer for his people, suffer for their sins, even unto death. Nevertheless – and because of this – untold glories must follow. ‘God has revealed to me’, Isaiah would have said, ‘that the Messiah “shall see his seed... he shall see the labour of his soul... by his knowledge my righteous servant shall justify many, for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong” (Isa. 53)’. The prophets would have been unanimous: ‘We will not live to see it’, they would have said. ‘It is for others (1 Pet. 1:12). We are very curious about what we are speaking of, what it means, the timing of it all and how, precisely, it will come about (1 Pet. 1:10-12). Despite our partial understanding, and despite its coming only after we are dead, come it will’.⁹

There is no hint of a suggestion in the New Testament that they would have said: ‘We are predicting a physical restoration of Israel, and the re-instating – indeed, the exaltation of – the old-covenant law and worship’. The truth is, it is the very opposite; I

⁹ This raises some interesting questions. How deeply did the disciples, for instance, probe the matter? They were surprisingly ignorant of Christ’s impending suffering – even though he repeatedly warned them of it (Mark 9:31-32; 10:33-34; Luke 9:22,44-45; 12:50; 18:31-34; 22:15-23; 24:7,25-26). The same goes for the resurrection. It was only after the resurrection and Pentecost that things fell into place (John 2:19-22; 12:16; 14:26; John 20:9; Luke 24:1-8,44-49). See note immediately following.

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Peter 1:10-12 tells us they were predicting the grace which would come to the church, not the law to the Jews.¹⁰

Consider such passages as Luke 24:27,44-47; John 1:45; Acts 3:18,25; 7:52; 8:30-35; 26:22-23; 28:23; Romans 1:2; 3:21; 16:26; 1 Peter 1:10-12. Unless we see Christ in the Old Testament – both law and prophets – we shall never read it and them aright. ‘For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy’ (Rev. 19:10). Everything in the Old Testament points forward to Christ, and everything in the New Testament is centred in him. This is the way to read the Bible. There is both a continuity and a discontinuity. To deny one or the other, or to confuse the two, is to make a grievous mistake. As Peter told the Jews: ‘Those things which God foretold by the mouth of all his prophets, that the Christ would suffer, he has... fulfilled’. Moses spoke of Christ, ‘yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days’ (Acts 3:18-24). How categorical – ‘*all* the prophets... have... foretold *these* days’. Yet so many claim to see a restoration of a national Israel near the end of this age – or after it – in almost ‘all’ if not ‘all the prophets’!¹¹

Note the words, ‘not to themselves, but *to us* they were ministering’ (1 Pet. 1:12); *to us*, that is, to believers, in this gospel age. *This* was revealed to the prophets. They knew *that* much. I concede that they could not have gone so far as to say something like: ‘The law has been added... till the Seed shall come... The law has been put in charge as our child-custodian until the coming of Christ’ (compare Gal. 3:19,24) – that had to wait for the ‘but now’ of Christ, followed by the outpouring of the Spirit on the apostles. Principally, of course, it had to wait until God revealed it to his people through Paul, writing to the Galatians. Even so, the prophets did know that they were ministering to us. And, the fact remains, *we have* entered into the promised glories, and done so *now*.

¹⁰ Following on from the previous note, the prophets had got closer to the meaning than the disciples – let alone the Jews – in Christ’s time (Luke 24:21; Acts 1:6-8).

¹¹ I do not think the present state of Israel, founded in May 1948, remotely fulfils the prophecies.

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Further, while many people will allow that the prophets spoke of Christ in terms of his suffering, note Peter's assertion that the Spirit, through the prophets, 'testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ *and the glories that would follow*' (1 Pet. 1:11). I acknowledge that these glories will culminate in the second coming of Christ and the ushering in of the eternal state (1 Pet. 1:4-5,13), but they are by no means confined to that day. Peter could say that 'God... raised [Christ] from the dead and gave him glory' (1 Pet. 1:21). The glories of which Peter spoke – and of which the prophets testified – are nothing less than the glories of the new covenant. As I have pointed out, to say that the saints *will* 'rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory', and leave it there, is sadly to miss the point. The truth is, 'though now you do not see him [Christ, that is], yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory' (1 Pet. 1:8). In other words, while it is true that the saints *will* rejoice in the age of the new heavens and the new earth, the wonder of the gospel – the wonder of the new covenant – the wonder of the grace Christ has brought in, even now, by his sufferings – is that the saints rejoice *now*, at this very time, despite their grief through 'various trials' (1 Pet. 1:6). This is a vital part of 'the glories that would follow'. It is not at all surprising, therefore, to hear Christ explaining that the prophets – who realised they were handling something very wonderful – 'desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it' (Matt. 13:17; Luke 10:24). 'These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them' (Heb. 11:13). This 'not having received the promises', however, does not apply to us! In the new covenant, it is to those of us who are believers – 'upon whom the ends of the ages have come' (1 Cor. 10:11) – that these things belong. They are ours. We *have* received the fulfilment of these promises.

Take Peter's sermon after the miraculous healing of the cripple (Acts 3:11-26). The apostle was explicit. This miracle, he said, is part of that which 'God foretold by the mouth of all his prophets... Yes, and all the prophets... as many as have spoken, have... foretold these days' (Acts 3:18,24). And what events were unfolded in 'these days', of which Peter was speaking? The

sufferings and resurrection of Christ (Acts 3:13-18). But not only that! Why, the very context tells us what the apostle was referring to. He was making proper capital out of the miracle they had all just witnessed. The prophets foretold that, too! Oh yes, said Peter, the prophets foretold these days of suffering. But, in addition, notice how he opens his sermon: ‘Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this?... The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied...’ (Acts 3:12-13). The fact is, Peter was talking about the prophets who ‘testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ *and the glories that would follow*’. Here was one of the glories!

Making a proper application of this, the apostle immediately commanded the people to repent, promising them salvation – under the striking expression, ‘that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord’ (Acts 3:19). He was, of course, addressing Jews, and making Jewish allusions. Listen to Isaiah, quoting God himself: ‘I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake; and I will not remember your sins... I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions, and like a cloud, your sins’ (Isa. 43:25; 44:22; see also Ps. 51:1,9; Isa. 1:18; Jer. 50:20). And: ‘I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit on your descendants, and my blessing on your offspring. They will spring up among the grass like willows by the watercourses’ (Isa. 44:3-4; see also Isa. 41:17-20; Ezek. 34:26-27; Joel 3:18). Compare John 4:13-15; 6:35; 7:37. And Peter’s hearers – Jews – certainly would have grasped what he was talking about. Furthermore, they would have realised that the apostle was declaring Christ to be God Almighty in human flesh.

Ah! But what about Acts 3:20-21? ‘That he may send Jesus Christ... whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began’. Doesn’t this mean that everything Peter was saying refers not to his own time – that is, our time – but to the millennium which will be ushered in at the return of Christ?

I do not think so. Let me quote Acts 3:19-21 fully:

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Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.

Working on the basis that Peter *was* talking about the millennium, would somebody give me the explanation of – and connection between – his command to repent and the ‘that... so that... that’? Nobody disputes, surely, that Peter was commanding his hearers to repent there and then. Surely he was also promising them that, upon their repentance, God would blot out their sins – there and then. On this basis, the first ‘that’ falls naturally and easily into place. Very well. Where, then, in this unbroken sentence, does the apostle leap from present experience to the millennium? At what point does he make this leap? Does it come between ‘blotted out’ and ‘so that’? In other words, Peter commands his hearers to repent, ‘so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and... the times of restoration’ will come – come in the sense of the millennium? If so, would somebody explain to me how the repentance of sinners two thousand years ago would produce the millennium, yet to come? There is no baulking the ‘that’ and the ‘so that’. The first part of the statement and promise leads to the second, and is instrumental in producing it. The repentance is the instrument, the means by which the blotting out, and all the rest, are produced. There is no evading this, I repeat. I must say that I am utterly at a loss to make the connection between repentance under Peter’s preaching in Acts 3, and a millennium yet to come.

For my part, I believe the apostle was telling the Jews that if they repented, there and then they would receive the joys and sweets of sins forgiven. He enforced this, as I have shown, by reference to the prophets – a reference with which they would have been familiar. By the promise that God would ‘send Jesus Christ’, therefore, I am convinced that Peter was not speaking of the second coming of Christ, but of the first coming of Christ, and now, supremely, the preaching of the gospel, the preaching of the person and work of Christ – which he himself had just engaged in, and to which he referred in Acts 3:26: ‘To you first, God,

having raised up his servant Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities'. See also Isaiah 57:19; Acts 10:36; 13:32,38; Ephesians 2:17. It is at this point – when he has exhausted the implications of the 'that' and 'so that', that the apostle moves to make a declaration about Christ's return and – as the prophets foretold – the eternal glories which will then be ushered in. I have already recognised that 'the glories which follow', though they speak of this present time, will only be totally accomplished in the eternal glory.

This is what the apostle is talking of. To shunt *all* these blessings to the (supposed) millennium, is I think not only a mistake. It runs contrary to the context. And it robs believers of the glories which are now theirs – *now* theirs, I say.

'Those things which God foretold by the mouth of all his prophets, that the Christ would suffer, he has... fulfilled'. Moses spoke of Christ, 'yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days' (Acts 3:18,22-24). 'To [Christ] all the prophets witness' (Acts 10:43). Let us, therefore, do as Philip when he was asked by the eunuch concerning Isaiah 53: 'Of whom does the prophet say this?' 'Philip... beginning at this scripture, preached Jesus to him' – and preached him for the conversion and baptism of the eunuch. In short, he preached in new-covenant terms (Acts 8:26-38).

In this regard, I find Acts 24:14 intriguing; Paul believed 'everything that agrees with the law and that is written in the prophets' (NIV), 'in accordance with the law' (NASB).¹² So do we, as he did – as fulfilled by Christ in the gospel; that is, in the new covenant. The key word is *kata*, a word very rich in meaning. Here it means 'according to'; perhaps, 'agreeably to', 'in accordance with', 'in concord with' (see also Matt. 7:12; Luke

¹² Notice what Paul did *not* say. He did not say: 'I do all that the law requires'. Nor did he say: 'I am bound by the law'. Nor did he say: 'The law is the perfect rule by which I live'. Above all, he did not set out what would become Calvin's three uses of the law, especially the third! Why ever not – if he believed it? In the context, it would have utterly floored his critics. And, of course, it would have saved believers a great deal of trouble down the centuries.

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1:70; 16:29,31; 24:27,44; John 1:45; 5:39-47; Acts 3:22-24; 10:43; 26:6,22-23; 28:23; Rom. 3:21; 1 Pet. 1:10-12). What Paul did *not* say was that he was a keeper of the *torah*, and that ‘the Way’ is nothing other than keeping the Mosaic law.

To sum up: the prophets spoke of the coming of Christ, his work and the glories that would follow. All the prophets did. They predicted that Christ would fulfil the old covenant, thus render it obsolete, and establish the new. The New Testament makes it plain beyond a vestige of doubt that this is precisely what happened (Rom. 10:4; 2 Cor. 3:6-11; Gal. 3:19,23-25; Eph. 2:14-15; Heb. 7:12,18-19,22; 8:6-13; 9:10; 10:15-18). And every believer, being in Christ, is a member of this glorious new covenant, a partaker of all its benefits (Rom. 6:14-18; 7:4-6; 8:2; 2 Cor. 3:6-9; Gal. 2:19-20; 5:18).

Above all, as the prophets predicted, Christ himself is the new covenant. Listen to Isaiah:

‘Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, my Elect One in whom my soul delights! I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the Gentiles. He will not cry out, nor raise his voice, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed he will not break, and smoking flax he will not quench; he will bring forth justice for truth. He will not fail nor be discouraged, till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands shall wait for his law’. Thus says God the Lord...: ‘I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness, and will hold your hand; **I will keep you and give you as a covenant to the people**, as a light to the Gentiles, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house. I am the Lord, that is my name; and my glory I will not give to another, nor my praise to carved images. Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them’ (Isa. 42:1-9).

And now the Lord says, who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, so that Israel is gathered to him (for I shall be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength), indeed he says: ‘It is too small a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be my salvation to the ends of the earth’... Thus says the Lord: ‘In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you; **I will preserve you and give**

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you as a covenant to the people, to restore the earth, to cause them to inherit the desolate heritages; that you may say to the prisoners: “Go forth”, to those who are in darkness: “Show yourselves”. They shall feed along the roads, and their pastures shall be on all desolate heights. They shall neither hunger nor thirst, neither heat nor sun shall strike them; for he who has mercy on them will lead them, even by the springs of water he will guide them. I will make each of my mountains a road, and my highways shall be elevated. Surely these shall come from afar; Look! Those from the north and the west, and these from the land of Sinim (Isa. 49:5-12).

But there is, of course, one great prophecy of the new covenant – the leading prophecy of the new covenant – that I have not considered in all this; namely, Jeremiah 31:31-34. *This is deliberate*. All the above has been preparing the ground for the approach to this towering prophecy of the new covenant. Jeremiah predicts that God will write his law on the hearts of believers, in a new covenant, a covenant unlike the old. What does he mean?

After all the above, can there be any doubt? Although many try to maintain that it is the law of Moses that is written on the believer’s heart in the new covenant, they are woefully mistaken. Woefully! Their view is an utter travesty, a grievous diminishing of the glory of the new covenant. The fact is, at conversion, God, by his Spirit, forms Christ in every believer (John 14:23; 17:23; 2 Cor. 6:16; Gal. 4:19; Eph. 3:17; Rev. 3:20; 21:3). Thus Christ himself is the law written on the believer’s heart, for Christ himself is the new covenant; indeed: ‘Christ is all and in all’ (Col. 3:11).

And establishing that from Jeremiah will be my task in the following article: ‘The Law on the Believer’s Heart’.

The Law on the Believer's Heart

We know that the law is written on a believer's heart in the new covenant, written by the Spirit in regeneration.¹ The terms and promises of the new covenant, prophesied in Jeremiah 31:31-34, and set out in Hebrews 8:6-13 and 10:16-17, are these:

Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah – not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No more shall every man teach his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying: 'Know the LORD', for they all shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.

How should we interpret and apply such prophecies? What are the general principles? Specifically, of what time was Jeremiah speaking? To whom does this prophecy apply? And to what law does it refer?

As to the time in question, in the first instance, of course, Jeremiah was speaking to the people of his own day; his words had relevance for them in their particular circumstances. But *that* does not exhaust the import of the passage – not by a long chalk. Jeremiah was clearly speaking of what he called 'the days [which] are coming', 'after those days'. What 'days' are these?

Next, he addressed 'the house of Israel and... the house of Judah', saying God would make 'a new covenant' with *them* in those 'days'. Of whom was he speaking? There are two main views. Some think he was speaking of the spiritual blessing of national Israel at the end of the gospel age; namely, a general

¹ This article is taken from my *Christ* pp299-301,312-321,543-555, lightly edited.

conversion of the Jews, and a covenant which God will make with the Jewish nation in those days. Others, however, think the prophecy refers to the church, the new or spiritual Israel, and speaks of the new covenant with every child of God throughout this gospel age. Some believe both.

Then there is the 'law' of which Jeremiah prophesied. In Jeremiah's day, of course, 'the law' was the entire law of Moses, just as 'Israel and Judah' in Jeremiah's day meant 'the nation of Israel'. But Jeremiah was a prophet, and his words were a prophecy. What does 'the law' mean in the days of which he was speaking, the days of this new covenant? *That* is the question. As above, there are two main views, dividing in precisely the same way as over the first question. Many think Jeremiah's prophetic use of 'law' refers to the law of Moses, the ten commandments in particular; others think it is the law of Christ. But there is a great deal of inconsistency. As I will show, many want to regard the 'Israel and Judah' as spiritual Israel, but keep the law as the law of Moses.

Whatever answers to these questions we arrive at, three things must be borne in mind.

First, we must not assume our answers, but work them out scripturally. We must not assume, for instance, that 'law' must mean the law of Moses. The 'law' does not automatically mean that. I have already dealt with this. 'The law of faith' (Rom. 3:27), 'the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus' (Rom. 8:2), 'the law of liberty' (Jas. 2:12) and 'the law of Christ' (Gal. 6:2) – these are not the law of Moses! In any case, is it not possible – to put it no stronger – that a prophecy of a *new* covenant might be concerned with something other than the law of the *old* covenant, the law of Moses? We must not assume that 'the law' for this new-covenant people is the same as for the old-covenant people of God. Nor must we assume the people are the same. Might not a new covenant speak of a new law for a new people? And it is a *new* covenant: 'I will make a *new* covenant... *not according to* the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt'.

Secondly, we must be consistent. If Jeremiah's use of 'Israel and Judah' is a prophecy of a new Israel, then a similar

conclusion and 'change' of meaning must apply to 'law'. It will not do to say that one part of the passage – 'Israel and Judah' – becomes 'new' in the prophecy, but the other – 'the law' – does not. A new Israel requires a new law.

Thirdly, if it is the law of Moses that is written on the heart in the new covenant, then it is the law of Moses – all of it! It is quite wrong to whittle this down to the ten commandments, blithely assuming it is so. If it is the law of Moses, the complete law, that is written on the heart of every believer, the consequences will have to be lived with!²

Clearly, all this raises a very important point of biblical interpretation. Did Jeremiah prophesy the law of Moses would be written on the hearts of the Jews? Or did he prophesy the law of Moses would be written on believers' hearts? Or did he prophesy the law of Christ would be written on the hearts of Jews at the end of the age? Or did he prophesy the law of Christ would be written on believers' hearts now? In other words, how should we read Old Testament prophecies such as this? That is, should we read them as predicting old or new-covenant blessings to old or new-covenant people? Naturally, the prophecies were delivered, in the first instance, to Jews in old-covenant language and terms, but are they to be understood in that way in the days of the new covenant?

What tools has God given us so that we might do the job – and come to a definitive, biblical answer to such questions? It is high time we looked at the key passage, namely 1 Peter 1:8-12, leading to an overview of all the prophets. And that is precisely what I did in: 'The Prophets and the New Covenant'. If you have not read that article, reader, I respectfully ask you to do so at this point. It is vital background material for what follows.

Assuming that you have, I now go on to consider the major Old Testament prophecy of the new covenant; namely Jeremiah 31:31-34.

² Consequences? Every believer will have heart love for, and devote heart obedience to, the sacrifices, observance of the festivals, dietary laws, and so on.

A look at Jeremiah 31:31-34

Let me start by retracing my steps. The law *is* written on a believer's heart in the new covenant, written by the Spirit in regeneration. The terms and promises of the new covenant, prophesied in Jeremiah 31:31-34, and set out in Hebrews 8:6-13 and 10:16-17, are these:

Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah – not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No more shall every man teach his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying: 'Know the LORD', for they all shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.

After all we have seen, we know how we should interpret this prophecy. We need be in no doubt. Jeremiah was predicting the coming of Christ and the setting up of the new covenant. God was announcing that in that new covenant, he would write his law – the law of Christ – upon the hearts of believers.

Moving from the general, to the specific, the New Testament directly quotes this prophecy, and interprets and applies it. I refer, of course, to Hebrews 7:18-19,22; 8:6-13; 9:24-28; 10:1-18. How does the writer of the letter to the Hebrews interpret this prophecy? Literally or spiritually? The literal interpretation of Jeremiah's prophecy and its context would entail the setting up of David's kingship once again (Jer. 30:9), the rebuilding of Jerusalem (Jer. 30:18; 31:38-40), its establishment for ever (Jer. 31:40), and the reinstatement and immense enlargement of the priesthood with its sacrificial ministry (Jer. 31:14; 33:17-18,21-22). Did the writer to the Hebrews speak of such things? Certainly not! That there was a physical restoration of the Jews to their land after their captivity in Babylon, I do not deny, but we are left in no doubt as to the New Testament fulfilment of

Jeremiah's prophetic words; which is, the gospel, the new covenant (Heb. 8:6-13).

In a lengthy extract drawn from the prophet, and a detailed exposition of that extract, the writer to the Hebrews is explicit as to how we should read, interpret and apply Jeremiah. May I suggest, reader, that you read Hebrews 7:18-19,22; 8:6-13; 9:24-28; 10:1-18, and do so out loud? If you do, I think things will soon become exceedingly clear. Having already spoken of a change of law under the gospel, and that change a 'necessity' (Heb. 7:12), the writer to the Hebrews contrasts the new 'law' with the Mosaic law, which he called 'old', 'obsolete', and 'ready to vanish away', 'disappear' (NIV) (Heb. 8:10,13). Note how he speaks of 'now... now... now, once at the end of the ages' (Heb. 8:6; 9:24,26). Note the 'us' and 'we' (Heb. 7:19; 9:24; 10:10,15). Note the utter lack of a whiff of a suggestion that there will be another fulfilment – a greater fulfilment – of the prophecy, which will come in some future Jewish kingdom. In fact, the whole context is that the prophecy was being fulfilled there and then – even as the writer was penning his letter. It was the present experience of the early believers. And it is ours, now, as believers. The passage speaks for itself. On its own, it is conclusive.

In short, Jeremiah's prophecy of Israel and Judah (Jer. 31:31-34) is to be understood spiritually, of believers. The law of which he prophesied, and which is fulfilled in the new covenant, is not the law of Moses, but the law of Christ, the gospel. The hill of Zion, Jerusalem, spiritually, is the church (Gal. 4:24-26; Heb. 12:22-23; Rev. 14:1-5) – which is called the *new* Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2); the temple is the church (Eph. 2:19-22; see also 1 Cor. 3:9,16; 2 Cor. 6:16; and I would include 2 Thess. 2:4).

All this, of course, is a hammer blow to those who object to the case I made out for the believer's rule in my *Christ is All* on the grounds that, in the new covenant, the law is written on the believer's heart. It is no objection at all. Jeremiah's prophecy is, in fact, the strongest biblical proof for the rebuttal of Calvin's third use of the law. For 'the law' in Jeremiah's prophecy, is nothing other than the law of Christ. It *cannot* be the law of Moses. It *is not* the law of Moses; no, not even the limited

Reformed view of the law – ‘the moral law’, as they call it. Neither Jeremiah, nor any other prophet, nor, come to that, any New Testament writer, ever used the phrase. They would not know what it meant! The truth is, God, through Jeremiah, promised that with the coming of his Son, he would set up the new covenant and, by his Spirit, write Christ’s law in the hearts of all his people. Indeed, as I showed in ‘The Prophets and the New Covenant’, the law of Christ is Christ himself, *for the new covenant is Christ himself*.

All this is further strengthened when we consider that most intriguing of phrases, ‘the Israel of God’, coined by Paul in Galatians 6:16.

‘The Israel of God’ (Gal. 6:16)

As many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

In my *Christ is All* (pp211-278,481-527), I gave my reasons for regarding ‘this rule’ as the law of Christ, but I now ask: Who or what is ‘the Israel of God’? The verse is unique, and presents several difficulties, punctuation – which has to be supplied – being one of them. Without getting involved in a convoluted discussion, let me say that, along with the majority, I take the punctuation as above, placing the comma after ‘rule’ and before ‘peace’.³ But what of ‘the Israel of God’? This is the only time

³ The two possibilities are: ‘As many as by this rule shall walk, peace upon them and mercy, and upon the Israel of God’; in other words, ‘peace’ and ‘mercy’ both belong to ‘as many as shall walk by this rule’. That is one possibility – the one I accept. Or: ‘As many as by this rule shall walk, peace upon them, and mercy [and] upon the Israel of God’; in other words, ‘peace’ belongs to ‘as many as shall walk by this rule’, but ‘mercy’ belongs to ‘the Israel of God’. That is the other – the one I reject. There is a second point; ‘peace’ and ‘mercy’ are in reverse order to every other occasion of their conjunction in Scripture (1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Tit. 1:4; 2 John 3; Jude 2). The order in Gal. 6:16 is ‘illogical’, although it occurs in the Nineteenth Benediction in the liturgy of the synagogue, which Paul might have been using. But this does not explain the structure of Gal. 6:16.

Paul used the phrase. Indeed, as I have said, it is unique in the whole of Scripture. What did the apostle mean by it? Above all, what of the 'and' in '*and* upon the Israel of God'? And why did Paul pen a piece of such remarkable, if not awkward, Greek? And why did he do it here – at the end of Galatians?

Let me tackle the 'and' first. When Paul said '*and* the Israel of God', was he using 'and' as 'and also'? In other words, was Paul speaking of two distinct groups – on the one hand, those who were living according to Christ's rule, *and also*, on the other, the Israel of God? If so, the Israel of God could not have been walking according to Christ's rule. Therefore, they were unbelievers; in fact, they were unbelieving Jews. But what an odd way of expressing it! 'The Israel of God', apparently, counter-balances 'as many as walk according to this rule'. This is not convincing. Quite the reverse! It is hard – for me, impossible – to accept that Paul called unbelieving Jews 'the Israel of God'. Why did he not use 'the circumcised' or 'the circumcision', his usual terminology (Rom. 3:30; 4:9; 15:8; Gal. 2:7-9,12; Eph. 2:11; Tit. 1:10, for instance), and which would have aptly fitted the context? What is more, if he was speaking of unbelieving Jews, it means that Paul desired peace and mercy upon them, every bit as much as he did upon those who belong to Christ. This is unthinkable. Why would Paul wish peace and mercy for those who did not see eye to eye with him on Galatians 6:14-15, who were not believers? For their salvation, he would pray, yes (Rom. 9:1-3; 10:1), but a desire for 'peace and mercy' does not translate into a desire 'that they might be saved'. In any case, concern for the salvation of unbelieving Jews is foreign to the context, both immediate and throughout the letter. And if he was including the Judaisers in 'the Israel of God' – as he ought, if he was speaking of unbelieving Jews – I cannot see how Galatians 6:16 can be made to fit with Galatians 5:12.

Not only is it very unlikely (it is unthinkable!) that Galatians 6:16 teaches that Paul prayed for 'peace and mercy' for both believers and unbelievers, it is hard to see how the verse teaches

that Paul prayed for two sorts of believers – Gentile and Jewish.⁴ The idea that the people of God can be divided into Gentile believers and Jewish believers is utterly foreign to Galatians,⁵ and is surely eliminated by John 10:16; 11:52; 17:20-23; Ephesians 2:11-22.⁶ Paul never does such a thing. So this kind of division cannot be the meaning of ‘and the Israel of God’.

The fact is, Paul was not praying for two groups at all. The ‘and’, *kai*, can be translated ‘namely’, ‘even’ or ‘that is’, and this is how it should be read here: ‘Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God’ (NIV).⁷ Indeed, the word is sometimes best left untranslated. The upshot is, Paul prayed that ‘peace and mercy be upon them, [that is, namely, even] upon the Israel of God’. In other words, he desired peace and mercy upon all who walk according to Christ’s law; that is, all believers. ‘The Israel of God’, therefore, is an all-encompassing term for all believers, for all – for ‘as many as’, whether Jews or Gentiles – for all who live according to Christ’s law.

But why did Paul choose the term ‘the Israel of God’? Why did he not say ‘the elect’, or ‘the saints’, or ‘the church’, or some such? Why did he use ‘Israel’? This is the most interesting question of all. We find its answer by re-considering our parallel discussion,⁸ of Paul’s choice (and in the same context – and, as always, the context must be king) of the word ‘law’ in ‘the law of Christ’ (Gal. 6:2). When thinking about *that*, I asked why Paul

⁴ Nor was Paul thinking of ministers, on the one hand, and private believers, on the other. I have not made up these ‘explanations’. As always, they are seriously suggested by various writers.

⁵ Moses, through his law, divided men, whereas Christ unites. This is a vital part of Galatians.

⁶ See also Ezek. 34:23-31; 37:24-28.

⁷ There is scriptural warrant for it, not least in Galatians. For instance: ‘But even (*kai*) if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed’ (Gal. 1:8). ‘And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with [Peter], so that even (*kai*) Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy’ (Gal. 2:13). ‘Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even (*kai*) we have believed in Christ Jesus’ (Gal. 2:16). ‘Even (*kai*) so we’ (Gal. 4:3).

⁸ See my *Christ* pp214-218,481-483.

did not use another, neutral word for 'law', saying he must have had good reason for his use of the old Jewish word. It could only have been deliberate. I called 'the law of Christ' a staggering phrase, a breathtaking paradox, and noted how intriguing was Paul's choice of such a loaded term as 'law'. I also commented on his word play over 'law'. Above all, I noted the important part played by the eschatological aspect of law and grace.

All this applies equally to Paul's use of 'Israel' here and elsewhere. His word play, for instance, is clearly at work in his astounding statement that 'they are not all Israel who are of Israel' (Rom. 9:6). At once the spotlight shines upon 'Israel'. Paul, there can be no question of it, meant his readers to sit up and take notice. We know that 'Israel', as a word, had enormous resonance for the Hebrew people. It was peculiarly their own name, their self-designation as the covenant people of God; outsiders called them Jews. This is significant. Whenever we come across 'Israel', we have something noteworthy, something precious. 'The Israel of God' (Gal. 6:16), therefore, must be exceedingly significant; not only 'Israel', but *'the Israel'*, even *'the Israel of God'*!

Then again, it is clear that in leading up to his use of 'the Israel of God' (Gal. 6:16), Paul has had 'Israel according to the flesh' in mind. Note his emphasis on law, circumcision, flesh and boasting (Gal. 6:12-13). This is what I meant by the context. Then comes his thunderous: 'But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world' (Gal. 6:14), which prepares the way for his shattering statement: 'For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation' (Gal. 6:15) – an unmistakable echo of Galatians 5:6. I say shattering, and so it is in light of the context. Paul could not have picked a more emotive topic to make his point for those tempted to go to the law – circumcision, of all things. How often he has spoken of it in this letter in one way or another (Gal. 2:3,7-9,12; 5:6,11-12; 6:12-13,15). The truth is, 'the circumcision' or 'the circumcised' was a euphemism for 'Israel' (Acts 10:45; 11:2; Rom. 3:30; 4:9,12; 15:8; Gal. 2:7-9,12; Eph. 2:11; Col. 4:11; Tit. 1:10). But circumcision, or lack of it, is of no

concern, says Paul. All that matters is to be 'in Christ', to be a new creation, to boast in nothing but his cross. 'And as many as walk according to *this* rule, peace and mercy be upon them'. *They* are 'the Israel of God' (Gal. 6:16). Furthermore, in his use of 'peace and mercy', unmistakable Jewish overtones are evident once again. As I say, Paul's readers would not have missed all this emphasis upon Israel; 'the Israel of God' would have assumed enormous significance for them. The phrase was no idle choice, one grabbed out of the air, but was deliberate, calculated to produce maximum effect.

And not the least aspect of the phrase's fascination lies in the fact that 'the Israel of God' is virtually impossible to express in Hebrew. It is entirely a New Testament phrase and concept. All this indicates that Paul had a special purpose in coining⁹ 'the Israel of God', every bit as much as when he coined 'the law of Christ'. As with 'law', so with 'Israel'; the significance of both lies in the eschatological period we are talking about.¹⁰ Which Testament are we in? Which covenant are we talking about? 'The law of Moses' was for 'Israel after the flesh' (1 Cor. 10:18) in the old covenant. 'The law of Christ' is for 'the Israel of God' in the new. Both 'law' and 'Israel' have been taken over and transformed in the change of covenants. Paul, in the same context, using the two weighty Jewish words, pregnant with meaning, 'law' and 'Israel', coined two new-covenant phrases, 'the law of Christ' and 'the Israel of God'. It is a classic demonstration of how the New Testament writers (Paul in particular) use the language, rites and titles of the old-covenant people, Israel, and apply them to the new-covenant people, the

⁹ As before, I deliberately use the word 'coin'.

¹⁰ By eschatological, I do not mean some supposed restoration of national Israel in the millennium, which is utterly foreign to Galatians (and everywhere else, as far as I can see). As I have explained at large, Paul has been speaking about the eschatological 'but now'. 'Once at the end of the ages, [Christ] has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself' (Heb. 9:26). 'The ends of the ages have come' upon us (1 Cor. 10:11). 'Now', 'but now' (Rom. 3:21; 5:9,11; 6:22; 7:6; 8:1; 11:30; 11:31 (second 'now' in NIV, NASB); 16:26; see also John 15:22,24; Acts 17:30; 1 Cor. 15:20; Gal. 4:9; Eph. 2:12-13; 5:8; Col. 1:26; Heb. 8:6; 9:26; 12:26; 1 Pet. 2:10). I cannot stress too much the 'but now'.

church. 'Passover', 'circumcision', 'sabbath', 'altar', 'sacrifice', 'priest', 'temple', *etc.* have all come over and been transformed.¹¹ Likewise with 'law' and 'Israel'. The law of Christ is the new law for the new people. As the Israel of the Old Testament had its law, the law of Moses – so the Israel of the New Testament has its law, the law of Christ.

Linking this with Jeremiah's prophecy of the new covenant, we can, once again, face up to the two questions. Who are the 'Israel' and 'Judah'? What is the law? These two questions are inextricably linked through the historic change of epoch in redemption history. The law of Moses gave way to the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2), and Israel after the flesh gave way to the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16). Let me use the despised word, 'replacement'; I am not ashamed of it: 'the law of Christ' has replaced 'the law of Moses', and 'the Israel of God' has replaced 'Israel after the flesh'. There is a contrast between the 'Israel of God' and the 'Israel after the flesh' (1 Cor. 10:18) The 'Israel of God' is the spiritual Israel, the whole body of believers whether Jew or Gentile, those who are governed by this rule. On them, peace and mercy abide, since they are the true Israel of God. All this, of course, was fully determined in God's decree, accomplished by Christ, and is being applied by the sovereign Spirit.

This is confirmed by other scriptures. 'We are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh' (Phil. 3:3). 'He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God' (Rom. 2:28-29; see also Rom. 4:12; 9:6-8; Gal. 3:7,9,28-29; 5:6; 6:15). In Christ, all believers, Jew and Gentile, are 'circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by [better, in] putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ' (Col. 2:11). Such are now 'a holy nation, his own special people... now the people of God' (1 Pet. 2:9-10; see also Tit. 2:14; Heb. 2:17). Note the 'now' – *now* the people of God'. Before conversion,

¹¹ For more in this vein, see my *Psalm 119; Sabbath Questions*.

Gentile unbelievers ‘were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world’.¹² But after conversion, Gentile believers (and Jewish, of course) ‘have been brought near by the blood of Christ’ (Eph. 2:11-13). Christ has reversed all the negatives. Gentile (and Jewish) believers are in Christ, they are one body in Christ, citizens of the true Israel, they partake of the covenants of promise, have hope and God in the world. I underline, in particular, the fact that the saints are Israelites indeed (see John 1:47; Rom. 9:6). They form ‘one new man’, ‘one body’, one ‘household’, one ‘building’, one ‘temple’, one ‘dwelling place’ of and for God (Eph. 2:14-22). All believers – Jew and Gentile – are Abraham’s children (Rom. 4). In truth, they are the ‘children of promise’ (Gal. 4:28), God’s adopted children, no less (Rom. 8:14-17; Gal. 4:5-7). They are, in short, the Israel of God.

‘As many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and [even] upon the Israel of God’, therefore, is the climax – and a fitting climax, at that – to Paul’s letter to the Galatians. It is not a mere add-on. Moreover, Paul is not at this late stage introducing a new subject – such as some future blessing for the Jews. Far from it. He is summing up his letter, drawing the threads together. ‘The Israel of God’! All through his letter, Paul has been working towards, not the ‘Israel after the flesh’, but the ‘Israel of God’; ‘peace and mercy be upon *them*’. And, coupled with this, of course, he has been defending his readers – stirring his readers – against the attacks of the Judaisers, showing believers that holiness is not by the law of Moses (Gal. 3:2-5), but by the law of Christ.

Galatians 6:16 is not sufficient, on its own, to come to a clear decision about the believer and the law, especially in connection with Jeremiah 31:31-34. No! For that, I can only refer you, reader, to the abundant biblical evidence I have already cited. Galatians 6:16 is only one part of this, I accept. Nevertheless, it is a part! And it is all very well to say what we *cannot* deduce from the verse, but what *was* Paul saying? After all, he used the phrase,

¹² Jewish unbelievers, of course, although Israelites, were without Christ, and so on, but Paul is addressing Gentiles at this point.

‘the Israel of God’! He must have meant something by it! If he was not thinking of what I have said, then what was he thinking of? I contend that both parts of Jeremiah’s prophecy – ‘the law’ and ‘Israel and Judah’ – are transformed by the epochal change of covenant. The parallel use of eschatological terms in Galatians and Hebrews concerning the replacement of the law by the Spirit, to my mind clearly establishes that ‘the Israel of God’ (Gal. 6:16) is not ‘Israel after the flesh’. I do not agree with the suggestion that ‘the Israel of God’ are the elect Jews, not the church. Nor do I think that Justin Martyr (c. AD160) was the first to call the church ‘the Israel of God’. I am convinced Paul used ‘Israel’ in this way in Galatians 6:16. And it is all of a piece with the rest of the New Testament teaching about the eschatological ‘but now’.

Christ has come. It is the age of the Spirit; the age of the Mosaic law is over. No more is it Israel according to the flesh, but Israel according to the Spirit. No longer is it the bondage of Mount Sinai in Arabia, but the liberty of the spiritual Zion. The law of God is now the law of Christ.

And all this confirms the view of Jeremiah 31:31-34 which I have set out. The prophet was not speaking of the law of Moses being written on the hearts of Jews. Nor was he saying that the law of Moses would be the believer’s rule under the gospel. The new covenant, of which Jeremiah prophesied, is an inward covenant, inward through the indwelling Christ, he himself being the new law, by his Spirit, ‘written on the heart’ of the believer. The law within the believer is nothing less than Christ living and formed within him (John 14:23; 17:23; 2 Cor. 6:16; Gal. 4:19; Eph. 3:17; Rev. 3:20; 21:3). Indeed, Christ himself is the believer’s covenant. As the apostle could declare to the Colossians: ‘I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to his saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory’ (Col. 1:25-27).

Nor was Jeremiah the only prophet to speak of the new covenant. Take God’s promise through Isaiah: ‘All your children

shall be taught by the LORD' (Isa. 54:13; John 6:45). Again, through Ezekiel: 'I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my judgments and do them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God... I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you will keep my judgments and do them' (Ezek. 11:19-20; 36:25-27; see also Ezek. 16:59-63). Nor, for obvious reasons, is the doctrine of the new covenant confined to the Old Testament!¹³

The *doctrine* of the new covenant (despite its relative rarity as a *phrase*) is written large throughout the entire Bible. It pervades everything; it is a major concept in Scripture. Take Isaiah 42, where God was addressing the Messiah, Christ (Matt. 3:17; 12:17-21; 17:5): 'Behold! My servant whom I uphold, my elect one in whom my soul delights' (Isa. 42:1). God commanded the people to 'sing to the LORD a *new* song', having addressed Christ thus: 'Behold, the *former* things have come to pass, and *new* things I declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them' (Isa. 42:9-10). This was a foretelling of the *new* covenant which would be established by Christ. 'Do not remember the *former* things, nor consider things of old. Behold, I will do a *new* thing' (Isa. 43:18-19; Jer. 31:22). God described this *new* thing: 'I will even make a road in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert... waters in the wilderness and rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, my chosen' (Isa. 43:19-20), and 'a woman shall encompass a man' (Jer. 31:22), something unheard of! God assured his people that they would 'hear *new* things', things they had not known (Isa. 48:6), 'be called by a *new* name' (Isa. 62:2), and eventually live in a '*new* heavens and a *new* earth' (Isa. 65:17; 66:22). The *new* song to be sung by the elect is a repeated theme of the Psalms (Ps. 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1).

¹³ See also my *Psalm 119*.

No wonder, since God promised to 'give... a *new* heart [to] and put a *new* spirit within' his people (Ezek. 36:26; 11:19-20), fulfilling his command that they should 'get [themselves] a *new* heart and a *new* spirit' (Ezek. 18:31).¹⁴

When the Psalmist spoke of the godly man, and recorded that 'his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in his law he meditates day and night' (Ps. 1:2), naturally, he was thinking of the law of Moses. Of course he was, since he was living in the days of the old covenant. But as a prophet, was he saying that the believer in the age of the Spirit would delight in, and day and night meditate upon, the law of Moses? Or, as so many (mis)define the law, the ten commandments? Reader, if you are a believer, does this describe you? When you ask God: 'Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from your law' (Ps. 119:18), and tell him: 'Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day' (Ps. 119:97), are you thinking only – or primarily – of the Mosaic law? Or do you read, delight in and meditate upon the entire Scripture, and especially the gospel of our (your) Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ? 'Consider *him*' (Heb. 12:3)! Surely the staunchest advocate of Calvin's third use of the law would not spend *all* his time in the law, would he? Nor would he spend *more* time in the Old Testament than the New, would he? And when reading and interpreting the Old, would he not do so in terms of the New? Reader, when you cite, sing or otherwise use, say, Psalm 3:4; 5:7; 18:6; 20:2-3; 24:3; 27:4-6; 48:9,12; 50:5; 51:18-19; 54:6; 65:4; 122; 128:5; 134; 141:2, what is going through your mind? If you were to be washed up on a desert island, and could have only one leaf of Scripture, would you select Exodus 20 or Romans 8? To ask such questions is to answer them.¹⁵

¹⁴ See my *Christ* p228 for the importance of 'new' and 'heart'.

¹⁵ Believer, have you not found that you can open the New Testament anywhere and turn it into prayer without adjustment? Do you find you can do the same with, say, Deut. 28:58-68; 1 Kings 8:14-53; Ps. 18:20-24; 109:1-20? What about Isa. 58:13-14 with Ex. 35:2-3; Jer. 17:21-27? See my *Psalm 119*.

The Law on the Believer's Heart

In all this, please do not forget this vital distinction I drew when setting out the believer's rule in my *Christ is All* (pp218-219,483-486). This is what I said:

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'.

Here is where it comes into its own.

Conclusion

Calvin's third use of the law is wrong! The ten commandments cannot sanctify. The ten commandments do not form the believer's perfect rule. The ten commandments are not written on the believer's heart in the new covenant. The gospel is. The law of Christ is. Christ himself is.

God demands heart obedience, heart experience, heart worship, but man cannot provide it. The good news is that God, by his grace, through Jeremiah (and others) promised that he would set up a new covenant and do this very thing, writing his new law, the law of Christ, upon his people's hearts. More than that, even better than that, at the appointed time God sent his Son into the world to establish this new covenant, to die for his people in order to redeem them, and to earn the gift of the Holy Spirit for them, and so write his law upon their hearts.

Thus the new-covenant man inevitably delights in obedience, and gives God heart worship and service, not a grudging conformity to irksome rules imposed from without. To any who object to my use of 'irksome', I can only suggest they re-read passages such as Acts 15:5,10,24; Galatians 2:4-5; 3:21-25; 4:21 – 5:1,13, noting words such as 'trouble', 'slavery', 'bondage', 'locked up', and 'prison' which are coupled with the law, and words such as 'freedom' and 'liberty' which are associated with the new covenant. The truth is, the believer serves God in Christ in glorious freedom. Why? How? Because God's Spirit enables the believer to *delight* in the law (the entire word of God, especially the gospel) from his heart, where the Spirit writes it (Ps. 1:2; 19:7-8; 37:31; Jer. 31:33; Rom. 7:22; Heb. 8:10; 10:16).

Take just one example. God commands his people to 'love one another fervently with a pure heart'. How can they do it? What grace and power does God give them to enable them to obey? Let the new covenant speak: 'Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God, which lives and abides for ever' (1 Pet. 1:22-23). That's how believers can do it – 'having been born again'. They can do it, they will do it, because they are regenerate, because they have the Spirit of God, because they are 'partakers of the divine nature' (2 Pet. 1:4), and because they are newly 'created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness' (Eph. 4:24, NIV).

So, while believers are under a far more searching regime in the new covenant, far more incisive than the Jews under the old covenant,¹⁶ while the law of Christ is far more penetrating, far more demanding than the law of Moses, Christ provides so much more than Moses. God demands all. God promises all. Christ accomplished all. Christ is all. Christ gives grace to enable his people to love and obey his law from the heart, by his Spirit, and thus glorify God.¹⁷

¹⁶ See my *Christ* pp232-236,508-509.

¹⁷ In saying this, I do not imply that there were no regenerate people in the Old Testament. While the position of Old Testament believers is 'somewhat anomalous', Abraham (before the law was given), Moses (who was given the law), and David (after the law had been given), are typical of those who lived and died trusting in the coming Messiah, and are rightly counted among the men and women of faith (John 8:56; Heb. 11). The Psalmist spoke for all new-covenant people of both ages when he said: 'Oh, how I love your law!' (Ps. 119:97). 'Love' is a heart word. Throughout Psalm 119, note the connection between 'law', 'precepts', 'judgments', and so on, and such words as 'heart' or 'whole heart', 'rejoice', 'delight', 'longing', 'love', and the like. The man who prefers the law above 'thousands of shekels of gold and silver' shows us where his heart is (Matt. 6:21). See also Ps. 1:2; 40:8. The fact that there were new-covenant people living in the Old Testament, of course, is why I can quote their words! There is no difference between David and Paul: 'I delight in the law of God according to the inward man' (Rom. 7:22). As

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‘The law was given through Moses’ – BUT – ‘grace and truth came through Jesus Christ’ (John 1:17).

I have made clear, it is all ‘the law of God’, but in the old covenant it is ‘the law of Moses’, while in the new it is ‘the law of Christ’. In saying this, of course, I am not going back on my comments on Rom. 7:14-25; I am deliberately not defining the man in question. In all this, see my *Psalm 119*.

The Law the Believer's Rule?

How should believers read, quote and use the law? Are they obliged to obey it as a command, as a rule? If so, are they obliged to obey all the commandments? Or what?

Different schools of thought come up with different answers.

At one extreme, there is the Reconstructionist: *Believers have to obey the law, all of it. This includes stoning for witches, adulterers, sabbath breakers, and so on. Believers must do all they can to bring about a Christian State which will enforce the Mosaic law on all its citizens.*

At the other extreme, there is the Antinomian: *Believers are utterly free of the law. Disobedience brings more grace and more liberty. This is what the 'no condemnation in Christ' means.*¹

In this article, I have only one thing to say about these two: both are completely unscriptural.

Somewhere in the middle, we have the Reformed: *Believers are under the law for sanctification; the law is their perfect rule of life.*² *But when the Reformed say 'law', what they really mean is 'the ten commandments' (which they call 'the moral law'), but not the law's 600 plus other commandments.*³ *They justify this severe narrowing*⁴ *of the law by use of a non-scriptural (not to say, unscriptural) construct. They say that the law is divided into*

¹ If any reader thinks this is a caricature, he should see the evidence set out in my *Four* pp19-24.

² The third of Calvin's three uses of the law.

³ In fact, because most of them think that the fourth commandment is partly moral and partly ceremonial, they really think believers are under 'the 9.5 commandments'.

⁴ 'Severe narrowing'? Virtual elimination (by about 99%), even taking into account the repetition of the ten commandments!

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three bits: 'moral', 'ceremonial' and 'judicial'.⁵ Christ has not only abolished these last two bits of the law, but his work covers the believer's failure in the first. But, since Scripture never divides the law like this, never sets out which commandment (or part of a commandment) is moral or ceremonial, how is the believer supposed to determine which part of any particular law is moral (and is, therefore, obligatory) and which is ceremonial (and is, therefore, abolished)? This vexed question applies particularly to the fourth commandment.⁶ So what should believers do? In effect, the Reformed answer amounts to this: 'Consult your chosen Reformed pope. Let him tell you what's what. Grit your teeth and get on with it. And learn to live with the endless conundrums you will inevitably have to face as a consequence'.⁷

Needless to say,⁸ all this is unscriptural, and, for those involved, spells bondage and sadness, and raises one dilemma after another.

Now for Scripture.

Apostolic authority for new-covenant use of the law

Christ promised his disciples that he would not leave them without guidance in all matters of the faith:

The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name... will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to

⁵ These constructs cannot be justified from Scripture. They are medieval, almost certainly stemming from Thomas Aquinas. See my *Christ* pp100-104,392-400.

⁶ Is the fourth commandment entirely moral, entirely ceremonial, or partly both? If the latter, what constitutes the moral part, and is therefore obligatory on believers, and which part is ceremonial and has therefore been abolished? How do the Reformed decide? On what biblical grounds do they decide? And what about the sabbath commandments (of which there are many examples) outside the ten? The assorted answers given to such questions demonstrates that hardly any two Reformed teachers agree over the practicalities of their system.

⁷ If any reader thinks this is a caricature, he should read Reformed works on the sabbath. For a sample, see my *Sabbath Notes* pp137-156.

⁸ At least, I hope it is! If not, for my arguments, see my *Christ*.

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you... The Spirit of truth... will guide you into all truth... He will glorify me, for he will take of what is mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are mine. Therefore I said that he [the Spirit] will take of mine and declare it to you (John 14:26; 16:13-15).

Having been given the law of Christ from their Redeemer, their lawgiver in the new covenant, and having received the promised Holy Spirit who brought to their remembrance *all* things which Christ had said to them, and who guided them into *all* truth (John 14:26; 16:13), the apostles spelled out Christ's law for all Christ's disciples for all time. The apostolic writings are replete with the concept: 'Be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Saviour' (2 Pet. 3:2). The gospel, 'the way of righteousness', is called 'the holy commandment' (2 Pet. 2:21). The apostles taught 'the law of Christ' (Gal. 6:2), 'this rule' which is to be observed by the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16),⁹ commanding believers to 'walk by the same rule' (Phil. 3:16),¹⁰ and to 'consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness' (1 Tim. 6:3; Tit. 1:1).¹¹ The apostles commanded Christ's people to

⁹ Is 'this rule' of Gal. 6:16 the law of Christ? I think so. It is the believer's norm, the principle of Gal. 6:15. It is not the law of Moses. Gal. 5:25 does not support the claim that it is; that law is not even mentioned. But by 'rule' we must not think in old-covenant mode. See below and my *Christ* pp212,247,503-504.

¹⁰ Is 'the same rule' of Phil. 3:16 the law of Christ? I think so. Although 'rule' probably was not in the original, even so it is clearly implied. We could use 'principle', or (NASB) 'standard', or 'precept', 'doctrine of Christ', 'the rule of faith as opposed to works'. But by 'rule' we must not think in old-covenant mode. See below and my *Christ* pp212,247,503-504.

¹¹ Are these 'wholesome words' the law of Christ? I think so. Leaving aside the first 'even' (supplied by the NKJV), consider the 'and' in 'the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, *and* to the doctrine'. This 'and' is *kai* which – see discussion in my *Christ* pp315,552-553 – may be translated 'even'. If so, 'the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, *even* the doctrine which accords with godliness' form the law of Christ. In other words, Christ's teaching is that which leads to and promotes godliness. And Christ's teaching includes the apostles' teaching, of course. See my *Christ* pp212,247,503-504.

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be sanctified, instructing them in the matter (1 Cor. 14:37; 1 Thess. 4:1-12; 2 Thess. 3:4-15). They gave instructions about family life (Eph. 5:22-33; 6:1-4; Col. 3:18-21), the work place (Eph. 6:5-9; Col. 3:22-25; 4:1), church life (1 Cor. 11:17-34; 1 Tim. 3:14-15), the way believers should conduct themselves in the State (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-17), and so on. They also commanded other teachers to do the same on the authority of the apostles and their instructions (1 Tim. 4:11; 5:7; 6:2,17; 2 Tim. 2:2,14; 4:1-5; Tit. 2:1-15; 3:1-2,8,14). And all was in the name of Christ himself: 'Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...' (1 Cor. 1:10).

In particular, the apostles laid down the ground rules for the way believers should read and apply the law.

Now to answer my original question. How should believers read, quote and use the law? All they have to do is ask the apostles how they used the law, and walk in their boots. So how did they use the law? In one way. Always. With every law. With all the law. And that way was... what? They never used the law in an old-covenant way, as a rule by which believers are to be governed, but *they always used the law as a paradigm for them*.¹²

An objection

'Whoa! If, as you claim, believers are not under the law, why does the New Testament appeal to the ten commandments? And why do the apostles press the ten commandments on believers?' The Reformed have no problem with this, of course. It is just what would be expected.

¹² As for Christ, in the Sermon on the Mount, he 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) – and made others redundant. In this sermon, 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. See my *Christ* especially pp236-241,493-500.

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But wait a minute! Is it? The New Testament does use the ten commandments when addressing believers, yes. But how does it do it? And how often does it do it? Surely, if the Reformed view is right, the New Testament should always – always! – be drawing the attention of believers to the ten commandments; ‘as the ten commandments say’ should be a constant refrain. After all, the Reformed say that the ten commandments are the believer’s perfect rule. If so, shouldn’t the New Testament be always pointing believers to the ten commandments – to that which is their ‘perfect’ rule? But we do not find it so. Nor do we find the apostles pressing the law on believers, do we? Where? When?

Let us clear away some loose thinking. And there is need! We meet plenty of sloppy – not to say, shoddy – exegesis when the Reformed turn to these passages, and try to make their case. For instance: Paul did not *impose* the fifth commandment on the believers at Ephesus (Eph. 6:1-3). Christ and the apostles did not *always* refer believers to the law when they wanted to speak of godliness. Nor does the New Testament show that *frequently* meditating upon the law is the *best* way to live a sanctified life, or to be stirred to it. Nor does it repeat and enforce *all* the ten commandments. These things are claimed. Do we get the impression that believers in the New Testament were turning to the law and *frequently* meditating upon it as the *best* way to discover God’s will for their lives, and stirring them to godliness? I think not! What evidence do we have that Gentile believers in that time had, or had even seen, a copy of the ten commandments?¹³ To think Gentile believers had (let alone pored over) a copy of the law (in Greek or Hebrew) is wildly fanciful.

The truth is, reader, where does Paul *ever* tell believers they are under Moses’ law? Where does he *ever* tell believers they must regard the law of Moses as their norm, their rule? Which commandment of the ten does Paul *ever* tell believers they must obey? The silence is deafening. These significant facts cannot be ignored. Yes, Paul *used* the law when *exhorting* believers –

¹³ See my *Christ* p481 regarding most Diaspora Jews and their lack of the Hebrew Scriptures.

though even this is rare – but he never commanded believers to obey the Mosaic law.

Having cleared the ground in general, let me now go on to consider those particular places where Paul does appeal to the ten commandments when writing to believers. There are three. Only three. But let us look at all three of them.

Consider Romans 13:8-10

Owe no man anything except to love one another, for he 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 bear false witness, you shall not covet’ – and if there is any other commandment – are all summed up in this saying; namely: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’. Love does no harm to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilment of the law.

The love Paul spoke of is love for men – particularly, if not expressly, believers – not love for God. As to the ‘law’ in question, there can be no doubt. Both the wider context – Paul’s overwhelming use of the word throughout Romans – and especially the immediate context – in which some of the ten commandments are quoted (Rom. 13:9) – make it clear that Paul, writing to believers, was here speaking about the Mosaic law,¹⁴ the ten commandments in particular. The upshot is, Paul undoubtedly quoted some of the ten commandments when writing to the believers at Rome. This is agreed.

But notice what Paul did not do. He did not make the law the be-all and end-all of his teaching. He did not make the law its climax. *Notice further what Paul did not say.* He did not tell the believers – nor remind them of what, according to Reformed teaching, they are supposed to have been fully aware of – that they are, of course, under the law of Moses. Strange silence! Not exactly a proof that Calvin’s third use of the law is wrong, I grant you, but from the Reformed point of view, certainly odd! Rather, the apostle said that love fulfils the law (Rom. 13:8,10; Gal. 5:14). ‘Fulfil’! How many times we meet this word in this context (Matt. 5:17-18; Rom. 8:4; 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14-16; 6:2; Jas. 2:8, for instance)! Love, said Paul, *fulfils* the law. And we know that, in

¹⁴ He quoted Lev. 19:18. See below for more on this point.

this regard, old-covenant regulations do not count: 'For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love' (Gal. 5:6). I realise that Paul was speaking of justification in this last verse, but the point is justifying faith will show itself by love – not by trying to keep the law of Moses! It is by faith a believer is justified, and it is as his faith works by love that he shows his sanctification.

While love does not dispense with the law – rather it fulfils it – Paul certainly did not say the law of Moses is the regulative norm for believers; he did not impose it upon them. He did not say it is their rule. He did not say believers must strive to keep it. *Nor did he imply it.* He simply cited examples from the ten commandments, making the point that love is the real end, the 'fulfilment', of the law. And in order to drive the point home, Paul says it twice in this brief paragraph (Rom. 13:8,10). *This*, I say, is the point. Furthermore, if the apostle's citing of the ten commandments really does prove that the law is the believer's perfect rule, does the same apply to nature and pagan poets? After all, see Acts 17:28-29; 1 Corinthians 11:14; Titus 1:12-13. No! Paul briefly quotes the ten commandments to say that love fulfils them.

'Fulfil' is a strong word. What does it mean? It does not here mean 'sum up'. Rather, we are, once again, in the realm of the eschatological. It also reminds us of something Paul said earlier in Romans: God has done a work through his Son in order 'that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit' (Rom. 8:3-4). I refer you, reader, to chapter 10 and my remarks on those verses. Linking that passage and this, both in the same book, remember, with no chapter/verse divisions, Paul, it is evident, is speaking of believers, those who are redeemed by Christ, who are indwelt by the Spirit, who belong to the new age of the Spirit, who are no longer under 'law', 'but now' are in Christ – the one who is the 'end of the law' (Rom. 10:4). And what does Paul say of these believers? Believers, who love one another, have satisfied, fulfilled the demands of the law as far as their conduct towards their fellow-men is concerned.

But, I hasten to add, as the context also makes clear, this does not mean that love has replaced the commandments; love *fulfils* the law, it does not replace it. Believers still need the written word, including the law of Moses – but they need all the word, including all the law, not merely the ten commandments. The entire word teaches them, reproves them, corrects them, instructs and trains them (2 Tim. 3:16-17). And this word, I repeat, includes the Mosaic law in all its entirety – properly nuanced in line with the New Testament, of course. But it also includes apostolic commands. And love is the fulfilling of it. Love is the purpose of the commandment – whether we understand it to refer to the precise command Paul gave Timothy (1 Tim. 1:5), or to the whole of Scripture, including the law. The law is ‘all summed up’ in love (Rom. 13:9). The believer, one of God’s people, a member of the new covenant, is no longer under the law of Moses, the law for Israel, the old-covenant people of God. On the contrary, he is under a new law, ‘the law of Christ’ (1 Cor. 9:19-21; Gal. 6:2). And at the heart of Christ’s new law lies that commandment of Moses – namely, the commandment to love our neighbour as ourselves (Lev. 19:18; Gal. 6:2 with 5:13-14).

There is not a hint of a suggestion that Romans 13:8-10 is a list of rules for believers. Indeed, such a thing would have destroyed what the apostle is, in fact, saying. Consider the context. Paul has been dealing with practical godliness right from Romans 12:1. We can go back even further. From Romans 6:1, he has been dealing with sanctification.¹⁵ On reaching Romans 13:9, Paul cites several of the ten commandments to illustrate the point that love is the great fulfiller of the law. Love is the great motive and spur for godliness. Love is both its test and standard: ‘He who loves another has fulfilled the law... Love is the fulfilment of the law’ (Rom. 13:8,10). And how does the apostle go on? By sundry commands and exhortations. Ah, but why? Why ‘do this’ and ‘do that’? Because the law says so, because we are under regulation, because otherwise we might get lashed with Calvin’s whip?¹⁶ Not at all! Why should we be godly? Because

¹⁵ See my *Christ* pp158-177,448-468.

¹⁶ The very word Calvin used in his third use of the law.

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Christ is coming, because our salvation is getting daily nearer (Rom. 13:12). Avoid carnality, Paul demands. But how? By this:

Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh... the Lord... the Lord... the Lord... the Lord... the Lord... the Lord... Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's... Christ... Lord... We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ... the Lord Jesus... Christ... joy in the Holy Spirit... Christ... Christ... Christ Jesus... glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... just as Christ... Jesus Christ... by the power of the Holy Spirit... Jesus Christ... sanctified by the Holy Spirit... Christ Jesus... Christ... the Spirit of God... Christ... Christ... Christ... I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit... in the Lord... in Christ Jesus... in Christ... in Christ... in the Lord... in Christ... in Christ... in the Lord... in the Lord... in the Lord... in the Lord... Christ... Lord Jesus Christ... The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen... the Lord... The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen (Rom. 13:11 onwards).

Otherwise you 'do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ' (Rom. 16:18). In conclusion:

Now to him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now¹⁷ made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith – to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen (Rom. 16:25-27).

If this does not set Romans 13:8-10 in its proper context, nothing will. The suggestion that Paul is imposing the law of Moses upon believers is incredible. The sense of anticlimax – to return to Moses after nearly thirteen chapters of teaching on the glory of Christ in the gospel – would be intolerable. Paul does not go back to Moses. Of course not! In contrast, he rises to the Lord Jesus Christ. 'Christ' is what he leaves ringing in their ears. Christ!

Let me summarise the passage. As I have already said, the argument runs from Romans 12:1. Paul, having reached Romans 13, lays the foundation and measure of sanctification, 'love' (Rom. 13:10), and then moves on to the eternal hope believers

¹⁷ Note the 'now'.

have in Christ (Rom. 13:11-12), and the consequent holiness of life this must produce, both in a negative sense – things to ‘cast off’ (Rom. 13:12) – and in a positive sense – ‘let us put on... put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh’ (Rom. 13:12-14). Paul then takes up the issue of ‘things indifferent’ (Rom. 14:1-23; 15:1-7). Notice the absence of a list of rules and regulations – the law approach. And not only an absence of regulations! Observe how the apostle gives believers an *overall principle* by which to order their lives. And what is this principle? It can be summed up as the law of Christ. Note the references to Christ. In addition to references to ‘the Lord’, it is Christ and his work which are specifically and repeatedly used as the believer’s motive and touchstone (Rom. 14:6-10,14-15,18; 15:1-3,5-7). And Moses is not mentioned once! Above all, notice Paul’s final word on the subject: ‘Therefore receive one another, *just as Christ also received us*, to the glory of God’ (Rom. 15:7). As in the previous chapter, I draw attention yet again to this paramount comparison, this staggering comparison: ‘Just as...’! Is this what Reformed critics mean by ‘wishy-washy’?¹⁸

Thus the believer has to take a far more spiritual stance than merely looking up a code of practice and seeking to obey it. How mistaken it is, therefore, to say that Paul, at the start of Romans 12, takes up the law and wields it to teach believers their duties. By his use of ‘the will of God’, the apostle does not mean ‘the law of God’. Certainly, ‘the will of God’ cannot be confined to the ten commandments, a mere sixteen verses (thirty-two, with the repeat) of Scripture. It is the entire revealed will of God – ‘all Scripture’ (2 Tim. 3:16-17). As Christ prayed for his people: ‘Sanctify them by your truth. Your word is truth’ (John 17:17). ‘Your word’ – your entire word! The apostle does not tell the believer to keep the law. He does not say the law is the rule, the norm, the standard of the Christian life. That could not be right.

Paul, in Romans 13:8-10, shows that he is not against the law. He does not attack Moses. He is not an antinomian. The work of Christ in the gospel fulfils the law in the believer. But this does not mean that Paul here re-issues the law. How could he? He has

¹⁸ See my *Christ* pp156,219,222,248,280-281,285,287,488-489,528-529,535.

already taught that believers, living by the Spirit, are enabled by him to love one another – and that this is what the law wanted to produce but could not. Paul is not making the law the rule for believers in Romans 13:8-10, and thus going back on what he set out a few pages before (Rom. 6:14; 7:1-6). Believers have died to the law!

Consider Galatians 5:13-14

Here is another place where Paul, when writing to believers, quotes the Mosaic law, or a kind of summary of it – but not, in fact, one of the ten commandments:

You, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’.

Paul does not here destroy what he has so carefully established in the rest of his letter to the Galatians. Of that we may be sure. After all that he has said, he is not at this late stage putting forward ‘the moral law’, the ten commandments, as the believer’s rule. And if he is, he chooses a singularly inept way of doing it, since he quotes from Leviticus.¹⁹ The law here is, without question, the Mosaic law. Consequently, if Reformed teachers want to use this passage to say the moral law is binding on believers as their perfect rule, it proves too much for them. They must extend their view of the law far beyond the ten commandments. ‘The law’, in Galatians 5:14, is the law of Moses.²⁰ It is, literally in the Greek, ‘the whole law’.

But why did Paul quote from Leviticus? Why this emphasis upon ‘love your neighbour’? We have met this reference to Leviticus 19:18 before, and will meet it again. This is noteworthy. Whereas before Christ’s use of it, and Paul wrote his letters to the churches, there are no explicit references to the verse in Jewish writings, in clear contrast, in the New Testament this verse is the most frequently quoted passage from the Pentateuch

¹⁹ See above for Paul’s use of Lev. 19:18 in Rom. 13:8-10. See also below.

²⁰ Not the law of Christ. See my *Christ* pp116-157,412-447.

(Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:14; Jas. 2:8). This can only mean that the emphasis on Leviticus 19:18 is particularly and specially a gospel emphasis, and must have come from Christ himself, who first used it in this way (Matt. 5:43; 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27).

Notice Paul's emphasis upon 'fulfilled' once again. Paul is certainly not establishing the Mosaic law as the believer's rule, the commandments of which are to be obeyed in every particular. Love is the fulfilment of the law, and this love is possible only to those who have the Spirit. To try to establish Calvin's third use of the law from this passage is to miss the point of what Paul is saying, and to miss it badly. He is not exhorting believers to keep the law. He is stating a fact. By their life of love, he declares, all the law is fulfilled. And he puts it in the passive, 'the law is fulfilled'. I am not word-spinning. Paul is not commanding them to 'fulfil the law'; he is telling them 'the law is fulfilled' – two very different things. Paul speaks of believers and the fulfilment of the law in three places (Rom. 8:4; 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14), and in none of them does he command believers to fulfil the law. Rather, as believers walk according to, by or in the Spirit, the law is fulfilled, he says. We have already met this important passive. Paul says the righteous requirement of the law is *fulfilled* in believers (Rom. 8:4), but never says believers have to *do* or *keep* the law.

So what is the issue? It is no accident that 'fulfilled' (Gal. 5:14) and 'fullness' (Gal. 4:4) come from the same root word (which is, significantly, the same word as in Matt. 5:17), *plēroō*. The truth is, Paul is expounding the theme he has stressed so much in this letter; namely, the eschatological. The age of the law is over. The 'fullness' of the time has come (Gal. 4:4). Christ has come. The faith, the gospel, has come. And this has huge consequences for the individual. 'All the law is fulfilled' in believers by their obedience to Christ and his law in this new age. They are a new creation. And this is what Christ said he came to accomplish (Matt. 5:17).²¹ And this is the issue in Galatians 5:13-14.

²¹ See my *Christ* pp96,170,236-244,498-500.

Paul, it must not be forgotten, is directing his remarks to those 'who desire to be under the law' (Gal. 4:21).²² To Paul, such a desire is unthinkable, the stock-in-trade of false teachers, the Judaisers. He stresses the believer's freedom from the law (Gal. 4:21-31; 5:1,13), and this context of Galatians 5:13-14, both narrow and wide, must not be forgotten or ignored. It is the eschatological point all over again, worked out in individual experience. Paul is speaking of the believer's freedom (Gal. 5:1), the freedom he has by the work of the Holy Spirit. The believer has been rescued from this present evil age (Gal. 1:4).

As for 'all the law', Paul meant 'the whole law', the entire law of Moses; that is, not so much individual commands, but the law in its entirety and purpose. Compare Romans 8:4. The literal Greek, 'the all law', is 'odd' in that Paul put the 'all' in a peculiar place, and this is significant. Moreover, Paul put the definite article – 'the' – in a strange position too. None of this would have been lost on the original readers; 'the all law' is 'the entire law', 'the heart of the law', the fulfilment of the law's purpose.²³

As I have pointed out, 'loving one's neighbour' is not a soft option, not a lowering of the standard of the law. To dismiss the thesis of my book by such a device is too tempting for some; they wave it away as something vague and hazy – 'imprecise ethics'.²⁴

²² The Reformed get caught in this net.

²³ What of the seeming contradiction between Gal. 3:10-12; 5:3 and Gal. 5:14? See my *Christ* pp536-537 for my views. In brief, in Gal. 5:3, Paul was speaking of the attempt to earn justification by 'doing the law', which can be only by 'doing the whole law', 'the observance of all that the law requires' (Gal. 3:12; 5:3). This is impossible for fallen man. *Hence the negative overtones.* In Gal. 5:14, however, Paul was speaking of the new-covenant provisions Christ brought in, by which he gives people grace to 'fulfil the whole law', giving them his Spirit to enable them to live a sanctified life which expresses love (see Rom. 8:3-4). 'The love of God' – the sense of God's love to his people – 'the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us' (Rom. 5:5). Thus the Spirit enables believers to love in return (Luke 7:36-50; 1 John 4:7-11,19) and so 'fulfil the whole law'. *Hence the positive overtones.*

²⁴ See my *Christ* pp156,219,222,248,280-281,285,287,488-489,528-529,535.

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Not at all! The very imprecision in defining 'love' and 'neighbour', and how this can vary according to time and circumstance (Gal. 6:10),²⁵ makes Christ's law *all the more demanding* than Moses' law. While Christ does not call for conformity to rules, a ticking-of-the-boxes approach to sanctification – which, in truth, is no sanctification at all – neither does he call for a warm, vague feeling towards other believers. He wants, he demands, a real, practical and concentrated love, the sharing of goods and money, even – wait for it – even to the laying down of one's life for the brethren, all because Christ laid down his life for us (Rom. 15:1-3; 1 John 3:11-18)! And we are to have the mind of Christ in this (Phil. 2:5)! Think of that! I hesitate, I shrink back, even as I write the words and cite the passages! How do they strike you, reader, as you read them? 'Soft option', indeed!

Galatians 6:2 is apposite here. The law of Christ is that law of love which Christ taught in John 13:34-35; 15:12, and so on. In bearing one another's burdens, believers are obeying the law of their Lord. When they fail to do this, they break his law. Believers keep the law of Christ, the essence of which is love, and they do so out of gratitude to him for his love to them. To break his law, therefore, is to show gross ingratitude to him for his love. Clearly, the law of Moses and the law of Christ are in contrast. Paul was saying the bearing of one another's burdens, under Christ's law, is infinitely better than keeping the external Moses' law.

Of course, an emphasis upon the believer's freedom, unless accompanied by the equally biblical emphasis on the all-embracing law of Christ, can be turned into an excuse for all sorts of carnal behaviour. This, it goes without saying, is utterly wrong. In declaring that 'all the law is fulfilled in one word' (Gal. 5:14), in declaring that 'all are summed up in this saying, namely: "You shall love..."' (Rom. 13:9), Paul was not jettisoning the Mosaic law, saying it no longer had any place or value. Nor was he

²⁵ Because the 'neighbour' in Lev. 19 referred to a fellow-Israelite, it is probable that the focus here is love to fellow-believers. Leaving aside Gal. 6:10, is there any reference in Galatians as to how believers should relate to unbelievers?

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replacing the Mosaic law by a warm feeling. Certainly he was not abandoning all restraint. But nor was he imposing the law of Moses upon believers.

To sum up: the comments made above on Romans 13:8-10 apply with equal validity here. In Galatians 5:14, Paul was not imposing the Mosaic law on believers. Rather, he was continuing his theme of the epoch of the Spirit having superseded the epoch of the law, and the relevance of this triumphant 'but now' to the believer. It is tragic, it is a travesty, to reduce such a momentous argument by trying to claim Paul was making the ten commandments the believer's rule.

Consider Ephesians 6:1-3

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honour your father and mother', which is the first commandment with promise: 'that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth'.

Paul, clearly addressing godly children, here commanded them to obey their parents in the Lord; he said this is right. And he backed up his command by referring to, alluding to the law. *But he did not quote the law as the rule under which believers live.* Rather, he used the law as a paradigm, a model of good behaviour for believers, not as a rule which he imposed upon them. He simply reminded his readers that the Jews had this fifth commandment with its associated promise of possession of the land of Canaan – which promise he stressed. He was challenging his readers: If the Jews had this commandment, and this promise, how much more should believers live a sanctified family-life! What greater benefits are promised to them than to Israel of old! If the Mosaic law spoke of Canaan, how much more does Christ promise to his people today! This is what he was saying.

But if it is still maintained that the commandment must come over unchanged as part of the believer's perfect rule, *then so must the promise.* We cannot pick-and-mix! In other words, we shall have to admit that we have made a serious mistake in dismissing the 'prosperity gospel'. In the new covenant, obedience, after all, does bring huge material benefit, here and now. Mind you, depending on how strictly we interpret the promise, we might all have to move to the Middle East and settle in 'the land'. Hmm! A

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bit far-fetched? Surely, the apostle was using the commandment as an illustration or paradigm to encourage sanctified family-life among believers. This is what he was doing. He was certainly not imposing the commandment on them, nor was he promising them material prosperity for obedience!

And this is made all the more evident if we bear in mind that the issue of family life – here, the attitude of godly children to their parents – is but one example of the apostolic call for sanctification among many. This stands out all the more if the entire passage concerning practical godliness, the three chapters, Ephesians 4 – 6, is read in one sitting. Paul's total argument, its overall force, must be kept in mind. Which is? The believer must obey – he will obey – the gospel, and do so in practice, not by thinking he is under the rule of the law of Moses, but by thinking of his calling as a believer, imitating God his Father, living as a child of light, and being filled with the Spirit, and so on; above all, by thinking of Christ – I estimate that 'Christ' or 'Jesus' appears some nineteen times in these three chapters. And what is at the heart of these chapters? 'Christ... loved the church and gave himself for her, that he might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that he might present her to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish' (Eph. 5:25-27). The cross! The cross leading to the believer's holiness! This is what Paul says to the believer. As the believer walks by the Spirit, living out the life of Christ, keeping his eye and heart on Christ and his cross, so he fulfils the law, fulfils it as it were indirectly. True, in addressing this particular topic, Paul quotes the fifth command to illustrate and enforce his call for godly children to be sanctified at home, but the apostle does not impose the command on believers; he simply uses the law as a paradigm for this godly behaviour.

What am I talking about? What is this 'paradigm' business? I have noted it on several occasions. Now is the time to establish and develop what I mean by it.

But before I do, I need to make a vital point. Believers, being in the new covenant, are not under the law of Moses (Rom. 6:14-15; 7:4-6; 8:1-4; 10:4; 2 Cor. 3:6-11; Gal. 2:19-20; 5:18; Eph. 2:14-

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15; Heb. 7:18-19; 8:13). They are under the law of Christ. But – and this is the vital point – although the word ‘law’ is used in both covenants (Mosaic and new), the law of Christ is a very different entity to the law of Moses.

The use of ‘law’ in the old covenant and in the new

It all hinges on the word ‘law’. ‘The law of Moses’ and ‘the law of Christ’ are (in the common parlance) very different beasts; that is, they are very different ‘entities’, ‘systems’, ‘regimes’. And they are poles apart, not only in content, but in their whole basis, approach, ethos, outlook, attitude and mindset. It is all to do with ‘Moses’ and ‘Christ’ (John 1:17). The two laws belong to two distinct, contrasting ages, and are very different ‘laws’. The law of Moses is a list of specific rules – the decalogue is *ten* commandments, after all. The law of Christ, however, is far wider, far bigger. And I am not thinking of a hundred commandments instead of ten! (Or, rather, a thousand commandments instead of the more-than six hundred in the Mosaic law!) The law of Christ is not a list at all. This is the point I am striving for. The law of Christ is a principle, an all-embracing principle. Anything more different to a list of rules, especially a list of ‘do not’s’, would be hard to imagine. Christ’s law is inflexible, but there is a certain flexibility within it. Within limits, differences of judgment are allowed under Christ (see Rom. 14:1 – 15:7; Phil. 3:15-16, for instance). This is a remarkable aspect of the law of Christ. In general, law allows no room for conscience. In particular, the Mosaic law allows none. Summarising the essential difference between the two ‘laws’, the law of Moses and the law of Christ, we may put it this way: we are talking about the difference between precept and principle.

We are now ready to get to the question I posed. How should believers read, quote and use the law?

The law is a paradigm for believers

The apostles never used the law in the old-covenant way. This needs stating, and stating with force, because, as I have said, law

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mongers have a hybrid – pick and mix – way of using the law. Sometimes they speak of it as a command binding on believers. At other times they speak of it as paradigm. And sometimes they use it as a mixture of the two, turning to medieval constructs such as the threefold use of the law or ‘the moral law’ as opposed to ‘the ceremonial law’, and play one off against the other. Such goings on are shoddy. Worse, they are unscriptural. And, alas, they thoroughly confuse believers. The solution is the apostolic way of using the law; namely as paradigm, and always as a paradigm.

While Paul did not make the law the rule under which believers live, he did not go to the other extreme and ignore the law or say it is of no use whatsoever. From the rich treasury of the entire Old Testament, Paul drew various lessons, types, illustrations, analogies and examples. In particular, he cited the Mosaic law, quoted it, illustrated and supported his doctrine with it, and gave examples from it. Of course he did – the New Testament quite rightly treats the Old Testament as the Scriptures, pointing to Christ, foreshadowing him (Col. 2:17; Heb. 8:5; 10:1). In Hebrews 8:5, two words are used, ‘copy’ and ‘shadow’. A copy is not the real or original, but it shows what the real thing is like; inadequately, yes, but nevertheless usefully. A shadow bespeaks the existence of the real, solid thing. True, a shadow is colourless, blurred and flat, but this does not detract from the glory of the original. In fact, it adds to it. Shadows are vital to an artist in conveying a sense of reality and solidity. In ‘pure’ water-colours, the lights are formed by painting in the darks, and deepening the darks enhances the lights. The Old Testament may be shadow, but how greatly it highlights the New! Paul, therefore, used the entire old covenant, including the law, to enforce his doctrine: ‘Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us’ (1 Cor. 5:7), for instance. But this is not to say he preached Moses, or that he imposed Moses on believers. He preached Christ, making use of Moses to preach Christ.

This is what I mean by using the law as a paradigm – which is what Paul did, and what we should do. But the law must be used

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lawfully, properly nuanced²⁶ under the new covenant. The law, a component of 'all Scripture', has its role to play in the life of the believer, and part of that role is as a paradigm. But this is not the same as saying that every part of the Old Testament, down to its minutest detail, has authority over the believer, nor that the law is his perfect rule. The New Testament *uses* the Old, but its system of sanctification is not based upon it. The basis of new-covenant ethics is Christ, not the ten commandments. The law of Christ *uses* all the law of Moses to illustrate its claims. It *borrow*s from it – but that only *occasionally*. Above all, it is not *based* upon it.

Take 1 Corinthians. In that book, Paul several times alludes to the Mosaic law. I emphasise this. He alludes to the law, the whole, all the law – not just the so-called 'moral law'. Paul draws on the entire law, including the Passover (1 Cor. 5:6-8), the removal of offenders from Israel (1 Cor. 5:9-13), the non-muzzling of the ox while treading the grain (1 Cor. 9:8-12), people and priests eating the sacrifices (1 Cor. 9:13-14; 10:18), Israel's sins in the wilderness (1 Cor. 10:1-11), the use of foreign languages (1 Cor. 14:21), and woman's submission (1 Cor. 14:34). But not once does Paul tell believers they are under the law. Never once does he tell them that they must keep Moses' precepts. Not once does he speak of the law as a list of rules which govern the life of the believer. Instead, he uses the law to give the believer a paradigm, an example, an illustration of the Christian life. 'These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come' (1 Cor. 10:11, NIV). That is to say, the apostle uses the Old Testament in general, and the law in particular, as a pattern, a model, an illustration of his teaching, to help his readers understand his instructions for godliness, and to encourage them in obedience – including the need for purity, for proper financial support of gospel teachers, warning against sin, against the misuse of foreign languages in meetings, showing the

²⁶ What I am setting out is very different to those who say the law is binding in every detail, but at the same time 'modify' it by cutting out its punishment, or in splitting it into three, and so on. I am simply doing what the New Testament does with the law. It never plays Reformed 'ducks and drakes' with it. See my *Christ* pp99-110, 154, 392-408.

right way for a woman to show her submission, and so on. Certainly this is the main way in which Paul uses the law in, say, 1 Corinthians. He appeals to the law as a paradigm for godliness. The same goes for 2 Corinthians. Paul uses the law as a paradigm in the matter of holiness (2 Cor. 6:14 – 7:1), the giving of money (2 Cor. 8:15), and the need for two or three witnesses to confirm a case (2 Cor. 13:1). But, as before, never does he turn the law into the believer's rule. In short, he takes his own medicine and uses the law lawfully (1 Tim. 1:8). He is *not* dividing the law into three bits, disposing of two, and setting up 'the moral law' as a rule; rather, he uses the entire law to illustrate new-covenant principles for believers. While the law of Moses very usefully serves as an illustration of the believer's behaviour, or an allusion to it, it cannot be the believer's perfect rule.

So, for instance, on not muzzling the ox, Paul takes the law but makes it say something different to what it originally said, applying it to the present circumstances of the believer, showing how the new covenant uses the old as a paradigm for the proper financial support for those who labour in the gospel (1 Cor. 9:1-18). Paul backs his argument by reference to the law: 'Do I say these things as a mere man?' he asks. 'Or does not the law say the same also?'²⁷ Reader, where did 'the law say the same also'? Where did it say that a gospel preacher needs and must receive financial support to do his work? It said it in the new-covenant reading of Deuteronomy 25:4. Listen to Paul: 'For it is written in the law of Moses: "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain"'. Pause, reader! A literalist, an old-covenant reader, has to argue that Deuteronomy says nothing about financial support for a preacher of the gospel. And he is quite right – on *old-covenant* principles; the verse is concerned with allowing an ox to eat some corn as it works the treadmill, and that is all. But listen to Paul, reading the law through new-covenant eyes:

Is it oxen God is concerned about? Or does he say it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written, that he who ploughs should plough in hope, and he who threshes in hope should

²⁷ In writing to Timothy, he used the same paradigm, saying 'the Scripture says' (1 Tim. 5:17-18).

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be partaker of his hope. If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things?... Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar? Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel (1 Cor. 9:9-14).

The Jews, no doubt, should have realised that the principle applied to more than oxen. All who labour ought to partake of the benefit of their labour. Surely oxen should not be treated better than men! Even in the old covenant, the humane treatment of oxen served as a paradigm for labour-relations. But it is only in the full light of the gospel that the spiritual point is made clear. This is the way the old covenant serves as a paradigm for the new. This is the way believers should use the Mosaic law, not as a binding rule down to its last Jewish detail.²⁸

There are many such examples. In that same section, Paul cited temple-practice (1 Cor. 9:13-14; 10:18). Before that, he had raised the Passover. I know, like the sabbath, the Passover slightly anticipated Sinai (Ex. 12 and 16), but, again, like the sabbath, the Passover was in fact an integral part of the Sinai covenant. In any case, both came very heavily into the law, and both played an enormous part in the life of Israel under the law. Now then, what did Paul command the Corinthians? 'Purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth' (1 Cor. 5:7-8). Let us think about that for a moment. Believers must get rid of yeast, and keep the feast of Passover. Hang on a minute! Do believers keep the feast as Moses stipulated? Do they keep the feast at all? They do not! If they did, it would be anathema to the Lord, would it not – since it would be an offence against the person and finished work of Christ? It would be tantamount to saying he had not died, and had

²⁸ I am not supporting the Puritan way of making the law teach every new-covenant matter in advance. There is all the difference between *that*, and looking back, through the gospel to the law and seeing an illustration.

not, by the shedding of his blood, redeemed his people. The truth is, of course, Paul was not talking about keeping any literal feast! Nobody in their right mind would think it!²⁹ He was telling believers to get rid of all worldly contamination, and live godly lives for Christ, live sincerely and scripturally for the glory of their Redeemer. The apostle simply used the Passover as a paradigm to drive home his point. What he was not doing was to make the law the believer's rule.

And so it goes on, everywhere, throughout the apostolic writings. Look, for instance, at the thrilling use Paul made of the clash between Sarah and Hagar (Gal. 4:21-31), and the lessons he drew from it. Listen to his punch line. Let it sink in: 'Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage' (Gal. 5:1). How relevant this is to the question in hand!

Then again, take the sabbath. Compare the Reformed approach with the apostolic. The Reformed pound out their old-covenant talk of sabbath observance in terms of a day on which *this cannot* be done, and *that ought* to be done, all being couched in terms of a law which is attended by the direst of punishments for disobedience,³⁰ and all the rest of it. Contrast that with the

²⁹ But the unthinkable does happen. I know of a professing believer, once Judaisers had got a toehold, religiously get rid of yeast products, eat unleavened bread for the requisite number of days, and then, on the 'right' day, eat roast lamb while standing up, deliberately-timed at sunset. I know of another who seriously contemplated smearing blood on the front door – with hyssop, I wonder? How long will it be before such people, staff in hand, sandals on feet, cloak tucked in, eat the whole lamb, innards and all, burning the remains the next morning, and doing it all in a rush? And what about the Feast of Tabernacles, the New Moon, and all? Bizarre! And sad. And worse. For Christ has fulfilled all the Jewish shadows, and abolished them! Heb. 7 – 10 is categorical; in particular, Heb. 9:10; 10:9,18.

³⁰ Though the Reformed always offer their followers the panacea that the curse has, in truth, been removed for them. For more on this clever-but-groundless device of 'pulling the law's teeth', see my *Christ* pp107-108,404-408. I am not denying, of course, that Christ bore the curse of the law, sin and death for the elect (Rom. 8:1-4; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:10-14; 1 Pet. 3:18), but Reformed shenanigans have nothing in common with apostolic doctrine on this vital point.

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writer to the Hebrews and his treatment of the subject (Heb. 3:7 – 4:11). Christ is the believer's sabbath. Christ gives the believer rest. Christ *is* the believer's rest.³¹

Similarly, old-covenant worship had an altar. So does the new: 'We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat' (Heb. 13:10; compare 1 Cor. 10:14-22). This verse – and its context – encapsulates precisely the right way for Christians to apply old-covenant terms. The altar of the new covenant is spiritual. Only the regenerate can partake of its sacrifices. The kingdom of God is spiritual; it does not consist of foods (Heb. 13:9); 'the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit' (Rom. 14:17). When we are told 'to go forth to [Christ], outside the camp' (Heb. 13:13), who thinks we are to make a move to a physical place? Likewise, who (apart from the revivalist with his 'altar-call') thinks that in order to obey Christ's command to 'come to me' (Matt. 11:28), a person has to leave his seat and make a physical movement? Again, the city we seek in the new covenant is not the physical Jerusalem (Heb. 13:14). It is the heavenly, spiritual Jerusalem (Gal. 4:25-26); believers 'have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem' (Heb. 12:22). The saints of the Old Testament³² were conscious of the very same thing (Heb. 11:10,13-16).

Yes, I know the Reformed have their answer ready. 'Believers are under the moral law. All that stuff is ceremonial'. Oh? I have already shown how that technique only works as long as you are willing to do what Scripture never does, and break the law into convenient bits. The Bible will never warrant it; it always treats the law as indivisible. In any case, it misses my point. I am simply showing that Paul (along with the other apostles) would use anything and everything from the law to enforce his doctrine on believers – the ten commandments (including, therefore, the sabbath), feasts, whatever. But never once did he impose any of

³¹ See my *Sabbath Questions* pp71-83. Also, put 'sabbath' in the Keyword box on the sermons page of David H J Gay (sermonaudio.com). See also the eDocs link.

³² Who were, of course, in the new covenant.

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those things upon believers as their perfect rule. He simply used anything and everything from the law as a paradigm. *That* is my point. So, whether or not any particular example comes from the ten commandments or any other part of the law (allowing, for argument's sake, such a division to exist), the Reformed gloss is utterly irrelevant.

Furthermore, Paul would use any source to enforce his teaching, not only the law. Moses, of course, was in a different league to the following, but the apostle was prepared to cite nature (Acts 14:15,17; 17:24-29; Rom. 1:20; 1 Cor. 11:14), history (Acts 14:16; 17:30; 1 Cor. 10:1-13), superstitious pagan and idolatrous practices (Acts 17:22-23; Rom. 1:21-23; 1 Cor. 10:18-22), and the writings of pagan poets, prophets and philosophers (Acts 17:28; Tit. 1:12-13), common sense and every-day practice (1 Cor. 9:7,10-12), the facts of life (1 Cor. 11:11-12; 12:12-31), and so on. But he made none of these the basis for his teaching, nor was he saying these constituted a norm for believers. Rather, he was making use of all these resources to draw analogies, and thus illustrate his doctrine.

In short, when addressing believers, the New Testament sometimes quotes and draws lessons from the whole law, yes, but this is a far cry from saying that the ten commandments are binding on believers as their rule of life. Paul never adopts the Reformed threefold division to limit 'the law' to 'the moral law', and so make the ten commandments the believer's perfect rule. On the contrary, the apostle makes the commands of the entire law to serve as a paradigm or example, illustration, specimen, instance or model of the behaviour which is required of believers. And that is all! I say again: new-covenant men use all the law – we do not select a mere 1% or less of it! No! The Reformed may call us antinomians. Let them! They need to use the mirror. For, unlike them, we use all the law – *but we only use it the way the New Testament does when it applies it to believers*. And never does it make the law the believer's rule.

Let me confirm that this *is* the right way to read those places in the New Testament where the law is so used. Take 1 Peter 1:15-16: 'As he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct'. Why? 'Because it is written'. Where is it written?

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In the law (Lev. 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7). What is written in the law? 'Be holy, for I am holy'. If the Reformed view is right, then it follows that since believers must be holy because God in the law told the Jews they had to be holy, then it follows that *that very law therefore is binding on believers as their rule*. Will the advocates of Calvin's third use of the law call upon this passage in 1 Peter for support? I doubt it. Although Peter quoted from the law, he did not quote from that part of the law which Reformed writers like to say is binding upon the saints. The fact is, turning to Leviticus, the apostle quoted from a passage (Lev. 11:1-47, especially verses 44-45) which commanded the Jews as to what kind of animals, fish, reptiles and insects they could or could not eat. He also quoted from another passage (Lev. 19:1-37, especially verse 2) which commanded the Jews to keep the fifth commandment; to keep the sabbaths (note the plural, reader; it was *all* the sabbaths they had to keep); to keep the second commandment; and to keep listed regulations for eating the sacrifices, reaping at harvest time, and so on. And he quoted from yet another passage (Lev. 20:1-27, especially verse 7) which commanded the Jews to stone idolaters, to execute all who cursed a parent or committed adultery, and so on. Is *this* law binding upon believers? Is it authoritative over them in every minute detail?

Of course not! It is the principle which counts. *As* the Jews had to be holy because God is holy, *so* believers must be holy. But this is not to say that the law, which God imposed upon the Jews, now forms the rule for believers! Rather, it serves as an illustration, exemplar or paradigm: *as* God never changes, and is always holy, and always requires holiness in his people, *so* believers must be holy. As I have shown more than once, this is the vital principle and demand. *As* God has forgiven his people, *so* they must forgive (Eph. 4:32). 'As... so' is the key here. Compare also Matthew 18:23-35.

For another instance of the use of the law in this way, see Romans 12:19-21, where believers are instructed: 'Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath'. Why? 'For it is written'. What is written? 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay'. So says the Lord (Rom. 12:19; see also 1 Thess. 4:6; Heb. 10:30).

But, reader, *where* did the Lord say this? In the law. Ah! but, I ask every Reformed reader, in which of your three categories of the law did God put it? You will not find it in what you like to call 'the moral law'! The original you will find in Deuteronomy 32:35, among the last words of Moses to the Jews before his death. Does *this* constitute the believer's rule?

The fact is, the New Testament is its own interpreter in all these matters: 'Whatever things were written before were written for our learning' (Rom. 15:4), and 'these things became our examples... All these things happened to [the Jews] as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come' (1 Cor. 10:6,11). 'Whatever things'! In short: 'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God [better, God-breathed, God breathed them out], and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction [training] in righteousness' (2 Tim. 3:16). 'All Scripture'! But this is a far cry from asserting – as the Reformed want to assert – that what they call 'the moral law' is binding on believers as their rule of life. I say again, it is 'whatever things, all these things, all Scripture', not just the ten commandments. The Old Testament does not give us all we need. If it does, why the New Testament?

In saying this, I do not say believers may be less holy than the Jews. Far from it: 'Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven'. And Jesus spelled out what he meant: 'You have heard that it was said to those of old... But I say to you...' (Matt. 5:20-22). If you have any suspicion that I am teaching believers to be lawless, reader, I ask you to read my *Christ is All* pp279-298,528-542; *passim*. I assure you I am not.

Nor am I saying a word against the law. Paul never argues that 'the Mosaic law is a bad thing'. Quite the opposite! But the fact is the time of the law of Moses is over. It has had its day. No doubt the child-custodian was good for the child (Gal. 3:24; 4:1-2), but hardly appropriate for a grown man! The law is not the norm of the Christian life. The law must be viewed through the new covenant.³³ While the law still has relevance for the believer, it is

³³ For the Anabaptist position on this, and their citation of various laws no longer applicable to believers, see my *Christ* pp77-78,374-378. I

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not Moses but Christ who is his people's lawgiver (Deut. 18:15-19; John 5:46-47; Acts 3:22-23; Heb. 3:5-6). The believer reads Moses, and gains from him, but it is Christ, the one of whom Moses prophesied, the one who fulfilled the law of Moses, whom believers are under. Christ is Lord, even of Moses. This is how and why Paul speaks as he does in 1 Corinthians 9:20-21. And he speaks for all believers everywhere and at all times. It is Christ, not Moses, who is his people's lawgiver. John 1:17 really must be given its full weight: 'The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ'.

In short, while the New Testament uses the old covenant in general, and makes very occasional use of some of the ten commandments (never all of them), in order to illustrate the law of Christ, it never once tells believers that they are under the law of Moses as the rule of life. Certainly not! Believers are not under that killing, condemning ministry, now made obsolete by Christ who fulfilled it in every particular (Rom. 6:14-15; 7:4-6; 8:2-4; 10:4; 2 Cor. 3:6-9; Gal. 2:19-20; Heb. 7:18-19; 8:7,13). The old covenant, as a shadow, illustrated and pointed to Christ and his work, but its days are now well and truly over. The shadows have fled away. The Sun of Righteousness (Mal. 4:2), has arisen. The

quote just one paragraph (sources may be found in my *Christ* p378): 'Menno Simons: "To swear truly was allowed to the Jews under the law; but the gospel forbids this to Christians". Sebastian Franck complained of "wolves, the doctors of unwisdom, apes of the apostles, and antichrists [who] mix the New Testament with the Old... and from it prove [the legitimacy of]... [the] power of magistracy... [the] priesthood; and praise everything and ascribe this all forcibly to Christ... And just as the popes have derived all this from it, so also many of those who would have themselves called evangelicals hold that they have nobly escaped the snare of the pope and the devil, and have nevertheless achieved... nothing more than that they have exchanged and confounded the priesthood of the pope with the Mosaic kingdom... If [that is, since] the priesthood cannot be re-established out of the old law, neither can [Christian] government... be established according to the law of Moses". In all this, Franck listed the sabbath along with circumcision, kingship, temple and sacrifices, as old-covenant externals'. For my own modest contribution, listen to my short discourse: 'No Mixture! Separation' (sermonaudio.com).

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law remains, as part of the old covenant – indeed, as a part of the word of God – and it serves as an illustration or paradigm of the glorious new covenant. This is how believers should use the law. They should read the law as a collection of insights into the work of Christ, as illustrations of how they should walk in the law of Christ, but not as a list of rules which they cannot sort out and which, in any case, they are unable to keep. They are, after all, the children of Romans 8:2-4:

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: he condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

The Priesthood of All Believers

Introduction

Under the old covenant, the priesthood went hand in hand with the law: ‘On the basis of it the law was given to the people’ (Heb. 7:11). That is, not only did the law rest on the priesthood, but in an on-going sense Israel received the law through the ministration of the priesthood. God, of course, had given his law to Israel, and only to Israel (Deut. 4:1 – 6:25; Ps. 147:19-20; Rom. 3:1-2; 9:4-5, and so on), as a temporary measure to last until the coming of Christ (Gal. 3:19). In the fullness of time (Mark 1:15; Gal. 4:4; 1 Tim. 2:6; Tit. 1:3), God, in accordance with his eternal plan, graciously sent his Son into the world to fulfil the old covenant, render it obsolete, and bring in the new (Rom. 10:4; 2 Cor. 3:6-11; Gal. 3:19,23-25; Eph. 2:14-15; Heb. 7:12,18-19,22; 8:6-13; 9:10; 10:15-18). All believers, being members of this glorious new covenant (Rom. 6:14-18; 7:4-6; 8:2; 2 Cor. 3:6-9; Gal. 2:19-20; 5:18), are new-covenant priests, in accordance with God’s promise: ‘He will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness’ (Mal. 3:3). And it is not only that every individual believer is a new-covenant priest: each believer is a member of the new-covenant priesthood, that priesthood being both mutual in the assembly and individual and personal.

My purpose in publishing this article¹ is to introduce this largely unknown, forgotten or ignored – but glorious – aspect of the new covenant to as wide an audience as possible; or at least, to remind believers of their heritage. If you are a believer, you are a spiritual priest in company with all your fellow-believers. Exercise your God-given ministry, brother and sister, both individually and corporately!

¹ What follows is taken from my *Pastor* pp19-33, lightly edited. For a fuller setting out of this important aspect of the new covenant, see my *Priesthood*.

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Let me conclude this introduction by quoting John Calvin (in his comments on Hebrews 7):

Now, as some might doubt whether the abolition of the law followed the abolition of the priesthood, [the writer to the Hebrews] says that the law was not only brought in under it, but that it was also by it established. *‘For the priesthood being changed, or, transferred, etc.’: As the authority of the law and the priesthood is the same, Christ became not only a priest, but also a lawgiver... The sum of the whole is, that the ministry of Moses was no less temporary than that of Aaron; and hence both were annulled by the coming of Christ, for the one could not stand without the other... That law,² as it was subordinate to the ancient priesthood, was abolished when the priesthood was abolished. And Christ, being made a priest, was invested also with the authority of a legislator, that he might be the teacher and interpreter of the new covenant.*

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Writing to believers, Peter declared: ‘As you come to him, the living stone... you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ... You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation... the people of God’ (1 Pet. 2:4-10). See also Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6. Hence, ‘the priesthood of all believers’.

From the outset, I want to stress that ‘the priesthood of all believers’ describes not only the believer’s individual experience, but stress the vital role it plays (or should play!) in the corporate life of believers, the church.³ The fact is, I am not talking about the priesthood of *the* believer. I am, of course, but rather I am talking about the corporate, the mutual priesthood of *all* believers.

² Calvin, as to be expected, tried in vain to exempt ‘the moral law’.

³ I would like to drop ‘church’ and use *ekklēsia*, but I feel I ought to continue to use the language familiar to the overwhelming majority. I say this because ‘church’, today, is largely part and parcel of institutional Christianity – Christendom. And Christendom has done much harm, over many centuries, to the cause of Christ in general, and to the individual believer in particular – to say nothing of the appalling effect it has had on unbelievers.

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Notice how Peter expresses it: Believers, he says, ‘like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ’ (1 Pet. 2:5). The ‘stones’ are, in the first instance, individuals; they are individual believers. The truth is, each believer is ‘a temple of the Holy Spirit’ (1 Cor. 6:19). But one of the glories of the new covenant is that these individual believers, these individual stones, these individual temples, are all fitted together by God, the great master-builder, to form a spiritual house, a spiritual temple (1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 6:16; Gal. 6:10 (AV, NKJV, NASB); Eph. 2:22; 1 Tim. 3:15; Heb. 3:6). And believers, all believers, who form this temple, are, all of them, the priests who offer spiritual sacrifices to God within that temple. Hence the corporate or collective nature of ‘the priesthood of all believers’. We are talking about believers as a ‘priesthood’ – not merely as individual priests. The emphasis in 1 Peter 2:9-10 is unmistakably corporate.

Moreover, while it is true that all believers, everywhere, constitute this one universal temple and priesthood, we can only experience the manifestation of this corporate spiritual priesthood within the local assemblies of God’s people – in each particular church, in every separate church. This is what Christ intended and set up. Every believer, therefore, has a privileged part to play in this local expression of the communal ‘priesthood of *all* believers’ – each believer being a living stone in the temple and, at the same, time, one of the priests sacrificing within that temple. What is more, each believer is at the same time part of the sacrifice (Rom. 12:1). And all of it is ‘living’ – ‘living’ stones, a ‘living’ sacrifice, in the temple of the ‘living’ God, the church of the ‘living’ God, in the city of the ‘living’ God, serving the ‘living’ and true God, all through a new and ‘living’ way, founded on Christ the ‘living’ stone (Rom. 12:1; 2 Cor. 6:16; 1 Thess. 1:9; 1 Tim. 3:15; Heb. 10:20; 12:22; 1 Pet. 2:4-5). Living! We are not talking about a mechanical organisation, but an organism, a living body. And ‘the priesthood of all believers’ plays an integral part, a vital part, a ‘living’ part, in it all. This concept of church life is written large across the New Testament; namely, the total involvement of believers in the worship and

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service of God. Christ stipulates that *all* his people must be wholly involved in it all.

All believers – both men and women – are priests. All sacrifice – in a spiritual way, of course. Let me explain. All believers have a service to perform for God. There are no exceptions, no special cases. God has made all his people priests. Private judgement, prayer (including public prayer meetings), gospel service, mutual instruction, reproof and edification, practical care of the saints, daily holiness and dedication to God, financial support of the gospel and its ministers or servants, true spiritual humility... these are not just for the few to be concerned about, the fanatical super-saints. They comprise the duty which God demands of *all* his people; he has made them *all* priests, and expects *all* of them to offer the sacrifices that he has commanded. There is no opting out, no holiday, no retirement. All God's people, all their days, carry the responsibilities and privileges of being priests; they all engage in priestly duty in serving God. Or should do.

And it is not just a duty. It is a privilege. In making the believer a member of his royal priesthood, Christ has bestowed a dignity second-to-none upon him/her, a dignity beyond description. Such dignity is the right and privilege of each and every believer.

But, of course, being a royal priest carries responsibilities. In particular, I stress that, although (as I will show) God raises up stated and recognised teachers in his church (and these must be men), all believers are, in the proper sense, teaching ministers. And this includes both men and women. Yes, it does! Women, under certain circumstances, as well as men, were teachers in the first churches (Tit. 2:3-5). Both Priscilla and Aquila (note the order) (Acts 18:24-28) helped the eloquent Apollos, by teaching him in their home. In the scriptures which follow, there is no suggestion that I can see that women are excluded.

All believers are gifted and appointed by Christ so that they may mutually⁴ edify one another. This is their duty. This is their privilege. Another way of describing this is to call it 'an all-body

⁴ 'Reciprocal' is probably more accurate than 'mutual', but it seems to me that 'mutual' is winning the day. See Rom. 1:12; 14:19; 1 Cor. 7:5.

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ministry’, ‘a one-another ministry’, ‘an each-and-every-member ministry’, as set out, say, in such passages as Romans 12:3-8; 15:14; 1 Corinthians 1:4-7; 12:4-31; 14:1-40; Galatians 6:1-2,10; Ephesians 4:1-16; 1 Thessalonians 5:11,14-15; 1 Peter 2:2-5; 4:7-11; Jude 20-23. This is only a sample; the New Testament is replete with the concept. Consider *allēlōn*, ‘of one another’. This word, which speaks of ‘reciprocally, mutually’, appears often in the New Testament, twenty-three times in sections which deal with admonition.

All believers are teaching ministers. In saying that, I am not suggesting that all are able to address a congregation, but no child of God is without some ability to pass on a word of experience, a word of encouragement, instruction, comfort, reproof... to a fellow-believer. Let me emphasise this, even though I know it will sound startling to some, perhaps many. But Scripture is rich on the subject:

I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong – that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith... For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgement, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith [or, in agreement with the faith]. If it is serving [ministry, NKJV], let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully... I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another (Rom. 1:11-12: 12:3-8; 15:14).

I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way – in all your speaking and in all your knowledge... Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift... There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service [ministries, NKJV], but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the

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Spirit is given for the common good... The same Spirit... gives... to each one, just as he determines... God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be (1 Cor. 1:4-7; 12:1-31, especially 4-7,11,18).

Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant (2 Cor. 3:5-6).

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow-citizens with God's people, and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit... But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it... It was he who gave some... to prepare God's people for works of service [for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, NKJV], so that the body of Christ may be built up... From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work [by which every part does its share, NKJV]... Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit [impart grace to, NKJV] those who listen... Be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (Eph. 2:19-22; 4:7-16,29; 5:18-21).

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Col. 3:15-17).

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing... warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else (1 Thess. 5:11,14-15).

Like newborn babes, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good. As you come to him, the living stone – rejected by men but chosen by God, and precious to him – you also, like living stones,

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are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ... Pray. Above all, love each other deeply... Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace [minister it to one another, NKJV] in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves [ministers, NKJV], he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen (1 Pet. 2:2-5; 4:7-11).

But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear – hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh (Jude 20-23).

Is that not proof enough?

It is, I say, abundantly clear: All the saints are ministers, priests; all engage in ministry; all are responsible and gifted to be able to be a part of the mutual nourishing of the body of Christ. Note the emphasis, 'to each one'. To each believer, Christ gives a gift or gifts so that each might serve the church. These passages tell us that *all* the saints are ministers, *all* are engaged in the ministry. In a few moments, I will be speaking about apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastors-and-teachers⁵ who are given by Christ to the churches, and who are used by him in order to equip the saints for this work of the ministry (Eph. 4:11-16). But do not miss the vital point: Christ gives such teachers to his people *for the very purpose of fitting believers – all of them – to engage in profitable ministry*. Filling believers' heads (or notebooks) with facts falls a long way short. The stated and authoritative (not authoritarian!) ministry is designed by Christ to produce believers

⁵ Note the apostle's words. Paul did not say Christ gave the church *some* pastors, and, in addition, gave the church *some* teachers, but that he gave the church some pastors-and-teachers; that is, men who are pastoral teachers, teachers who teach with a pastoral heart, pastor-teachers, the double designation describing two aspects of their work – as most commentators agree. This is why I use the hyphens.

who are able to edify each other, not to make them grow fat and, at the same time, increasingly dependent on the pulpit. Imagine, in a physical sense, always eating four square meals a day, and never doing any work, never doing anything productive with all the digested calories and proteins. The very suggestion is laughable. Or very sad! So it ought to be in a spiritual sense.

I repeat therefore: The stated ministry is designed by Christ to produce believers able to edify each other, not to produce a spoon-fed dependency. Note, once again, Romans 1:11-12; 15:14, just quoted. Paul the apostle wanted to visit Rome to be a blessing to the Romans, yes. *But they would also be a blessing to him*: ‘I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong – that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith... My brothers... you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another’. Why, even in the context of Romans 15:16, note the apostle’s emphasis on all-body ministry (Rom. 15:14-17; not forgetting Rom. 12:3-8).

Each believer is given grace for ‘mutual edification’ (Rom. 14:19), to be able to ‘edify another’ (NKJV), to be ‘competent to instruct one another’ (Rom. 15:14), to be ‘able... to admonish one another’ (NKJV), to ‘encourage each other’ (1 Thess. 4:18), to ‘comfort one another’ (NKJV), to ‘encourage one another and build each other up’ (1 Thess. 5:11), to ‘comfort each other, and edify one another’ (NKJV), to ‘warn... encourage... help’ (1 Thess. 5:14), to ‘warn... comfort... uphold’ (NKJV) fellow-believers.⁶ Indeed, as we have seen, Paul, writing to the Thessalonians, could add, ‘encourage one another and build each other up, *just as in fact you are doing*’ (1 Thess. 5:11). Could Paul say this to many churches today? I especially note the ‘just as in fact you are doing’. I am not talking about mere text-book theory; ‘just as in fact you are doing’. Not ‘just as you used to do’; not ‘just as you once did’; not ‘just as you would like to do’. But ‘just as in fact you *are* doing’. This is the New Testament church that Christ set up!

⁶ See also Rom. 15:2; 1 Cor. 14:3-5,26; 2 Cor. 1:4; Eph. 4:25-29.

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The New Testament gives no warrant whatsoever for the notion that ‘the pastor’⁷ edifies the members; end of story. Not at all! It speaks of the elders edifying the believers who in turn edify one another – including the elders! How rarely does ‘a pastor’ think church members are there to edify him! And how few believers think they ought to edify their ‘pastor’! Such ideas, I suggest, sound preposterous to most believers, not excluding ‘pastors’, today. But ‘encourage [exhort, NKJV] one another daily’ (Heb. 3:13) is said to all believers; all believers, not just a special man in the church – ‘the pastor’.

1 Thessalonians 5:11-28 encapsulates what I want to say. Here we find an all-body ministry where all believers are expected to warn, to encourage, to show patience, to demonstrate love by action, to pray, to greet, and so on, and all need grace to carry out these functions. And at the same time, as an integral part of it, we have stated rulers.

That is how it should be. All believers need constant, consistent and continual teaching. And that teaching is designed (or ought to be designed) to prepare every believer to engage in ‘the ministry’. This ‘work of the ministry’ is something *all* the saints are to do. It is not something reserved for elders or deacons; certainly it is not confined to an ‘ordained’ minister. I am in the habit of reminding churches with, say, twenty members, that they have twenty ministers or preachers. Not in a formal sense, of course, but, nevertheless, a church with twenty members has twenty real ministers. It has twenty priests!

I do not wish to romanticise the New Testament churches. I acknowledge that they had their problems, and made their mistakes. Big problems, big mistakes. Nevertheless, it is a fact that I have been able to quote from the apostolic letters to the churches in Rome, Corinth, Ephesus and Colosse, as well as Thessalonica – not to mention those believers to whom Peter and Jude wrote. What is more, some of the problems which arose in the New Testament churches did so because of their excesses in the believers’ exercise of their mutual ministry. Yet it is noteworthy that no apostle tried to put a stop to such ministry.

⁷ Note the almost universal switch from the biblical ‘pastors-and-teachers’ to ‘the pastor’. This is the source of much trouble.

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Take, for instance, the excessive spiritual behaviour of the Corinthians (1 Cor. 14). Paul did not reprove them for trying to engage in ministry. Nor did he tell them to be content to sit and listen. Certainly not! He just wanted better order, better edification in the exercise of their mutual ministry. He certainly did not want silence and inaction! By the way, reader, do you think the apostle would have to administer the same rebuke to most churches today? Why not? The fact is, problems can arise when there is little or no mutual ministry! Excessive signs of life are not altogether good, but they are a great deal better than depressing evidence of death! A corpse may have none of the problems of a living man. But do we want our assemblies to be gatherings of cadavers?

And the ministry of each and every believer reaches outside the church. A believer preaches when he or she engages someone in a spiritual conversation, or witnesses to an unbeliever. When the early church was persecuted, the believers were driven out of Jerusalem. 'Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went... telling the message... telling them [not only Jews, but Greeks] the good news about the Lord Jesus' (Acts 8:4; 11:19-20); that is, they talked to people, they told them about Christ, they 'gossiped' the gospel. The believers in question certainly did not stand in non-existent pulpits in non-existent places of worship at stated pre-arranged times! In noting this fact, I am not, of course, condemning pre-arranged services – how did Acts 13:44 come about? Incidentally, neither am I saying that the usual form of a pulpit is necessary, nor even helpful. All I am doing is pointing out that the early church saw conversions, even when they were denied the structure (props?) we have come to regard as essential. In other words, we must not confine 'preaching' to a man standing in a pulpit. The word is far too rich for that!

What I am saying is this: according to the New Testament, every believer, each believer, is a priest, and, as a priest, each and every believer, in this sense, is a preacher. It is every believer's responsibility and privilege – both men and women – to so live before men that, if they are moved to ask the believer about his hope, then that believer is fully able to meet the apostolic

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command, and is ‘always... prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have’ (1 Pet. 3:15). Actions do speak louder than words, and this is certainly more than an old saw (1 Pet. 3:1-6). Nevertheless, it must not be made into an excuse for silence. To tell others about Christ and his gospel is a part of the believer’s ministry. For biblical examples of it, see Mark 5:18-20; John 1:29-36,41-42,44-46; 4:28-30,39-42; Acts 4:20; 8:4-5,26-40; 9:20.

All this comprises the priestly duty of preaching the gospel, and yet none of it, perhaps, comes under what we know today as the formal task of preaching in a pulpit. To be engaged in any way in the spread of the gospel is to be engaged in a work of the greatest dignity and importance. It is a ‘priestly duty’. Preaching the gospel, both formally and informally, is, therefore, a most noble work. I would rather be a priestly preacher for Christ than be the king of Ruritania.

And when any are converted under such a ministry, God is pleased to receive such as an offering to him. He calls them ‘first-fruits’ (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:15; Jas. 1:18; Rev. 14:4, all NKJV). This, of course, is a reference to the old covenant, in that the ‘first-fruits’ were offered to God in worship (Ex. 23:16,19; 34:26; Lev. 2:12; 23:10,17,20; Num. 18:12; 28:26; Deut. 18:4; 26:2,10; see also Prov. 3:9; Jer. 2:3; *etc.*). Consequently, when, in the new covenant, the Holy Spirit uses the priestly ministry of believers, both in prayer and preaching, when he makes the call of the gospel effective, when he saves sinners and sanctifies saints by it, God looks on this as a sacrificial, priestly duty and an offering pleasing to him. So much so, he regards all those who benefit from his people’s labours as first-fruits to him.

So, whether within the church, or outside, all believers are priestly ministers, gifted by the Spirit for the work of ‘the ministry’. Consider the apostle’s words to the Corinthians:

Such confidence... is ours through Christ before God... Our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant... of the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:4-6).

Of whom was Paul speaking when he wrote: ‘He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant... of the Spirit’? I cannot accept that the use of ‘ours’, ‘our’ and ‘us’ speaks *only* of

the apostles. If it does, then it would appear that Paul might have been implying that, while he and his fellows were competent, the Corinthians, and all believers since, were and are not. In the apostolic age, non-apostle believers, I suppose, just had to relax, sit back, not bothering their heads and bewildering themselves with things far beyond them, and let the apostles – who alone were ‘competent’ – do it all for them.

I cannot agree. How it would tally with Acts 17:11 baffles me. And what the equivalent is for believers after the apostolic age, including us today, I dread to contemplate – if it was only the apostles who were ‘competent’. We would be bereft of a competent ministry today, and no believer would have any competence to edify another. This is so far out of step with the overwhelming impression the New Testament gives of believers exuberantly engaged in spiritual activity, edifying each other – or being encouraged to – that it cannot possibly be right. I have already mentioned 1 Corinthians 14.

Getting back to 2 Corinthians chapters 2 to 4, without question Paul *is* speaking of his own ministry, and that of his fellow-apostles and fellow-workers, yes. And, as I will explain, the specially endowed – the apostles – were, and their writings and works remain, absolutely essential and fundamental to the gospel, yes. Coming down the scale of authority, there is, there always has been, an essential role in the church of God for able teachers and preachers – and these are not ten a penny. Only God can make them ‘competent’.

All that is perfectly true, as I will delineate. But notice how the apostle uses ‘we’ in these three chapters. Sometimes by ‘we’ he does mean, perhaps, just himself, maybe with other apostles and fellow-workers in mind (2 Cor. 2:17; 3:1; 4:7-15), although it is not absolutely certain in all these cases. But notice how he quickly moves into ‘you’ (2 Cor. 3:1-3). So what should we make of the ‘we’ and ‘ours’ in the next verses, leading on to the words I quoted above? And it is, I think, unlikely that the ‘we’ in 2 Corinthians 3:12-18; 4:16-18; let alone 5:1 and on, should be limited to Paul himself, or to Paul and his fellow-apostles.

In any case, it is undeniable that *all* Christ’s people are kings, priests and prophets by reason of their union with Christ. The

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prophets foretold it, and Christ established it. Not in a literal sense, of course, but in a spiritual sense. Believers, therefore, are ministers. I think we may justly argue that they are ‘competent’; all of them are ‘competent as ministers’. In fact, Paul himself says it is so. As I quoted earlier, writing to the Romans, the apostle declared: ‘I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another’ (Rom. 15:14). And when Paul spoke of ‘brothers’, he was not thinking only of men!

Each believer has God’s Spirit and can, therefore, in a measure teach others. The point can be broadened. God equips all his people to fulfil that particular ministry which he has for each of them. To deny it is to fly in the face of the provisions of the new covenant (Isa. 54:13; 61:6; Jer. 31:31-34; 33:14-22; Ezek. 40:46; 44:10-31; Zeph. 3:9-10; Mal. 3:1-4; John 6:45; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; 1 Thess. 4:9; Heb. 8:8-12; 10:15-18; 1 Pet. 2:4-12; 4:10-11; 1 John 2:20-21,27; 5:20; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6).

Nevertheless, because, according to the New Testament, all believers are ‘preaching ministers’, it does not mean that it did not call for recognised and stated able preachers who were to edify the church by their teaching. The very suggestion shows a lack of understanding of what the New Testament means by the many different words it uses for ‘preach’ and ‘teach’. Obviously the promise that no member of the new covenant will need a human teacher (Heb. 8:11; 1 John 2:20-21,27) cannot possibly mean what it appears to be saying at first glance. The writer to the Hebrews, and John were both teaching as they were saying it! Nobody in their right mind could doubt that the New Testament recognised the need for teachers and preachers, ministers!

But my point here is that *all* believers are competent ministers, gifted by God; *each* believer is gifted to minister. And that includes the ability to strengthen, encourage, reprove and confirm fellow-believers. Moses’ wish (Num. 11:29) has been more than amply fulfilled.

I realise that I am touching a very sensitive point, saying something contrary to common practice in many churches. Perhaps it will disturb some. Some might go as far as to think – and accuse me of it – that I am subverting the preaching and

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teaching ministry. So let me try, yet again, to set any anxious heart at rest. *I am, myself, anxious – anxious **not** to give the impression that I am dismissing the need for stated, and recognised, gifted teachers.* I am not! In a few moments, I will prove it. Let me give one example now. A few pages back, I quoted Acts 8:4; 11:19-20, showing how ‘ordinary’ (I detest the word in this context) believers ‘preached’ the gospel. By God’s grace, they were ‘competent’: ‘The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord’ (Acts 11:21). But go on to Acts 11:22-26. Barnabas recognised that these ‘established’ believers, along with the new converts, needed solid teaching. The ‘ordinary’ believers were ‘ministers’, yes, all of them, but none of them were gifted sufficiently to sustain an edifying ministry to the church – which the church was crying out for.⁸ Barnabas rose to the occasion. He brought Paul to Antioch, and the pair of them, both gifted teachers, ‘for a whole year... met with the church and taught great numbers of people’. And they were successful, for it wasn’t long before the Antioch church had three more capable ‘prophets and teachers’ listed alongside Barnabas and Paul (Saul), who was listed last! (Acts 13:1; see also Acts 15:35).

I think that all this speaks for itself, and should calm the fears of any who think I might not hold to a stated, gifted ministry. I certainly hope so. I could not be more emphatic on the need for an able, stated preaching and teaching ministry, and on the biblical warrant for it.

My point here, however, must not be lost. All believers have a ‘ministering’ gift and ability. All of them. And this is an aspect of their priestly ministry under the new covenant. *This* ministry needs emphasising – and exercising!

Take Christ’s assurance: ‘Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them’ (Matt. 18:20). How wrong it is to confine this glorious, sweeping promise to a token quote at the opening of a public meeting. Let us stop tugging our forelock at the text and moving on! Christ meant what he said. Wherever two or three believers – believers, not just ministers or elders or

⁸ The church always is. It is today! I certainly hope churches are praying for, and on the lookout for, able teachers.

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whatever – wherever and whenever two or three believers come together for any spiritual purpose – to pray, to talk, to sing, to read and study Scripture, to testify, to repeat experience, or whatever – the Lord is with them. What does this tell us about Christ himself – the one who can guarantee his presence wherever and whenever his people meet? Think of that! Think of the dignity Christ places upon such informal gatherings. Then again, think of the confidence Christ has in his people. Think, too, of what gifts and abilities the Spirit must dispense to them. The context of Matthew 18 is clear, and the rest of the New Testament is replete with the working out of the principle. Take the young church of the Thessalonians. Take the apostle's second letter to them. Trace the outworking of the principle throughout that letter. Though it was a young church, all of them had a part in all of the church's spiritual life. Even the apostle felt the need of their prayers for him. It shows just what Christ meant when he promised: 'Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them'. This is the priesthood of all believers in action.

Action! That's the word! Let us rescue 'the priesthood of all believers' from our Statement of Faith, and put it to work! It must not be reduced to a slogan. So much comes from it and by it. Those who rule the church are, themselves, in the first instance, believers, and, as such, priests of Christ. Their fellow-priests, as part of their priestly function, recognise and acknowledge the gift Christ gives to these men, and submit to them – to be edified in order to further exercise their own ministry. But all the members, the rulers and the ruled, are priests of the Lord; all of them *equally* priests of the Lord. Nothing – *nothing* – can take away from *that*. Nothing should be allowed to take away from it. Christ died for it!

The Two Ministries

The ‘ministries’ in question are the ministry of the law and the ministry of the gospel, as set out by the apostle in 2 Corinthians 3. No passage in Scripture more clearly lays bare the contrast between these two ministries. And how needful is this today – when so many believers today are locked in some sort of hybrid between the two, a mixture of law and gospel, especially in the areas of assurance¹ and sanctification,² held there by the teaching of those I call ‘law mongers’.³ If they wish to be released from the bondage and grief that this inevitably brings, they should take on board Paul’s teaching in 2 Corinthians 3. They could do no better. To this end, I publish this article.⁴

In seeking the resolution of the tension over the believer and the law, nobody could pretend that 2 Corinthians 3 carries the same weight as Galatians or Romans. No! But whatever decision we arrive at concerning the believer and the law, we must not fail to get to grips with the apostle’s teaching in this chapter, and make sure that our stance takes it fully into account. And more! Our view must thrive in face of 2 Corinthians 3. Indeed, it must arise directly from it.⁵

As so often in New Testament times, Judaisers were, once again, on the attack; this time at Corinth. As always, Paul stood up to them:

¹ See my *Assurance*.

² See my *Christ*.

³ By ‘law monger’, I mean those who say that we must preach the law to sinners to bring them to Christ, stop preaching the law just as they are about to trust Christ alone for justification, and then immediately take them back under the law for sanctification. I also include those who do this in an incipient way. My short denial of it all can be found in 1 Cor. 2:2; 9:16; 2 Cor. 4:5. For a longer answer, see my *Christ*.

⁴ In producing this article, I have very slightly edited chapter 11 of my *Christ* pp178-184.

⁵ Since writing this, I have come to see 2 Cor. 3 is a more important chapter than I thought. Along with Rom. 7:4-6, it plays a major role in the vital contrast between the letter and the spirit or Spirit.

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For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works. I say again, let no one think me a fool. If otherwise, at least receive me as a fool, that I also may boast a little. What I speak, I speak not according to the Lord, but as it were, foolishly, in this confidence of boasting. Seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast. For you put up with fools gladly, since you yourselves are wise! For you put up with it if one brings you into bondage, if one devours you, if one takes from you, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face. To our shame, I say that we were too weak for that! But in whatever anyone is bold – I speak foolishly – I am bold also. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I (2 Cor. 11:13-22).⁶

Note the apostle's emphasis upon boasting and boldness. Broadening this, note the word 'glory', 'glorious' or 'glorify', appearing, on my count, twenty-three times in the letter, mostly in the third chapter. 'Glory' is the theme of the entire letter; 'glory' is certainly the theme of 2 Corinthians 3. In particular, the apostle glories and boasts in connection with his ministry. This is the issue he focuses on when confronting the false teachers at Corinth, with their boasting and self-exaltation. See, in particular, 2 Corinthians 10 – 12.⁷

And that leads us directly to the central aspect of Paul's argument, the fundamental core of his case against the Judaisers. His ministry is more powerful and more glorious than theirs. That is his claim. They boast. Very well! He, too, can boast. What is more, he will boast! Further, he can outdo them in their boasting. And he does! How? Is it because he is a better preacher, and all the rest of it, than they? No! In some senses, he might be regarded as a poorer preacher (1 Cor. 1:17; 2:1,3-4,13; 2 Cor.

⁶ There are hints of it in his first letter also (1 Cor. 4:14-21; 5:6-8). See immediately below. Do not forget the Judaisers' mistaken claim that the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants are one, and that if Gentiles want to become children of Abraham they must be circumcised – and that this, in turn, means coming under the law.

⁷ On my count, the words 'boast' or 'boasting' come 28 times in the letter, 18 of which occur in these three chapters.

10:10; 11:6) – though, in these letters to Corinth⁸ (see for instance, 1 Cor. 4:10; 2 Cor. 11:19,21), it must not be forgotten, irony is never far below the surface with the apostle. No! What makes the difference between him and the law mongers is ‘commendation’, that pet theme of the Judaisers. They are forever on about it! They demand letters of commendation. That is why Paul speaks of commendation so frequently in this letter (2 Cor. 3:1; 4:2; 5:12; 6:4; 10:12,18), and stands up to his detractors on the issue: ‘Letters of commendation? Well, I’ve got them!’ Really? ‘Oh yes!’ He addresses the Corinthians plainly: ‘You are my letters! You believers! Every one of you at Corinth! Bits of paper? I don’t need bits of paper! My gospel success, my spiritual power, my sufferings, and God’s evident approval of my ministry, as revealed in the lives of others, you Corinthians in particular – there’s my “commendation”’ (2 Cor. 3:1-3; 4:2; 5:11 – 6:4; 10:13-18; 12:11-12; see also 1 Cor. 3:6; 9:1-2). ‘Now then, the Judaisers – what’s theirs? Let’s hear it!’ (2 Cor. 10:12-18). As he had told them in his first letter: ‘I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you. For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel... Now some are puffed up, as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills, and I will know, not the word of those who are puffed up, but the power. For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power. What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?’ (1 Cor. 4:14-21).⁹

But even this fails to get to the root of the apostle’s argument. The fundamental difference between his ministry and that of the Judaisers lies in something much more radical than its evident power, as compared to theirs.

The truth is, the Judaisers’ ministry is in a totally different realm, a different age, a different system to the apostle’s. They are really living in the age and ambience of the law, and their

⁸ And elsewhere.

⁹ He is not contradicting 1 Cor. 4:1-5. Remember, he calls himself ‘a fool’ for boasting, explaining that he was forced into it (2 Cor. 11:16-23; 12:6,11).

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ministry shows it. Theirs is an old-covenant ministry. Paul, however, lives in the realm of the Spirit, and his ministry is that of the new covenant. *This* is what makes all the difference. His boasting, power and commendation come from his being in the realm of the Spirit, and not in the realm of the law. Paul's power does not come from himself (2 Cor. 2:16; 3:5; 4:7-12,16-18; 6:3-10). Not at all! He can boast, yes, but only because God in Christ has made him competent, 'sufficient', as a minister (1 Cor. 15:10; 2 Cor. 3:5-6). And this sufficiency derives directly and inevitably from his being in the new covenant, his labouring in the realm of the Spirit, and his use of spiritual weapons appropriate to that covenant (2 Cor. 6:7; 10:3-5):

Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some others, letters of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you? You are our letter written in our hearts, known and read by all men; clearly you are a letter of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh; that is, of the heart. And we have such trust through Christ towards God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life... We do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 3:1-6; 10:3-5).

And *this* is the heart of the matter – the new covenant. *This* is what makes the difference between the Judaisers and the apostle. They labour in the letter, the law; he labours in the Spirit, in the gospel. And it is not only, as it were, the message that is different. The power, the boasting, the glory of the apostolic ministry, its very ethos, lies in that it is a ministry of the new covenant, not the old. With the change of covenant, the entire ministry has changed.

Let me stress this. Remember the chicken and the egg? Which comes first – the change of covenant, or the evident power? There is no doubt about it. It is as plain as a pikestaff. Paul does *not*

argue that since he possesses power and glory, there must have been a change of covenant. No! What he says is, since the old covenant had a glory, the new covenant must have even greater glory – which it has – and, as a consequence, he has that power and glory, and the Judaisers do not. It is all a result of the change of covenant. He is in the new covenant; they are in the old. And it shows.

The Judaisers, locked in the old covenant, preaching the law, are using thrash and slap¹⁰ to enforce their doctrine, hitting the Corinthians into line. So much so, the apostle can rebuke the Corinthians: ‘You put up with it if one brings you into bondage... if one strikes you on the face’. Paul will have none of it: ‘To our shame, I say that we were too weak for that!’ (2 Cor. 11:20-21). Taking this line, Paul, of course, is being ironical. It is not a question of weakness. He is not weak! Not at all! He is in a different covenant to the Judaisers! He has no intention whatsoever of hitting the Corinthians. Severity might be required, as a last resort. If so, he will not shirk it: ‘Being ready’, he says, ‘to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled’ (2 Cor. 10:6). But that is not his forte: ‘Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the authority which the Lord has given me for edification and not for destruction’ (2 Cor. 13:10).¹¹ Read again the above-extract from his first letter.

So, in 2 Corinthians 3, having made his point about the two covenants, in order to make sure that the Corinthians really do take it on board – since it is so easily and so often forgotten or whittled away (never more so than today!) – the apostle then launches into a comparison of the two. A comparison? He *contrasts* them, irrefutably spelling out the contrast in a series of devastating terms, deliberately polarising the two covenants as starkly as he can.

Before we glance at these contrasts, however, we must bear in mind that although Paul uses neither of the phrases, ‘the old

¹⁰ How about ‘whip’? I ask this, of course, because Calvin used this term when setting out his third use of the law. It is this which has led to so much bondage and sorrow for believers. See my *Christ*.

¹¹ For more on this, see my *Christ* pp264-265.

covenant', or 'the law', what else could he be talking about? And he certainly does use 'Old Testament' – which might easily be translated 'old testament'. In fact, he uses *palaias diathēkēs*, literally 'old covenant' (verse 14). And when he refers to 'tablets of stone... the letter... the letter... the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones... the ministry of condemnation' (verses 3,6,7,9) and speaks of Moses (verses 13,15), there is no doubt whatsoever that he is speaking of the old covenant, the entire Mosaic economy, the law, including the ten commandments, which he contrasts with 'the new covenant' (verse 6), the work and realm of 'the Spirit' (verses 6,8,17-18).

I say it again, there can be no doubt. Paul *is* contrasting the old and new covenants. He is not contrasting certain aspects of the two covenants, certain man-made and artificial segments of the covenants (none of which exist in Scripture). No! He is, root and branch, contrasting the old and new covenants.

And what a devastating series of contrasts he draws between the two! But, yet again, even that is not quite right. Although I will now list the contrasts, they do not actually form a list; they make one continuous line of reasoning. Do not miss the apostle's use of 'but... for... but... but if... so that... for if... for even... for if... therefore...' (verses 6-12) – all of which, I grant, are small Greek words in themselves, yet all of them are mighty words of reasoned argument. And when they follow hard, one after another, what an argument it is! What reasoning! So let us get away from a proof-text and bullet-point mentality, let us get away from a 'list-driven' Christianity, and let us get a firm grip on the apostle's argument. Indeed, let his argument grip us!

Nevertheless, in contradiction of what I have just said, in order to make things as clear as I can, I will now list the various contrasts the apostle draws.

Each of these, on its own, would constitute a powerful-enough statement of contrast between the old and new covenants. Gathered together, in one small section of Scripture, they form an invincible catalogue, demonstrating beyond all fear of contradiction that the old and new covenants, far from being one covenant, are chalk and cheese. Not only that. As these statements make plain, the old covenant was, in comparison with

the new, outward, weak, fading, useless and is now, with the completion of the redeeming work of Christ, and his resurrection, obsolete.

And that is not all:

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

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

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

The old covenant 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 (verses 7-11).¹²

The old covenant condemned; the new covenant is saving (verse 9).¹³

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

What a phenomenal series of statements! Breathtaking! But even so, we still have not reached the apostle's ultimate point! No! We have not yet got to the fundamental conclusion and application of his words in this chapter. So let us do it now.

Let me remind you, reader, of what I argued in my *The Priesthood of All Believers*, when looking at this passage. I have

¹² Note the apostle's 'deliberate tautology' – without redundancy, of course.

¹³ '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.

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two things in mind: ‘Ministry’ goes far wider than ‘pulpit work’. What is more, we must not confine the ‘ministry’ in question to that of the apostle:

[In] 2 Corinthians chapters 2 to 4, without question Paul *is* speaking of his own ministry, and that of his fellow-apostles and fellow-workers, yes... But notice how the apostle uses ‘we’ in these three chapters. Sometimes by ‘we’ he does mean, perhaps, just himself, maybe with other apostles and fellow-workers in mind (2 Cor. 2:17; 3:1; 4:7-15), although it is not absolutely certain in all these cases. But notice how he quickly moves into ‘you’ (2 Cor. 3:1-3). So what should we make of the ‘we’ and ‘ours’ in the next verse, leading on to the words I quoted above? And it is, I think, unlikely that the ‘we’ in 2 Corinthians 3:12-18; 4:16-18; leave alone 5:1 and on, should be limited to Paul himself, or to Paul and his fellow-apostles. In any case, it is undeniable that *all* Christ’s people are kings, priests and prophets by reason of their union with Christ. The prophets foretold it, and Christ established it. Not in a literal sense, of course, but in a spiritual sense. Believers, therefore, are ministers. I think we may justly argue that they are ‘competent’; all of them are ‘competent as ministers’. Each believer has God’s Spirit and can, to a measure, teach others. The point can be broadened. God equips all his people to fulfil that particular ministry which he has for each of them. To deny it is to fly in the face of the provisions of the new covenant (Isa. 54:13; 61:6; Jer. 31:31-34; 33:14-22; Zeph. 3:9-10; John 6:45; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; 1 Thess. 4:9; 5:11; Heb. 8:8-12; 10:15-18; 1 Pet. 4:10-11; 1 John 2:20-21,27; 5:20).

Why do I reiterate that here? I do so for this reason. Although the apostle is dealing primarily with his ministry as opposed to the ministry of the Judaisers, the principles he sets out apply to all believers. All believers are, from the moment of their conversion, in the new covenant; indeed, they are ministers of the new covenant – all of them, without exception, both men and women. So what Paul says about himself, he actually says about all believers. And that which lies behind his power and glory, and brings about that power and glory, lies behind every believer, and produces that same power and glory in them. Yes, I know it sounds staggering, but it is the truth! ‘Ministry’ is far more than ‘preaching’, and new-covenant ministry is something every believer engages in. When a sinner is converted, when he ‘turns to the Lord’ (verse 16), all is changed (2 Cor. 5:17). From that

moment, he (or she) has the Spirit of God, and now lives under the new covenant, in the realm of the Spirit – with all that entails in terms of life and liberty and glory:

In Christ... When one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord (2 Cor. 3:14-18).

And the upshot of all this? How can any new-covenant person think of going back to the old covenant? How can any new-covenant teacher think of instructing believers to submit to the old covenant? In light of 2 Corinthians 3 it ought to be utterly out of the question. But, sadly, as is all too evident, Reformed teachers persist in trying to mix the old and new covenants. They think they are doing the saints a service when they pick up – to use Calvin's words – the whip of the law to smite lazy asses. The truth is, in so doing, they risk (to put it no higher) coming under the apostle's reproof so pointedly set out in this chapter.

If I may use an illustration. Reader, what would you think of a man who insisted on lighting a candle for illumination when he was sitting in the glare of the full mid-day sun at the height of summer? What would you think of him putting on his thermals at such a time? You would think him mad or, at the very least, ill!

Well, this is the age of the Spirit. Do not go back to the flesh! Keep to the gospel. Do not allow yourself to be taken back to the law. The law is the flickering candle; the gospel is the meridian sun.

Can this be right? Is this really what the apostle is saying? We have a way of finding out. Bearing in mind what we have seen so far in this chapter, along with material I have not dealt with – that is, Moses' veil, the blindness of the natural man's heart, the removal of the veil in Christ – all of which leads up to the triumphant conclusion of the chapter with its exuberant declaration of life, liberty and joy of believers, let us glance at the way the apostle goes on in chapter 4:

Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced the hidden things of

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shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed – always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us, but life in you. And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written: 'I believed and therefore I spoke', we also believe and therefore speak, knowing that he who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God (2 Cor. 4:1-15).¹⁴

I leave you, reader, to judge whether or not what I have said here really has caught the spirit of 2 Corinthians 3. If it has, then it should signal the end of the debate about the believer and the law. The believer is in the new covenant; every believer (whether man or woman) is a minister of the new covenant. The new covenant is the air we breathe, the kingdom in which we live, the governance under which we thrive. The notion that we – the children of the new covenant – should mix law and gospel, old covenant and new, let alone elevate law over gospel, ought to be utterly out of the question.

Reader, if you are a believer who is locked into the law for assurance and sanctification, kept there by a preacher who dispenses a law-and-grace 'gospel', one who is backed-up by a

¹⁴ For more on this, see my *Glorious*.

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Confession (such as the Westminster or the 1689 Particular Baptist) that advocates Calvin's uses of the law, I urge you to read, ponder and pray over 2 Corinthians 3. I encourage you to read the chapter out loud, using different versions to the one you are used to (as well as your preferred version, of course). Repeat the prescription for Romans 6:14 – 7:6; 8:1-4,9-17. Let the apostle's teaching soak into your soul.

More. Take off the manacles and shackles of the law. You have the apostle's key to unlock the Reformed law-system. Use it! Enjoy your heritage, your freedom, in Christ. You are a child of the new covenant. You have been released from the killing letter. You have died to the law. You have been set 'free from the law of sin and death' by 'the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus' (Rom. 8:2). You have the witness of the Spirit (Rom. 8:16). Listen to him. He will take you to Christ, not the law. And Christ is all (Col. 3:11). Set your mind and heart on the Lord Jesus (Col. 3:1-4; Heb. 3:1; 12:1-3). Obadiah predicted that 'the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions' (Obad. 1:17). Make sure you do. Remember that 'the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ' (John 1:17). Start enjoying the liberty you have in Christ: 'Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we... are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit' (2 Cor. 3:17-18). Begin to experience the power of these words: 'Though you have not seen [Christ], you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your' soul (1 Pet. 1:8-9).

I say it again: Give up trying to live the Christian life in the way of the old covenant, even in part. You are a child of the new covenant. Enjoy your privileges in Christ. 'And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free... Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed' (John 8:32,36).

All this goes, also, for those of you who are under a preacher who, though he does not overtly preach the law, nevertheless preaches a mixture of gospel and law. Does he urge sanctification and assurance by works, rule and regulation, trying your best,

trying harder and all the rest of it?¹⁵ And does he teach you that assurance comes only by searching your sanctification, but, even so, few of you will ever get it? Then take the above prescription, I plead with you. As I said, quoting the apostle: Christ is all (Col. 3:11). I assure you of it.

Finally, if any unbeliever is reading this, then you need to understand that you do not need works, law, sacraments (so-called), priest, church or pastor. You need Christ. Repent, turn from your sin, turn to Christ and trust him, and you will be saved (Acts 16:31). Look anywhere else, and you will be damned. So look to Christ, trust him, call upon him now. For everyone who calls on him will be saved (Rom. 10:13).

¹⁵ Of course there are works for the believer to do, and commandments for him to keep. All who trust Christ, who love Christ, will keep his commandments (John 13:34-35; 14:15,21,23-24; 15:10; Jas. 1:25; 2:12; 1 John 5:2-3; 2 John 6). But in the new covenant, these commandments are part of the law of Christ (1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2; 2 Pet. 3:2) for his new Israel (Gal. 6:16; Phil. 3:3), not the law of Moses (John 1:17). Not, I hasten to add, that the law of Christ is a mere set of rules. I will not expand on this vital point here (see my *Christ* pp211-278,481-527), but the law of Christ is an entirely new system, regime, principle, one which is radically different to the ambience of the law of Moses. It is, as I say, the law of 'the Spirit' as opposed to the killing 'letter' of Moses (Rom. 7:4-6; 2 Cor. 3:6-9; Gal. 2:19; 5:18). As for assurance and sanctification, these are by grace, by the Spirit, not law.

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I refer to Galatians 3:23-25, the climax of Galatians 3:10-25. I quote the verses:

Before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept [literally ‘confined’ – footnote] for the faith which would afterwards be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor (NKJV).¹

And in other versions:

Before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster (AV).

Before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor (NASB).

Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ [put in charge until Christ came – footnote] that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law (NIV).

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 (ESV).

All these versions have in-built problems of one sort or another, problems which have led many to seriously misunderstand the apostle. And the consequences have been severe. I want to do what I can about it.²

¹ In this article, I mostly use NKJV.

² For more, see my *Christ*, especially pp127-140,348-358,420-430.

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First, ‘faith’ (Gal. 3:23,25). Paul was not speaking about ‘faith’ as a personal experience – that is, ‘believing’. Rather, he was speaking of ‘the faith’ as the gospel, Christ – that is, ‘who and what is to be believed’. In other words, ‘faith’ here is objective, not subjective.

Secondly, ‘to bring us’ (Gal. 3:24, NKJV, AV), ‘to lead us’ (NASB, NIV). These words are not in the original, and should be removed. They have been the unfortunate source of much misunderstanding. Paul did not say the law was given as a child-custodian ‘to bring us’ or ‘to lead us’ to Christ. Rather, the law was in place as a child-custodian ‘until’ the coming of Christ (Gal. 3:19). The ESV got it right: ‘the law was... until Christ came’.

Thirdly, the ‘tutor’ (Gal. 3:24), Greek *paidagōgos*, ‘tutor’ (NKJV), ‘schoolmaster’ (AV), ‘in charge’ (NIV), ‘tutor’, literally ‘child-conductor’ (NASB), ‘guardian’ (ESV). Sadly, some of these translations (especially, ‘schoolmaster’ and ‘tutor’), even the transliteration ‘pedagogue’, give the misleading impression that the law was an ‘educator’, much like *didaskalos* (Rom. 2:20; Heb. 5:2, for example). *This* is not the meaning of *paidagōgos*. The word is a combination of *pais* (child) and *agōgos* (leader), derived from *agō*, ‘to drive, to lead by laying hold of, to conduct’ with the idea of discipline. As Thayer explained: ‘The name was applied to trustworthy slaves who were charged with the duty of supervising the life and morals of boys... The boys were not allowed so much as to step out of the house without them, before reaching the age of manhood... The name carries with it an idea of severity (as of a stern censor and enforcer of morals)’. And, linking this with the previous point, the child-custodian’s job was not to *bring* the immature boy anywhere; rather, he had to discipline and protect the boy *until* he reached maturity. During that time, the Jews were ‘kept under the law, shut up’ (Gal. 3:23, AV), ‘were held prisoners by the law, locked up’ by the law

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(NIV), ‘held captive under the law, imprisoned’ (ESV), ‘kept under guard by the law’ (NKJV), confined by the law.³

Fourthly, what ‘law’ was Paul speaking of? There is no room for doubt. None whatever. Paul was speaking of the entire Mosaic institution. He was not speaking of the moral law, the ceremonial law or the judicial law, allowing the terms for the moment.⁴ Nor was he speaking of Jewish misunderstanding of the law, or legalism. Paul said ‘the law’ and he meant the law, the law of Moses in its entirety. *And he kept to it throughout the passage.*⁵

Fifthly, what of the ‘added’? This word must not be misunderstood. The law ‘was added’ to God’s promise to Abraham, given 430 years before the law (Gal. 3:19). Paul did not say that the law was ‘incorporated’ into the promise, or added to the promise in the sense that the pair made one covenant, a covenant of grace. Quite the opposite, in fact. The law came in as something extra to the promise, a distinct, separate and subordinate economy or system, *not* an alteration of, an adjustment to, or modifier of the promise. The law did not belong to the existing system or promise. It was not part of it. It was something additional, not fundamental. It was an add-on.⁶ As the apostle said: ‘The law entered’ (Rom. 5:20). The Greek word for ‘entered’ is used only twice in the New Testament (Rom. 5:20; Gal. 2:4). In the latter, it means ‘sneaked in’. While in Romans 5:20 it does not bear the evil sense of Galatians 2:4, nevertheless it possesses the connotation, ‘slipped in between’, ‘came in besides’, ‘in addition to’. The law slipped in. Paul’s emphasis on

³ I was a modern pedagogue – Mathematics teacher – for years, but if I had acted the part of a real pedagogue, the State would have locked me up for child abuse!

⁴ Not that I do allow them! Scripture doesn’t! See my *Christ* pp100-104,392-400.

⁵ Some Reformed commentators are ambiguous on this, or change their mind as they go along, without justification – except to maintain their covenant theology at all costs (including distortion of the text by not allowing Paul to speak for himself).

⁶ It was also temporary (see below), something very different to the promise, which was permanent.

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the law's temporary place in salvation history is obvious here.⁷ It ought to be unmistakable.

The apostle went further. Do not forget the Judaisers' claim that the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants were one and the same.⁸ Paul did not fudge the issue. They could not be more wrong. He was adamant. Going for the jugular, he categorically *contrasted* the two covenants, and let all concerned – the Galatians and the Judaisers – know the consequence of denying the contrast: 'For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise' (Gal. 3:18). This he confirmed in Galatians 4:24-26, where he argued that the Abrahamic covenant and the Mosaic covenant were two separate, distinct, covenants, not two parts of the same. What is more, throughout the letter to the Galatians, Paul stoutly preserved this separateness, standing firm against the Judaisers who, as I say, wanted to blend the promise and the law into one.⁹

There is no question but that Paul was thinking of the law's vital, though temporary, role in the unfolding of salvation history. That history is not flat, nor smoothly evolutionary in character. Rather, it is the record of God's interventions. God broke into the history of the world to give Abraham the promise. 430 years later, he intervened again to give Israel the law through Moses. Centuries later, at the right time (Gal. 4:4), he intervened again and sent his Son, the Seed (Gal. 3:19). He intervened again with the gift of the Spirit (Acts 2).¹⁰ To lose sight of Paul's eschatological argument is tragic.¹¹

⁷ See my comments on salvation history in my *Christ* pp30-35.

⁸ For more on the Judaisers, see my *Christ* pp16-18. The modern equivalent are the Reformed who, holding to Calvin's three uses of the law, claim that unbelievers must have the law preached to them to prepare them for Christ (preparationism), and believers must be under the law for sanctification.

⁹ This, of course, puts the Reformed advocates firmly on the side of those Paul was speaking against!

¹⁰ There is one more intervention to come; Christ's return.

¹¹ See Isa. 34:4; 65:17; Hag. 2:6-9,21-23; Heb. 12:25-29; 2 Pet 3:3-7. This, of course, takes us to the continuity/discontinuity debate. See my *Christ* pp76-79,374-380.

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Moreover, as with the previous point, Paul was speaking about the law – the law in its entirety, the law full stop! It was the law, the whole law, that was added 430 years after the promise, and it was the law, the whole law that was temporary in that God intended it to last until the coming of the Seed. There is not the slightest hint that Paul was saying the whole law was given at Sinai, two thirds of which lasted until the coming of the Seed, the remaining one third being eternal.¹²

Sixthly, the ‘us’. When Paul said: ‘Christ has redeemed *us* from the curse of the law, having become a curse for *us*’ (Gal. 3:13), to whom was he referring? Was he speaking of elect Jews? Or was he speaking of the elect, full stop, both Jews and Gentiles? There are strong arguments for both. The problem of the ‘us’ is not confined to Galatians 3:13-14, of course. It also arises in Galatians 3:23-29 and 4:3-7. It is likely that Paul was speaking primarily of elect Jews – and this is where the emphasis must fall – yet encompassing all the elect, both Jew and Gentile, in Christ’s redemption.¹³ While historically and actually it was only the Jews who could be said to be ‘under the law’, Paul probably included the Gentiles on the basis of Romans 2:14-15.¹⁴

¹² Actually, less than 1% of it.

¹³ The arguments in favour of viewing the ‘us’ as Jews can be summarised thus: while all men, both Jew and Gentile, are sinners, since it was only the Jews who were under the law, its curse could only apply to them, and therefore redemption from the law could apply only to them; since Gentiles are spoken of in Gal. 3:14, it is likely that the Jews were being spoken of in Gal. 3:13; Paul said ‘we who are Jews’ (Gal. 2:15); note the *us/you* contrast of Gal. 3:23-25 and 3:26-29; and, finally, the contrast in the Greek between ‘us’ and ‘the Gentiles’.

¹⁴ See my *Christ* pp27-37,337-347 for my reasons. Perhaps Paul was treating the Jews as a special case of redemption (Matt. 15:24; John 4:22), or in their priority over the Gentiles in its order (Luke 24:47; John 1:11; Acts 1:8; 3:26; 10:36; 13:26,46; 28:28; Rom. 1:16; 2:9). As I showed in my *Christ* pp47-48,342-347, it may be that Israel and the law served as a paradigm for Gentiles; the Gentiles are answerable to God for the moral standards he has placed upon them and within them, just as Israel was answerable for the law. This is why the Old Testament prophets could condemn the nations for their failure, just as they could condemn Israel for hers – even though the Gentiles and Israel were not

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And, *seventhly*, do not miss the unity which the apostle stresses in this passage. The Seed is one (Gal. 3:16), God is one (Gal. 3:20), and believers (whether Jew or Greek) ‘are all one in Christ Jesus’ (Gal. 3:28). In short, Gentiles do not need to go under the law to belong to the people of God, or to ratify their belonging to that people. They should pay no attention to the Judaisers who want them to submit to the law to make them ‘kosher’. In Christ, they, along with believing Jews, ‘are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus’. They, *all* of them, have ‘put on Christ’, ‘are Christ’s’, and ‘are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise’ (Gal. 3:26-29), and that without the law.¹⁵

Having teased out these seven preliminary – but far from trivial – details, we can now get to grips with Paul’s argument in Galatians 3:10-25. *Trivial* details? If they were to be grasped, it would signal an end to this debate on the believer and the law.

Now for the passage. I take it up from Galatians 3:8.

Paul reminded his readers of God’s promise to Abraham that through him he would bless the nations, which promise, as the apostle explained, is fulfilled in the calling of the elect (Jew and

under the same law. And this might be the explanation of Paul’s warning in Gal. 4:21 and 5:4. For unbelievers, God’s ‘law’ – whatever form it may take – continues to condemn those who are not in Christ and thus have not fulfilled the law. And whatever the arguments over the *us* in Gal. 3, in any event all men need redemption since ‘they are all under sin’, ‘the Scripture has confined all under sin’ (Rom. 3:9,22-23; 11:32; Gal. 3:22). All men – Jews and Gentiles – are slaves to sin. See my comments on Rom. 3:19 in my *Christ* pp35-37,339-341.

¹⁵ Gal. 3:20 has baffled most, if not all, commentators. While I have strong objections to N.T.Wright’s theology on several vital issues (see my *Conversion; Hinge*), I like the following: ‘Moses, to whom the Galatians are being tempted to look for membership in the true people of God, is not the one through whom that single family is brought about... The law cannot be God’s final word: God, being himself one, desires a single family, but the Mosaic law was given to one race only [the Jews], and therefore cannot put this plan into operation’ (N.T.Wright: *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and Law in Pauline Theology*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1993, pp169,172). In other words, Gentile believers must not go back to the law. Wright drew attention to the parallel in Rom. 3:30-31. For his full argument, see Wright pp157-174.

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Gentile) to faith and justification in Christ. This justification, Paul stressed, is by faith in Christ, not by the law. In fact, the law can only curse; it is antithetical to faith. But Christ has redeemed the elect from the law's curse – and in so doing has accomplished the promise God made to Abraham; namely, that the elect, including Gentiles, should 'receive the promise of the Spirit through faith' (Gal. 3:14). This takes us as far as the apostle's earlier rhetorical question: 'Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?' (Gal. 3:2).

Having cleared the ground thus far, Paul powered on. Even a man's covenant cannot be broken – let alone God's. This principle the apostle worked out in the following verses (Gal. 3:15-18). Nothing can alter, let alone 'annul', God's promise and purpose in the Abrahamic covenant – not even the law. In short, the law cannot contribute to our justification. But neither can it do away with God's earlier promise.

Such statements, of course, raise a question. And Paul asks it. 'If what you have said is true, why ever did God give the law to the Jews through Moses on Sinai?' As the apostle put it: 'What purpose... does the law serve?' (Gal. 3:19). Good question! As always, you can tell whether or not you are getting Paul's drift – does the question that he asks spring to your mind, too? If the law could not justify, and if the law did not abolish the promise, why ever did God give it to the Jews? What purpose did God have in mind when he gave the law to Israel?

Now for the answer. We are left in no doubt since Paul himself answered his own question, and his answer must be definitive, settling the issue once and for all. Here it is. The law? The purpose of the law? 'It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made' (Gal. 3:19).

There are two points.

First, God's purpose¹⁶ in giving the law was to do with sin; 'it was added because of transgressions' (Gal. 3:19). While this is not easy to interpret, some things are clear. The law was not added because transgressions *existed* – before the law there could

¹⁶ The 'because' has a forward look; it is a word of purpose.

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be no transgression. Rather, the law brought home that fact that sin (which did exist) was sin against God, it was transgression of his law (1 John 3:4), the law having turned sin into transgression. Men were sinners before the giving of the law, of course, but the law turned sin into transgression – where there is no law, there is no transgression (Rom. 4:15; 5:13). What is more, while the entrance of the law did not create sin, it promoted it, increased it, exhibited it, defined it. This is what the law does. This is why it was ‘added’. It exposes sin, and convicts the offender of it (Rom. 3:19-20; 7:7-13). It arouses sin (Rom. 7:5,7-11), brings a curse (Gal. 3:10), slavery (Gal. 4:1-8) and wrath (Rom. 4:15). ‘The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law’ (1 Cor. 15:56). ‘The law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners’ (1 Tim. 1:9-10). To break one commandment of the law is to incur the guilt of all (Jas. 2:10-11). As for the Jews, the law was ‘added’, it was given to them as a prison keeper, prison house, or child-custodian (Gal. 3:23-25). Note Paul’s stress on being guarded, confined, restricted, locked up and ruled by the law. So important is this idea, to drive it home the apostle uses the illustrations of slavery (Rom. 6), marriage (Rom. 7), the child-custodian (Gal. 3), the steward (Gal. 4) and Hagar (Gal. 4). ‘Moreover, the law entered that the offence might abound’ (Rom. 5:20). ‘The offence’? What offence? The offence of Adam’s sin: ‘Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men... by one man’s offence many died... by the one man’s offence death reigned through the one... through one man’s offence judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation... by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners’ (Rom. 5:12-19). ‘Moreover the law entered that the offence’ – Adam’s offence, and its consequence throughout the human race – ‘might abound’ (Rom. 5:20). *This* was God’s purpose or intention in giving the law. It was to make offence ‘abound’. In short, the law was to do with sin, transgression, guilt, wrath, curse, death, condemnation, prison and bondage. And it made the offence abound. This is why God ‘added’ the law. This is why he gave the law to Israel.

So much for the first point.

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Secondly, the law was only a temporary economy or system: ‘It was added... till the Seed should come’ (Gal. 3:19). Paul highlights this temporary nature of the law in two ways. In addition to the word ‘added’ – which speaks of the law’s supplementary role¹⁷ – note the words, ‘till the Seed should come’. I draw attention to the *till*. The law was revealed on Sinai to Moses – ‘it was added’, it ‘entered’ at that time (Rom. 5:13-14,20; Gal. 3:19) – and it entered the world to last only *until* the Seed should come. This refers first and foremost to the law’s historical significance. That is to say, it was a temporary system given to Israel through Moses, 430 years after the promise to Abraham (Gal. 3:17), and lasting *till* or *until* the coming of the Seed. Who is the Seed who was to come? Christ: “‘And to your Seed’”, who is Christ’ (Gal. 3:16). So now – do not miss that vital eschatological word, once again – since the Seed, Christ, *has* come, the reign of the law is over, the reign of the law must be over, the law’s day is done, its sun has set. This is what the *until* means here. Note the *before* and *after* in Galatians 3:23. As Paul stated: ‘*Before* [the] faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for [shut up to, confined for] the faith which would *afterwards* be revealed’ (Gal. 3:23). The time element is very prominent once again – *eis* appears twice in Galatians 3:23-24. In both verses it means ‘until’; in neither does it mean ‘to’. Paul’s argument is that *until* the coming of ‘the faith’, *until* the coming of the Seed, *until* the coming of Christ, *until* the bringing in of the gospel, it was the time or age of the law.

Not only was it the time of the law: until the coming of Christ, the law *reigned*. The law ‘kept under guard’ the Jews, imprisoning them, confining them, shutting them up to the coming of the gospel. For, as Paul said, referring to Jewish history from Sinai to the coming of the Messiah, ‘the law was our [that is, for the Jews] [child-custodian] to [*eis*, until] Christ’ (Gal. 3:24). Until the coming of Christ, the law was disciplining those under its rule, the Jews, shutting them up until the coming of the gospel in Christ. ‘The law was put *in charge* until Christ came’ (Gal. 3:24, NIV footnote).

¹⁷ See my *Christ* pp30-35.

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‘But after [the] faith has come’ – that is, now that Christ has come and brought in the gospel – ‘we are no longer *under* a [child-custodian]’ (Gal. 3:25). ‘We’, the Jews,¹⁸ said Paul – the Gentiles never were under the law in any case – we are no longer under the law. So how could anybody be under the law since the age of the law is over – now that Christ has come?¹⁹ Now that the faith – the gospel – has come, the law has served its purpose. ‘For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ’ (John 1:17). ‘On the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness... On the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope... For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second... In that [God] says: “A new covenant”, he has made the first obsolete’ (Heb. 7:18-19; 8:7,13). ‘The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious... how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory’ (2 Cor. 3:6-9).

All this is reinforced by Paul’s use of ‘pedagogue’. The pedagogue was a guardian, a child-custodian, whose job it was to restrain a minor from immoral behaviour, and to protect him until he matured. Once the juvenile reached maturity, however, the pedagogue’s work was finished. He had no more say over his former trainee. He was out of a job, surplus to requirements. His old power and rule had ended. Paul used this well-known practice to illustrate the law’s relationship to the Jews, standing over

¹⁸ Jews? Jews as Jews? Or converted Jews? Are any Jews under the law today? This takes us far beyond the remit of this article, but since Christ has fulfilled and abolished the law, and its age is therefore over, I am inclined to think the law’s old-covenant role has gone. I know that some Jews are still mistakenly waiting for the coming of the Messiah, but if any are still under the law, if the law is still in place, where are the priesthood, sacrifices, *etc.*?

¹⁹ This question has to be answered also by those who mistakenly think Paul was speaking about an individual’s experience of the law before conversion. It has especially to be answered by them! See below.

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them, keeping them in line throughout the age of the law.²⁰ The Mosaic order (the old-covenant administration, economy, dispensation), the law, was the pedagogue which kept Israel in order until the coming of Christ and his new covenant.²¹ Once Christ had come, however, believing Jews were no longer under the law (Gal. 3:25). And if Jewish believers are no longer under the law, then, of course, neither are Gentile believers.

Note the repetition of ‘under’ – the key word – in ‘*under guard by the law*’, ‘*under a [child-custodian]*’, ‘*under guardians and stewards*’ and ‘*under the elements of the world*’, and ‘*under the law*’ (Gal. 3:23,25; 4:2-3,5). The repetition of ‘under’, and the thrust of the argument, show these phrases are all saying one and the same thing. Which is? The law, bringing in and imposing rules, governed and guarded the way the Jews behaved, confining them *under* itself. The law was over the Jews, they were *under* it, *under* its grip, *under* its power. It revealed sin, and aroused or stimulated it. Paul says the same thing in Romans 6 and 7. In both Galatians and Romans, the apostle makes it as clear as noonday that there are two stages of salvation history. The former age, ‘under law’, and the present age, under Christ, ‘under grace’. The apostle always heavily contrasts the two. The former age was the age or realm of bondage; the latter, freedom. Now when Paul spoke of ‘being under the law’, he meant more than being under its curse.²² He meant being under *it*, under the law as a system, under it as a realm, under it as a rule of behaviour, under the law

²⁰ As I have noted, all this is reinforced by Paul’s use of the guardian or steward in Gal. 4:1-7.

²¹ See Acts 15. Note the *our fathers nor we* (Acts 15:10) – clearly a reference to the Jews; Peter, a Jew, was speaking about the Jews. Note the reference in Acts 15:21 to synagogues and sabbaths; clearly Jewish – not Gentile – terms. The law distinguished between – divided indeed (Eph. 2:14-15) (see my *Christ* pp27-37,200-207,337-341,478-480 – Jews and Gentiles, but grace, through trust in Christ, makes them one (Acts 15:7-9; see also John 10:16; 11:52; 17:20-24; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:13-22).

²² This, of course, is a common ploy adopted by the Reformed, which, coupled with their almost incessant use of the non-scriptural ‘the ceremonial law’, marks their determined (but desperate) attempt to evade the plain meaning of the apostle’s words.

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as a child-custodian, under its reign, under its grip, under its power. It is all a question of maturity, of age, epoch, realm and status. To be under the law is to be under a child-custodian, whereas to be under Christ is to be free. Just as a mature man is no longer under the child-custodian, so the believer is no longer under the law, no longer subject to the imposition of its rule.²³

And since this is so, how can believers think of going under the law? After all, the child-custodian only had a job while the child was immature. When the child reached maturity, not only the child-custodian's work, but the child-custodian himself, was finished. Well then, as Paul states so clearly, believers are 'all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus' (Gal. 3:26). Sons? The apostle uses *huioi* – grown up, mature, sons. And he declares that believers, all believers, the moment they trust Christ, are fully-mature adopted sons of God. Consequently, just as, on reaching maturity, the minor was released from the child-custodian, the believer, being a mature son, cannot possibly be under the law. See Galatians 4:1-7, where the apostle clearly contrasts the infant, *nēpios*, with the son, *huios*. In short, for converted Jews to go back to Moses, or for converted Gentiles – who never had the law – to go under Moses, is unthinkable. Or ought to be.

Here we have it. Galatians 3:10-25 shows us that there have been two great ages, two epochs in human history; first, the age of law from Moses to Christ, and then the age of grace under Christ. And these two ages are sharply contrasted with each other. The law was a temporary or interim measure, a parenthesis, an age which Christ in the gospel brought to an end and did away with. Paul's compelling line of reasoning in this Galatian passage is from start to finish to do with the eschatological, the historical, and he builds his case with invincible clarity and devastating power. The temporary, provisional, age of the law was abrogated with eschatological finality by Christ when he brought in the gospel revelation. Such is Paul's majestic argument. 'All the prophets and the law prophesied until John' (Matt. 11:13). So

²³ This does not mean that the believer has nothing at all to do with the law, but the law is not the rule nor norm for defining his walk with God. See my *Christ* pp289-294,530-540 to see how the law plays the role of a believer's paradigm as part of 2 Tim. 3:16-17.

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said the Lord Jesus. Even as he spoke, the age of law was coming to its appointed end. And when Christ died, ‘at that moment’ (NIV), God tore down the temple curtain (Matt. 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45). The age and reign of the law was over. The law had been fulfilled, Christ having brought it to the end that God had always determined for it (Matt. 5:17-18; Rom. 10:4). This is what Paul teaches in Galatians 3:10-25. This section of Scripture, it might well be argued, constitutes the zenith of the apostle’s teaching on the law.

But many place a very different construction on the passage. Very different! They say that Galatians 3:19,22-24 speaks of the *personal* experience of conviction of sin during an *individual’s* experience of coming to faith in Christ. Paul, they allege, was saying the Spirit uses the law to convict the sinner, closing every avenue but grace, forcing him to Christ for relief from his sins by trusting him for salvation. In other words, the law rules over an individual unregenerate sinner until Christ has come savingly to that individual sinner. Furthermore, the law ‘brings us’ to Christ (Gal. 3:24). It is not a question of history, at all. It is a personal experience, today. And these teachers, building on this personal idea, say that the preaching of the law is essential in order to prepare the sinner to come to Christ.²⁴

This notion of personal preparationism by the law is *not* what Paul was arguing.²⁵ Not at all! For a start, as I have explained, ‘to bring us’, is a translators’ insertion, and a bad insertion at that. Paul said nothing of the sort. Preparationism’s entire edifice is built on this non-existent textual foundation. But preparationism comes to grief on far more than a single text. It is the context!

²⁴ But even if this is the correct view of the passage – and it most certainly is *not* – Paul’s: ‘The law was our tutor to bring us to Christ... But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor’ (Gal. 3:24-25), destroys at a stroke Calvin’s third use of the law. On the Reformed view, the law acts as a tutor until the sinner comes to personal faith in Christ, and then that converted sinner is immediately put back under his tutor, the law! How can this be squared with what Paul actually said? And where is the text that states the Reformed view?

²⁵ See my *Christ* pp51-61,348-358.

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For a start, consider the immediate context from Galatians 3:10. The apostle was clearly speaking of two ages in the history of the world – before the coming of the Seed, and after. He was not remotely addressing the individual's personal experience. No! He was taking a grand, overall view of the sweep of the history of redemption. Then there is the wider context of Galatians to bear in mind. How preparationism can be made to fit with *that*, I am at a loss to comprehend. The Judaisers got some things wrong, but, after all, they *were* preaching the law – just the job for bringing sinners to Christ! Strange, then, that Paul did not commend them for this part of their ministry, merely fine-tuning the bit they got wrong. And then there is the wider context still – the rest of the New Testament. If the apostle, in Galatians 3:24, had been setting out the way a sinner is brought to Christ, we ought to find several examples of apostolic preaching of the law to Gentiles, especially by Paul. After all, so we are told, this is *the* way for sinners to come to Christ! So where are these examples in Scripture? We find none. Not one! Why did the apostle not take his own medicine? Why did he not make use of this sovereign way of bringing sinners to the Saviour? If, that is, this passage teaches what is claimed for it! Yet he, with the other apostles, saw many Gentile sinners converted to Christ – without first preaching the law to them. Why, Paul told us his method was the very opposite of the idea. He explained how, when wanting to 'win' 'those who are without law', he himself went 'without law' (1 Cor. 9:21). How anybody can argue that the right way to preach the gospel to Gentiles is to begin with the law, when Paul expressly says that he set his face against such practice, baffles me. And certainly his sermons to Gentiles, as documented in Acts 14:15-18; 17:22-32, lend no support whatever to the claim that he preached the law. On the contrary, they amplify and more than justify what he said about his guiding principles (1 Cor. 9:21).²⁶

But let me take time to give one further biblical case to prove that preparationism by the law is wrong. Moreover, it is the obvious case, since it is Paul's choice in Galatians 3:10-25. And what a case! I refer, of course, to Abraham, the pivotal figure in

²⁶ As I say, see my *Christ* pp51-61,348-358.

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the human race as far as the history of redemption is concerned.²⁷ Nor must the contextual significance (the Judaisers' attack) be missed: to make his point about conversion, Paul went back, not to Moses, but to Abraham. When we first meet Abraham in Scripture, he is an unbeliever, a pagan, uncircumcised (Rom. 4:1-25), a spiritually-dead sinner without God (Rom. 5:12-14). Yet, in this very state, he is confronted with God's command to quit his homeland (Gen. 12:1-3), which he obeys (Gen. 12:4), receives the promise of God (Gal. 3:16-18), and was later justified by faith (Rom. 4:1-24), and all this without any personal experience of conviction by the law to bring him to Christ. How could he have had a law work? The law was not given for another 430 years (Gal. 3:17)! Even so, he is the prime example in Scripture of believing in Christ for justification (Rom. 4:1-25; Gal. 3:6-29). And this without the law.²⁸

The tragedy of misunderstanding and misapplying Galatians 3:10-25 is far wider than this question of preparationism, however – though that is serious enough, in all conscience. The Galatian passage is vital for understanding the place and purpose of the law in salvation history. Failure to see *this* point is tragic beyond words. *We must not miss the big picture.* Paul was speaking about the two great epochs – law and grace, law and gospel, before Christ and after Christ.²⁹ The apostle in this passage most definitely was not concerned with an individual's experience of conviction of sin and subsequent conversion. No! While the individual's experience is, of course, of the utmost

²⁷ Note how Paul uses him again in Rom. 4:9-16 to show that justification is not by circumcision in particular, or by law in general.

²⁸ If, in reply, it is pointed out that Christ did not come into Abraham's conviction of sin, may I ask: But we all believe in progressive revelation, do we not, and therefore we expect clearer light than in Abraham's day, do we not? In any case, my point stands – Abraham was convicted without the law. And he did see Christ! As Christ said: 'Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad' (John 8:56). As Paul put it: 'The Scripture... preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand' (Gal. 3:8). Where does it say that it preached the law to him?

²⁹ BC and AD are not mere convenient calendar divisions invented by men. This, of course, is being whittled away by the use of BCE and CE.

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importance (to the individual, as it was to Paul – see Galatians 5), the apostle here was speaking of something on a much vaster scale; namely, the historical aspect of the law in the history of salvation. Paul was referring to the law's reign over the Jews in the age before Christ came. The apostle said that the law 'was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come' (Gal. 3:19). When the Seed came, the law's work was over. That is what Paul said. That is what he meant. To say that the law must be preached before the gospel in order to convict sinners and bring them to Christ is to miss the point and to minimise Galatians 3. Paul was speaking of the historical role of the law, and its temporary nature – 'it was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made' – not of its supposed role in restraining sin in the unregenerate. The idea that the law exists today to do something which was ended nearly 2000 years ago by the coming of the Christ, is remarkable, to say the least. Coming from the other direction, if the law *was* given to bring sinners to Christ, why was it limited to the time that the Seed should come? Surely Calvin, and those who follow him, argue that the law does that work *nowadays*, do they not? Consequently, the notion that Galatians 3:24 justifies the preaching of the law to prepare sinners for Christ is quite wrong. And it is just as wrong to preach the law to believers to sanctify them.

The passage above all is historical in both its meaning and context. It is eschatological. It explains the two great systems of God's dealings with men; namely, through Moses or Christ, by law or by grace (John 1:17). In particular, it sets out the passing of the old age, and Christ's bringing in of 'the time of the new order' (Heb. 9:10, NIV). The historical nature of the Galatian passage must be emphasised. It is absolutely paramount. It cannot be overstated. It certainly can be understated. Worse, it can be ignored. Worst of all, the passage can be warped to make it teach that which Paul never did.

And this of course brings us back to Calvin's third use of the law for sanctification. A right understanding of Galatians 3, I say, utterly destroys the idea. How? As I have already noted, even on the Reformer's (mistaken) understanding of Galatians 3:24-25,

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once the sinner has come to Christ, he is no longer under the law. But of course, the idea that Paul was talking about the believer's individual experience is a bad mistake, falling far short of what the apostle really was thinking of. I say it again: *Do not miss the big picture*. The passage teaches there have been two great ages in the history of the world; the age of the law and the age of grace. The age of the law was temporary; it is over now that Christ has come. How then, can the law be the means and the motive for the believer's sanctification? The believer belongs to a totally different age. Grace, not law, is the age in which the believer lives. Grace, not law, must be the means and motive for his sanctification.

What is more, the fact that God gave Abraham and Moses two separate, distinct covenants is utterly basic to Paul's doctrine in Galatians 3:10-25, God having, long before Moses, established his covenant with Abraham – indeed, 430 years before the law (Gal. 3:17). The Judaisers wanted to meld the two covenants into one. Paul would have none of it. The two covenants, he argued, are distinct and contrasting. Being so obvious, it is staggering that anyone should question it. But they do.³⁰ The spiritual aspect of Abraham's covenant is nothing less than the new covenant. The Mosaic covenant is the law. That these two covenants in question are utterly different is likewise fundamental to understanding the Bible, which takes it for granted, no less. To say otherwise is to make nonsense of Paul's teaching. In the one covenant, God declared to Abraham and to all his spiritual seed what *he* – God – would do; it was God's promise, the covenant of promise (Gen. 15:17-18; Gal. 3:16-17; Heb. 8:6-13; 10:15-17). In the other covenant, God commanded the people through Moses as to what *they* must do: 'You shall... keep my statutes and my judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them' (Lev. 18:5; Rom. 10:5; and many others), and it was verified by the consent of the people (Exod. 19:8; 24:7). The Abrahamic covenant in the new is unbreakable (Jer. 31:31-34), whereas the Mosaic covenant was conditional; sadly, it was broken (Jer. 31:32). The promise is of faith on the basis of grace; the law was of works, a question of

³⁰ See my *Christ* pp75-98,369-391.

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earning and meriting (Rom. 4:1-8; 6:23; 11:6; Gal. 3:11-12,24-25; Eph. 2:8-9). The promise brings blessing; the law brought a curse (Gal. 3:10-14); and so on. Now these are large differences. Differences? *Contrast is the word*. The two are mutually exclusive: 'For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise' (Gal. 3:18). 'If those of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect' (Rom. 4:14). 'You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace' (Gal. 5:4). 'If by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace' (Rom. 11:6).³¹ How, as many claim, the Mosaic covenant can be thought to be one and the same as the Abrahamic covenant, or that it is 'a fresh administration of the covenant of grace', defies common sense. Worse, it defies Scripture: 'The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious... how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory' (2 Cor. 3:6-9).

As I have already observed, very often we can test our understanding of Paul by looking at the questions he raises after making his staggering assertions. Paul frequently raised objections to his doctrine – we shall meet it again – and here is a case in point. I draw your attention, reader, in particular, to Paul's use of the word 'then': 'What purpose *then* does the law serve?... Is the law *then* against the promises of God?' (Gal. 3:19,21). In other words, Paul said, in light of my [Paul's] teaching – which, I admit, sounds so startling – how *then* does the law square with the promise? Now, if the commonly-held Reformed view is right, and the law and the gospel comprise one covenant, if it is essential to preach the law to sinners before preaching the gospel, and if it is essential to take sinners, once converted, back to the law to sanctify them, Paul would never have asked such a (redundant) question as: 'What purpose then does the law serve?' 'Why the law then?' (NASB). Such a question could be raised

³¹ Pointing out the obvious – that in Gal. 5:4 Paul was speaking about justification – cuts no ice. The point I am making at this stage is irrefutable – law and grace are contrasted.

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only by someone who knows the two systems are very different, whose teaching has exposed the difference, and yet who needs to make sure his readers do not denigrate the law. No one who teaches the standard Reformed view needs to ask such a question. It simply does not arise. Nor would his hearers ever think of it. It would never cross their mind. Under his teaching, they are never exposed to thinking the law is different to grace, since he has taught them that the law and the gospel are virtually one and the same covenant. If a Reformed teacher did ask such a question, he would surely be shouted down, dismissed: ‘As we all know – and, after all, as *you* taught us – the law serves to prepare the sinner for Christ, and to sanctify the saint. That’s the law’s purpose. You yourself told us! So why are you asking such a daft question?’ Consequently, the fact that Paul raised this very question, using the word ‘then’, and yet did not give the ‘standard’ answer, proves he was no advocate of the Reformed first and third uses of the law. Far from it! The truth is, he had to explain how the law fitted in with the promise. The law, he said, was temporary, confining the Jews until Christ came. Thus it is the historical setting of Galatians 3:10-25 which must be grasped. It must not be lost in a welter of words about preaching the law to pagan sinners today. *Do not miss the big picture.*

In the apostle’s question, the word ‘serve’ is not in the original. The original reads: ‘Why then the law?’ The ‘serve’ has been added by translators. Very well. But what tense should they have chosen? Is it: ‘What purpose *did* the law serve?’ Or: ‘What purpose *does* the law *now* serve?’ The context speaks of the past. This seems, to put it no stronger, to teach that the law has no ongoing function for the believer. But if Paul did ask: ‘What purpose *does* the law *now* serve?’, why ever did he not reply along the lines of Calvin’s threefold use of the law? Why did the Spirit leave it for 1500 years until he made it known to the churches through the Reformer? This is not the same as saying men cannot discuss a problem before it arises – for instance, John Owen did not tackle ‘being slain in the Spirit’ – for Paul was dealing with the precise issue in hand at this very point. And he was inspired. So why did he not give the classic Reformed answer?

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We may put it to the test. Ask any Reformed teacher to tell us the purpose of the law, and he will rattle off Calvin's threefold use. Now ask Paul! Well...?

We may go further. As I have emphasised, the era of the law was temporary.³² It was only an interlude (but a God-ordained interlude, I hasten to add) in God's great plan for the ages. And God gave Moses the law with the intention that it should last only until the establishment of the new covenant by Christ (Gal. 3:16-19,24-25).³³ The entire law, not the law's 'mode of administration', was abolished by the coming of Christ.

As for the law of Moses being temporary, note the following: 'In that [God] says: "A new covenant", he has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away' (Heb. 8:13; see also 2 Cor. 3:11,13). As for 'vanish away', the same root-word is used in: 'What is your life? It is even a vapour that appears for a little time and then vanishes away' (Jas. 4:14). This opens up an interesting parallel between the temporary nature of the law and the limited, temporary life-span of man: 'The days of our lives are seventy years' (Ps. 90:10). As soon as we are born, we begin to die. 'As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more' (Ps. 103:15-16). 'Man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow' (Ps. 144:4; see Job 8:9-10; 14:1-2,5-6; Ps. 39:5-6,11-12; 78:39; 89:47; 90:5-6; 1 Pet. 1:24; *etc.*). Our days are 'numbered' (Job 14:5; Ps. 90:12). Similarly, the law of Moses came with a 'sell-by' date stamped on it; it was a temporary, passing shadow which, when its God-appointed task was done, at God's predestined time it would vanish away. And with the coming of Christ and his accomplishment of his Father's purpose, the law's work was over, completed and fulfilled. The age of the law had passed. In addition to this temporary aspect, there is also

³² The law of God is eternal; the law of Moses was temporary. See my *Christ* pp222,227.

³³ I am not suggesting for a moment that God changed his mind, that his intention in giving the law was thwarted, or anything remotely like it. God always did intend to bring in the law, *but only as a temporary measure*.

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a parallel – a connection, indeed – between the *frailty* of man and the *weakness* of the law (Rom. 8:3).³⁴

I have spent some time on this section of Galatians because its importance can scarcely be exaggerated. As I have said repeatedly, *do not miss the big picture*. I have laboured the point simply because many Reformed writers claim the two covenants (law and grace) are one and the same, and because they build so much upon it.³⁵ The fact is, the view we take of Galatians 3:19-20 will largely determine how we think of the believer and the law. Recall Paul's argument thus far. In dealing with the Judaisers, their claim that the covenants are one and the same, and their call for the believers to go under the law, he has drawn on the Galatians' experience. He has appealed to Scripture. He has called upon human reason in using an analogy from everyday life (Gal. 3:15) and applied it to God's dealings with men. He has explicitly set out the temporary nature of the law's reign. He has proved that the Galatians already have all they need spiritually – God's promise, the Christ, and the Spirit – and they have it without the law. How can they think of going to the law in face of the evidence he has produced? What purpose could it serve? The law's sun has set. But, it must be noticed, in light of this, Paul has to answer the question, if this really is the state of things, why then was the law given in the first place? And this is the very question Paul raises and answers. In truth, he has already answered it. The law was not given to believers in the age of the gospel. It was given to Jews before the coming of Christ. And those Jews had to live under the bondage of that law, even though it did not give them any power to meet its demands. But now that Christ has come, that age is over. The law has ceased. It has not ceased in part or to certain ends. It has ceased. The law, the age of the law, is over. With the coming of Christ, salvation history has entered a new age, the age of the Spirit. Israel's pedagogue, the law, has gone; the Spirit has come. And it is the Holy Spirit, not the law as a pedagogue, who sanctifies the believer. The verb 'led' in Galatians 5:18 comes from the same word as 'pedagogue'

³⁴ See my *Christ* pp172-176,460-464 on the 'weakness' of the law.

³⁵ See my *Christ* pp75-98,369-391.

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– an example of Paul’s love of word play.³⁶ The believer is ‘pedagogued’ by the Spirit, not the law, now that in the fullness of time Christ has come, and the Spirit has been given. The law’s time is finished. Now is the age of the Spirit; now is the time for walking in and by the Spirit.³⁷

To sum up Galatians 3:10-25: the law was given through Moses, it was given to Israel, it was given because of sin, it imprisoned and disciplined those under it, it was never intended to be permanent, but to last only until the coming of Christ. How can it be thought that a believer ought to go under the law? To make Gentile believers in the new covenant conform to the law of the old covenant, which was intended to discipline unregenerate Jews in the age before the coming of Christ, is nothing short of incredible.

May I say it just once more. I address all believers. We are given the big picture in Galatians 3. *Do not miss it!* The doctrine the apostle sets out here is of massive importance. Having seen it, do not forget it. Do not allow any man, however illustrious he may be (Ps. 118:9; 146:3,5), to impose any template on Scripture. In particular, do not let yourself be robbed of the apostle’s teaching by submitting to the covenant-theology construct which was forged in the 16th century. If you do – or if you have – you will find yourself imprisoned under the law for both assurance and sanctification. As a result, you will be cheated of your rightful birthright as a believer – the liberty, the glory and the joy that are in Christ.

There is one lesson above all that we should take from Galatians 3:10-25, as for every passage of Scripture (Luke 24:37,32,45): Look for Christ. Look *to* Christ. For Christ is all (Col. 3:11).

Before Christ came, the Jews were imprisoned under the law, kept there until he came. But Christ has come, and he has established the new covenant. Those who trust Christ are justified

³⁶ In addition to Gal. 3:24 with 5:18, see Rom. 8:2-4; 9:6; 1 Cor. 9:19-23; 11:3-16; Gal. 6:2,16, and so on.

³⁷ This is not to say the law has no place at all in the life of the believer. See my *Christ* pp279-298,528-542.

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by faith. Not only that, in establishing the new covenant, Christ fulfilled and abolished the old, so that believers, having died to the law, are no longer under that killing ministry, but are alive in the Spirit:

Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another – to him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter... For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: he condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Rom. 7:4-6; 8:2-4). I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Gal. 2:19-20).

Believer, this is your birthright. Realise it. Count on it (Rom. 6:11). Enjoy it.

Christ is All: No Sanctification by the Law

Dr John S. Waldrip

*******Life changing!** July 20, 2013

David H.J. Gay writes in a way most can easily follow to show that an error concerning the Mosaic Law has found its way through Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin into mainstream Protestant thought. Gay shows the error of this and points the reader ever and always to the Lord Jesus Christ as the Object the divine Means by which the believer's sanctification is accomplished. I would give this book six stars if the author had left out the final chapter of the book.

Terence Clarke

*******Deals thoroughly with Christian sanctification in Christ rather than Moses (Law)** 16 August 2013

David Gay thoroughly deals with the biblical concept and application of sanctification (imparted righteousness) which he reveals is in Christ alone. He demolishes the teaching of the reformers and those that follow on this issue that sanctification is by the 10 Commandments. He shows that just as in justification Christ is all and as far as the sanctification of believers is concerned 'Christ is in all'. This is anything but an antinomian approach but emphasises the power of Christ in the Christian's life. David's style is unusual in that it displays a preacher's approach to delivery but is fresh and direct. He does repeat his arguments throughout the book so that the reader should be in no doubt of them or misunderstand them. He introduces briefly his amillennialist view on Israel which, I find, is not argued with the same biblical thoroughness as the main subject. Recommended for all those who have a true interest in biblical sanctification and the whole work of Christ.

Moe Bergeron

*******At last a view of 'New Covenant' Sanctification** August 30, 2013

'Antinomian!' is a hideous charge that is levelled at those who do not believe in any use of Sinai's Law for the saint's sanctification. The fact of the matter is that anyone who subscribes to such a use, including a third use, of Sinai's Law denies the clear biblical teaching of Romans 7:6 and 2 Corinthians 3. The written code and the way of the Spirit are opposed to one another. In the apostle Peter's 2nd letter and in the 1st chapter he explains New Covenant sanctification. Learn of Christ! David Gay's work is a must read for all who understand that the Lutheran/Reformed debate is not Law vs. Gospel. It truly is Letter vs. Spirit.

Mr Rod Angus

*******Insightful, courageous and clear** 27 August 2013

The Reformed teaching that the OT law, especially the 10 Commandments, is the Christian's standard and perfect rule for obedience, when not overtly taught, is nevertheless the incipient ingredient lurking in the minds of many believers. The belief that the Law is an aid to sanctification is a lie. The law dis-empowers and condemns, but never sanctifies. David Gay has written a unique book exposing this Reformed spell that has been cast over the Church. As he writes 'The same grace that saves... also sanctifies'. Grace wins the love of the heart in a way that the law never could. 'The Law of Christ' is 'a real law. Love is its goal, love is its motive'. My only real problem with David's wonderful book is his continued allegiance to the Augustine-Calvin Christologically deficient teaching on election. I have already contacted him over this, to which he graciously replied. I hope he sniffs this one out in the same way as he has exposed the lie concerning the believer and the law. Nevertheless, this is an outstanding piece of writing. Thank you David.

Amazon customer

*******Demolishes Reformed view of sanctification by law**

November 12, 2013

Best and most thorough book on New Covenant Theology I have ever seen. Completely demolishes the erroneous Reformed doctrine of sanctification by law.

Tom Knotts

*******The best book I have ever read next to Bible on the law and grace** April 30, 2014

This book was recommended to me by my former pastor and I have to say it is the best book I have read on the law and grace. Gay takes the time to break each and every passage down dealing with the subject but the beauty is that he goes beyond that and ties in things I had never considered. A great book.

James M.Kray 'Lewis Fan' reviewed *Christ is All: No Sanctification by the Law*

*******So good, I read it 2 times in a row** June 27, 2014

A real challenge to the typical 'use the Law for your sanctification' view held in most Reformed circles. Very readable style too. I wonder how many are trapped in their doctrinal statements and/or confessions. Have you ever noticed that Paul never says 'Walk in the Law'? and this by an ex-Pharisee! I bought the Kindle AND the paperback.

James M.Kray 'Lewis Fan'

*******A Very Good Presentation on Law/Gospel** August 13, 2014

This book will get you thinking hard about the Law/Gospel relationship. If you are Reformed or think that the Law of Moses can be broken down into civil, ceremonial and moral, think again. Even non-Reformed have adopted this 3 way division. So good, I had to read it two times in a row.

Audio book (may be downloaded from sermonaudio.com)

JamesC. (Fallbrook, CA)

Great Audio Book! August 29, 2014

Thank you for providing this free audio book. I am benefiting greatly from the material in it. It is eye-opening – as radical as the biblical doctrine of election. I am seeing things that I once glossed over. Coming out of Way of the Master evangelism and Reformed thinking, the information in this book is causing a welcomed paradigm shift for me.

J. Duncan

*******Great!** October 7, 2014

I am becoming very impressed with Gay's writing. He uses and quotes a wide array of sources (demonstrating he is well versed with differing viewpoints), and most importantly, allows the Bible to guide his thinking. This book is largely a refutation of Covenant Theology, though Gay is not a dispensationalist (see last chapter). He mentions that, while he doesn't prefer to be labelled, many have said he would fit under 'New-Covenant Theology' in his biblical theology. I would agree. I was especially impressed by his demonstration of the new covenant along with it's 'law' being the 'Law of Christ.' Many strong points are made demonstrating this is not simply the 'moral law' such as many covenant theologians (including 1689 Baptist federalists) hold. However, the bulk of the book was geared towards proving the subtitle of the book, that sanctification does not come through the law, as taught by Calvin and many of the reformers. But, in case that last sentence was misleading, Gay believes (though I can't remember if it was explicitly stated) in the doctrines of grace (5 points of 'Calvinism'), although this doesn't have a major purpose in the book. A tremendous read for just \$1. I am looking forward to checking out more of his books, as most centre around this topic.

James

*******Paradigm-Shifting book!** October 14, 2014

I listened to the audio book on sermonaudio. This book really threw me for a loop since I was heavy into the Way of the Master 'Have you kept the 10 commandments?' Evangelism. It was so revolutionary to my thinking that I was left questioning what I really believed. The information helped tear my focus from the Law onto where it should be – Christ. The author does an excellent job of backing up his claims from Scripture. Through the author, the Spirit revealed to me things that were plain as day. I highly recommend this book.