

NEW-COVENANT ARTICLES
VOLUME SIX

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Baptist Sacramentalism: A Warning to Baptists.

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Christ is All: No Sanctification by the Law.

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The Pastor: Does He Exist?

The Priesthood of All Believers: Slogan or Substance?

New-Covenant Articles

Volume Six

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

Hebrews 8:6,13

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BRACHUS 2015
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Scripture quotations come from a variety of versions

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Note to the Reader

This is the sixth volume in my collected articles on the new covenant. Although such pieces will continue to be posted under the eDocs link on David H J Gay Ministry (sermonaudio.com), and on christmycovenant.com, once again I not only want to set my work in a more permanent form for those who have already discovered it, but I hope to reach a new audience. The fact is, there is a growing body of believers who, having had more than enough of the bondage and fear produced by the law teachers and their clever tricks with Scripture, are displaying a voracious appetite for the liberating gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. I am thinking of them. If they find any value in these articles, they might like to explore my full-length books, which are available on Amazon and Kindle. I have also opened a You Tube site with the same heading as the one on [sermonaudio](http://sermonaudio.com).

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

New-Covenant Theology: A Summary

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

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

God has one eternal plan centred in Jesus Christ.

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

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

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

Believers use the law of Moses as a paradigm, as part of ‘all Scripture’, but not as a list of detailed rules.

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

There is one body of the redeemed, the eschatological Israel, ‘the Israel of God’ (Gal. 6:16), comprising the redeemed from the time of Adam to Pentecost, and redeemed Jews and Gentiles from that time until the end of the age.

‘New-Covenant Theology Is Dangerous’

Recently, two believers that I know were having a conversation.

A: ‘How are you getting on in your church?’

B: ‘We are looking for a new pastor’.

A: ‘How are you going about it?’

B: ‘We asked the ****¹ and they gave us a list of ** names of men seeking a pastorate. Within half an hour we had whittled this down to *. But one of these is hopeless’.

A: ‘Why’s that?’

B: ‘He believes in new-covenant theology’.

A: ‘Why would that disqualify him?’

B: ‘We have several members who attend on Sunday morning only. So, if we get a man who teaches that believers are not obliged to keep the sabbath, this will inevitably encourage the uncommitted to be even less committed. It will justify their absence from meetings. What is more, it might well make some of the committed start to become lax. We need a man who will preach in such a way that will enforce commitment, not weaken it. That’s why new-covenant theology is dangerous. It will weaken the church further, weaken the spirituality of its members’.

I was not present at the conversation, but what I have just set out is pretty much that which transpired. It certainly is the gist of it. I can vouch for the utter integrity of A, who told me of it. Indeed, both men are weighty, serious, experienced, well-read and thoughtful believers. B is a Reformed Baptist, and an officer of the church in question.

¹ The Association to which this church belongs.

‘New-Covenant Theology Is Dangerous’

According to B, new-covenant theology is dangerous. Why? Since new-covenant theology teaches that Christ has fulfilled the law, rendered the old covenant obsolete, removing the old-covenant shadows because he is the reality and substance of those shadows, then it can do nothing but harm. We want a man who teaches the law, especially sabbath observance.

New-covenant theology is dangerous? It certainly is! *That is, if you accept B’s presuppositions.*

What presuppositions?

Attendance at meetings, and conformity to rule over external matters, are sure signs of spirituality. If you believe that, then the best way to get spirituality is to get conformity. And the way to get conformity is to preach rule, and enforce it. By preaching rule, you get conformity. And conforming Christians are spiritual Christians. Therefore churches need men who will preach rule. And that is just what a new-covenant man will *not* do! Hence, new-covenant theology is dangerous. *If, I say again, you agree with B’s suppositions.*

I want to make a few comments on that conversation and the point at issue. Certain things, however, I will not say anything about at this time. For instance, I will say nothing about the idea of ‘your’ church. I will say nothing about ‘looking for a pastor’. I will say nothing about sabbath observance and the Lord’s day. I will say nothing about attendance at church meetings. It is not that these issues are unimportant, but they are not what I have in mind at this time. If you wish to see what I think about such matters, you may find my views in my works.²

So what *is* bothering me? Bothering me so much that I take the time to sit down at my PC to write? What is so pressing, so important?

Let me spell out the issues that bother me:

² In particular, *Pastor; The Priesthood; Sabbath Questions*. As for the Lord’s day, I hope to publish on that.

‘New-Covenant Theology Is Dangerous’

I am disturbed by the emphasis on institutional religion. Spirituality, apparently, is measured in terms of the institutional. This, however, is quite foreign to the new covenant.

Again, the notion seems to be: ‘If we have a problem, leave it to the pastor to sort out, especially by his preaching’. How about the *ekklesia* sorting it out *as a body*? How about the elders doing it now? How about private conversation? Why wait for ‘the new pastor’? Don’t backsliding believers need help now?

Getting closer to the heart of what I want to say, it looks as though conformity is what counts for many believers. As long as people conform, conform to prescribed patterns, then all is well. But conformity is not the same as commitment, consecration, or transformation. And transformation is what the apostles demand of believers. Moreover, transformation is what is guaranteed by the new covenant, and only by the new covenant. One thing that rule – even the law of God itself – cannot do is to transform sinners into saints. Nor can it sanctify believers.

What is more, I get the distinct impression that externals count above all. If the people are ‘in church’, at the meeting, all is well.³ But what about the heart? And it is the heart which the apostolic writers are concerned with. And the heart is precisely that which new-covenant theology is concerned with.

Do I need to set out the scriptural justification for the points I am making? Do the apostles not open their letters with solid gospel instruction for the mind? And when they have set out the truth, do the apostles not go on to press their doctrine into the heart and will of the believer? Following which, do the apostles not go on to appeal to the truth to move the heart, so that the believer will live a life of godliness, a life of growing Christ-likeness? Do the apostles not always stress God’s grace in Christ, the believer’s calling, and the believer’s position in Christ, as motives for godliness – and never conformity to rule? Do the apostles not lay

³ I know of a case where a woman confessed to her pastor that she thought she was backsliding. He reassured her that she was not – because, he said, you are still coming to the meetings.

emphasis upon the power of the Spirit, the one who works in the heart of the believer, moving him to live a life of consecration to the glory of God? Do they not stress the Spirit's working that desire in the heart of the believer, and working it out in the life? I assert that these things are written large across the apostolic letters.⁴ And I further assert that these things are integral to new-covenant theology. And to nothing else! Certainly not to a regime of law!

For one thing which is signally absent in the apostolic letters is this: you will look in vain for apostolic harangues for external conformity to rules!

The upshot? I am pleased to have been told of this conversation. I needed to hear it. And I will tell you why. I have been naïve. I had hoped serious-minded believers would examine new-covenant theology by reading such passages as Romans 6:1 – 8:4; 2 Corinthians 3:6 – 4:6; Galatians; Ephesians 2:1-22; Philippians 3:2-16; Colossians 2:9-23, and reading them in more than one version, weighing them carefully, and doing so without filtering them by their preferred Confession. But no! This is not what counts, it seems. I had thought serious enquirers into new-covenant theology would compare the prophets, Isaiah 42:6; 49:8; 54:13; Jeremiah 31:31-34; and Ezekiel 36:24-32, with John 6:44-45; Hebrews 7:11 – 10:18; 1 Peter 1:8-12. But no! I had thought that such enquirers would compare Matthew 5:17-20 with Romans 8:1-4; 10:4. And so on. But no! And that is why I am glad to have been told of this conversation. My eyes have been opened.

The truth is, this conversation has switched a light on for me, and let the cat out of the bag at the same time. It has underlined, once again, the contrast between new-covenant theology – which is biblical – and recipe preaching, rule preaching, which seeks to produce outward conformity. It has, I say, let the cat out of the bag as far as the latter is concerned. And the latter is, it seems, what many earnest believers think is right.

⁴ If you doubt it, see my works for countless – countless – examples of it.

'New-Covenant Theology Is Dangerous'

Consequently, my advice – for what it's worth – for those who want to produce conformity in themselves and their fellow-members: Get a law man as quick as you can. Encourage him to preach the rules and recipes that you agree with. Insist on conformity. And you will be home and dry.

But if you want a willing people, a people moved by the Spirit from the heart to Christ-likeness, then I strongly advise you to get a grip on the biblical teaching of the new covenant. Rather, let that teaching get a grip of your mind, then your heart and thence your life. And do all you can to encourage this in your fellow-believers. The fact is, it is only the new covenant that can produce the spirituality that true believers need.

But this is not my main reason for advocating new-covenant theology. For, above all else, new-covenant theology is scriptural. If you have any doubt about it, take those scriptures I listed, read them out loud in more than one version, and weigh them carefully. Let the Spirit speak to you and show you what is being said in those passages. And once you have been convinced of the doctrine written plainly in those scriptures, go on to read the rest of the apostolic letters in light of that doctrine – and see how assurance and godliness are produced, not by law, rule and regulation, but by Christ, using the Spirit, working within the believer, Christ himself being formed within the believer, and all this showing itself in the believer's life of growing Christ-likeness. This is what is needed to be preached. We must have preachers who understand such matters, and who unreservedly preach to saints on that basis. Far from new-covenant theology being dangerous, it is the apostolic way.

A Must-See Debate

Introduction

I refer to the recently published YouTube video: ‘The Theonomy Debate: Joel McDurmon vs. Jordan Hall’.¹ Joel McDurmon is an advocate of theonomy (reconstructionism), while Jordan Hall is an advocate of covenant theology. The motion before the two men is: ‘Mosaic Civil Law is Obligatory for Civil Governments Today’, proposed by McDurmon, opposed by Hall.

In my opinion, this debate is essential viewing for all who are weighing the pros and cons of new-covenant theology. No! It’s not a misprint. The debate between these two theological titans is the best advert I know for new-covenant theology. And that’s why I say it’s essential viewing – a must-see – for anyone exploring the much-disputed subject of the believer and the law. A great deal can be gleaned from it. I do not say that in order to commend the substance of the debate. Far from it! But, rather like Solomon learning from his observation of the confusion and disorder on the lazy man’s farm (Prov. 24:30-34), I see this debate as a valuable eye-opener into the pitfalls of both theonomy and covenant theology. On the positive side, I hope it will do much in the way of encouraging believers to take new-covenant theology seriously.

The debate

Check it out, and you will see that both men tell us that Scripture is the supreme authority, but... having duly touched their caps at Scripture, what do they do? They wrangle and wrangle again (and again) over what the Confessions (the Westminster and the 1689 or Second London) did or did not say. They wrangle over what the Puritans did or did not say. They wrangle over what John Calvin had for breakfast, what William Perkins had for lunch, what Samuel Rutherford had for tea and what the men of the

¹ Late February 2015 on youtube.com.

Massachusetts Bay Colony had for supper. They wrangle over not only what these divines said and wrote, but what they had in mind when they said and wrote as they did. Moreover, McDurmon and Hall get their teeth into the philosophy of what is known as ‘general equity’.² And so on.³

Check it out!

Both men make massive assumptions and proceed to argue on that basis. For instance, I heard no definition of the term ‘law’. But what *does* Scripture mean by ‘law’? Then again, both men assume that they can divide the Mosaic law into two (or three) bits and throw one (or two) away. They then proceed to argue over a non-scriptural concept. Yet the ‘proof’ they offer for this massive construct and imposition on Scripture amounts to nothing more than inference. Not Scripture; inference. But just

² Let a covenant theologian explain: ‘Two aspects of generality in equity are notable in the Reformed tradition before and at the time of the Westminster Assembly. Neither of these may be excluded from the phrase which appears in the Confession. First, and perhaps less significantly, there is the concept that the political constitution of a particular society carries an element common to all constitutions, and yet expresses equity in the special circumstances of that people, with laws and penal sanctions different from those of other nations; the common goal of natural equity is realised in particular polities which differ from one another’ (Sherman Isbell: ‘The Divine Law of Political Israel Expired: General Equity’, downloaded from westminsterconfession.org). All clear?

³ And when they do tackle Scripture, instead of following what, I suspect, most people would accept as the golden rule – namely, go first for the big picture, then the major passages, and only after that tackle the lesser, more problematic, texts – McDurmon, for instance, started with 1 Tim. 1:3-11. I am not saying a word against the use of the passage – indeed, see my video on it (youtube.com) and my ‘The Unlawful Use of the Law’ (the eDocs link on David H J Gay Ministry, sermonaudio.com) – but nobody could possibly regard this as THE place to start. It reminds me of people worrying about the icing (frosting) when they have not even assembled the ingredients for the cake, and have no oven in which to bake it.

because men associate a claim with Scripture, it does not mean that they have actually argued their case from Scripture.⁴

Check it out!

Both men, without scriptural warrant – indeed, contrary to Scripture – think their cherished bit (or united bits) of the law rules the roost from Genesis to Revelation.

Check it out!

Both men, without scriptural warrant – indeed, contrary to Scripture – think their cherished bit (or united bits) of the law perpetually binds all men to obligatory obedience.

Check it out!

Reflecting on all this, I am reminded of nothing more than watching two men as they argue over the colour of the tiles they want to stick on the wall of the bathroom – when they haven’t built the house, they haven’t laid the foundation, and they haven’t even got planning permission! Perhaps a better comparison would be two rabbis arguing whether national governments should enforce kosher laws on their citizens, complete with attendant and appropriate punishments for all transgressors. This is no idle illustration. For ‘kosher laws’ read ‘sabbath observance’.⁵

And that’s why I say that this debate should be compulsory viewing for all who want to consider new-covenant theology. Let me explain. Working on the principle that nothing more clearly shows the crookedness of a stick than simply to lay down a straight stick alongside, I will set out some scriptural extracts on these contested points, restricting my comments as much as possible, in order to leave Scripture to make its own case. Those

⁴ If I may get a bit technical: eisegesis is not the same as exegesis; that is, imposing an idea on Scripture, or associating it with Scripture, is not the same as letting Scripture state its case, finding the idea in Scripture. Exegesis literally means ‘leading out of’: a conclusion flows from the text, out of the text. Eisegesis literally means ‘leading into’: a conclusion is put into the text, and then read back out.

⁵ See my *Sabbath Questions*.

who want to follow my full arguments behind all this, may find them in my works.⁶

Let us start at the beginning and clear the decks so that we know what we are talking about.

What is the law?

How does the Bible speak of ‘the law’?⁷

The two main words are *torah* (instruction)⁸ in the Old Testament, and *nomos* in the New. Sometimes ‘the law’ refers to the entire Scriptures;⁹ sometimes the Old Testament;¹⁰ sometimes the Pentateuch,¹¹ or Moses’ teaching;¹² sometimes the ten commandments (but whether just the ten commandments is open to question);¹³ sometimes a system or universal principle;¹⁴

⁶ My main title – but not the only title – is *Christ is All: No Sanctification by the Law*. My books and kindles may be found on my page (David H J Gay) on Amazon and Kindle. My sermons, audio books and articles may be found under David H J Gay Ministry on sermonaudio.com, including the eDocs link. My videos, ‘New-Covenant Theology Made Simple’, may be found on my page (David H J Gay Ministry) on youtube.com. My articles are also posted on christmycovenant.com.

⁷ See my ‘What Is The Law’ (*New-Covenant Articles: Volume Four*).

⁸ The meaning of *torah* is ‘teaching’, ‘doctrine’, or ‘instruction’; the commonly accepted ‘law’ gives a wrong impression. We should, perhaps, think in terms of ‘custom, theory, guidance or system’ (see Wikipedia).

⁹ Ps. 19:7, for instance.

¹⁰ John 10:34 quoting Ps. 82:6; John 12:34 alluding to Dan. 7:14; John 15:25 quoting Ps. 35:19 and 69:4; 1 Cor. 14:21 quoting Isa. 28:11-12, for instance.

¹¹ John 1:45; Luke 16:16; 24:44; Gal. 4:21, for instance.

¹² Josh. 1:7-8; 2 Kings 14:6; John 5:46; 1 Cor. 9:9, for instance. 1 Cor. 9:9 is the only place where Paul used the phrase, ‘the law of Moses’, probably meaning the five books of Moses.

¹³ Rom. 7:7,14, for instance.

¹⁴ Rom. 7:21,23; 8:2a, for instance. ‘The law of faith’ (Rom. 3:27) clearly means the *principle* of faith. See my *Christ* pp214-218,481-483.

sometimes the Mosaic covenant;¹⁵ sometimes several of these concepts coalesce.¹⁶ In short, ‘the law’ in Scripture really amounts to the revelation of God to Israel, principally through Moses on Sinai, including (but far from being restricted to) the ten commandments engraved on the two stone tablets. And this is the overriding meaning we should attach to ‘the law’.¹⁷

The law is an indivisible unity

Actually this is a little difficult – trying to prove a negative. The fact is, Scripture *never* divides the law into bits. Scripture is more than ready to take commandments from all over the law – law, judgements, rules, commandments, statutes – and fit them – without distinction – into one descriptive envelope: the law of God. Time and again I have called for those who act against this principle, and advocate the triple (or double) division of the law, to give us the *scriptural* proof of it. It’s high time we saw this proof, since the construct plays such a vital role in the debate – not only the debate under consideration here, but the debate on the law in general. Scripture, I say again, never sorts the commands into categories. Never.

Take the end of Leviticus. After God had given Israel a whole host of laws, commands and rules on all sorts of matters, including idolatry, adultery, disrespect for parents, the weekly sabbath, harvest, resting the land every seven years, the year of

¹⁵ Deut. 5:1-3,5-22; 6:1; 9:9,11,15; 10:4-5,8, for instance. (I admit ‘the law’ does not appear in these verses – as a phrase – but they are clearly talking about it).

¹⁶ Matt. 11:13; 12:5; John 1:17; 12:34, for instance.

¹⁷ In saying this, I except biblical prophecies of the new covenant. The law of the new covenant, the law of Christ, contrary to covenant theologians, most definitely is *not* the law of Moses. Jer. 31:32 (Heb. 8:9) expressly states that the new covenant is not like the old covenant. Consequently, but this is not the only reason, the new law in the new covenant is not like the old law of the old covenant. It is, in fact, very different! As for which ‘law’ it is that fulfils such prophecies, see my *Christ* pp299-321,543-555; ‘The Prophets and the New Covenant’ (under the eDocs link on David H J Gay sermonaudio.com; christmycovenant.com).

jubilee with all its regulations for redemption, and so on, Moses recorded: ‘These are the statutes and rules and laws that the Lord made between himself and the people of Israel through Moses on Mount Sinai... These are the commandments that the Lord commanded Moses for the people of Israel on Mount Sinai’ (Lev. 26:46; 27:34). No dividing of the law into bits here!

Take Numbers 15. The stoning of the man for transgressing the law of the sabbath (Num. 15:32-36) is sandwiched between – on the one hand, the laws of sacrifice and offering for sin (Num. 15:1-31) – and on the other, the sewing of tassels on the corners of garments (Num. 15:37-40), this last to remind the Israelites to ‘remember all the commandments of the LORD and do them’ (Num. 15:39-40, NKJV). And the chapter concludes with words remarkably similar to the preface to the ten commandments (Num. 15:41; Ex. 20:2; Deut. 5:6). My point is that *it is impossible to detect any biblical difference in the designation of any of these laws*. Sacrifices, offerings, sabbath and tassels all – *all* – come under the one umbrella:

One statute... one law and one rule... All these commandments that the Lord has spoken to Moses, all that the Lord has commanded you by Moses, from the day that the Lord gave commandment... The rule... one law... The word of the Lord... his commandment... As the Lord commanded Moses... remember all the commandments of the Lord, to do them... So you shall remember and do all my commandments, and be holy to your God (Num. 15:15-16,22-23,29,31,36,39-40).

The law is one, one indivisible unity.¹⁸ That is, in Scripture it is. If only theologians would stick to Scripture on this point, much of the debate on the law would be over. Perhaps I should say it would be better informed. As for the debate in question, that would never even begin! Nobody in Scripture ever talks about ‘the civil law’ as distinct from ‘the moral law’ or ‘the ceremonial law’. Neither should we.¹⁹

¹⁸ I deliberately leave the tautology to drive home the fundamental point.

¹⁹ See my ‘The Law: Reformed Escape Routes’ (*New-Covenant Articles: Volume Two*).

The law was given to Israel, and to Israel only

As Moses declared:

And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them... You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you... See, I have taught you statutes and rules, as the Lord my God commanded me... Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say: 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people'. For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?... For ask now of the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether such a great thing as this has ever happened or was ever heard of... Did any people ever hear the voice of a god speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and still live? Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great deeds of terror, all of which the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? (Deut. 4:1-7,32-34).

The psalmist reminded Israel:

[The LORD] declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and rules to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know his rules (Ps. 147:19-20).

And the apostle was definite:

Gentiles... do not have the law... they do not have the law (Rom. 2:14).

What advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God (Rom. 3:1-2).

They are Israelites, and to them belong... the covenants, the giving of the law (Rom. 9:4).

Clearly, Israel had the law, while the Gentiles did not.²⁰ So much so, the apostle based his gospel-approach to the two groups on the fact:

To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law... that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law... that I might win those outside the law (1 Cor. 9:20-21).²¹

The law was given to Israel only.

The law was given to Israel as a special marker separating Israel from all other people

This is true of the law in general. In particular, the sabbath, an integral part of the law, being the fourth commandment, was given to Israel as a special marker or sign to distinguish and separate Israel from Gentiles:

And the Lord said to Moses: ‘You are to speak to the people of Israel and say: “Above all you shall keep my sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you. You shall keep the sabbath, because it is holy for you. Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death. Whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people... Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the Lord. Whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall be put to death. Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the sabbath, observing the sabbath throughout their generations, as a covenant forever. It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed”’ (Ex. 31:12-17).

I led them out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness. I gave them my statutes and made known to them my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live. Moreover, I gave them my sabbaths, as a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them... ‘I am the Lord your God; walk in my statutes, and be

²⁰ Proselytes, of course, had opted to go under the law.

²¹ See also Neh. 13:1-30; Ezek. 11:12.

careful to obey my rules, and keep my sabbaths holy that they may be a sign between me and you, that you may know that I am the Lord your God' (Ezek. 20:11-12,19-20).²²

As for the sabbath, so for the law – in its entirety. Israel had the law; Gentiles did not. And the law separated Israel from Gentiles.

In fact, the law not only separated Israel from all others; it was, to put it mildly, a bone of contention between Israel and Gentiles, a source of hostility between them, which hostility was only done away with by Christ – but not in bringing the Gentiles under the law, but, rather, by (see below) fulfilling the law, and therefore rendering it obsolete and abolishing it

As Paul put it when writing to the Ephesian believers:

Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called 'the uncircumcision' by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands – remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world... But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility (Eph. 2:11-16).

The law could not have been binding on all men from the time of Adam since it was given to Israel, and Israel alone, through Moses on Sinai

Listen to Paul. When speaking of the years 'from Adam to Moses', the apostle called it the time 'before the law was given'

²² See also Neh. 9:1-37, especially verses 13-14. See also my *Sabbath Questions*.

(Rom. 5:13-14). Clearly, the law was not in the world until Israel had reached Sinai after the exodus.

And even then, the law was not central or pivotal; rather, God gave it to Israel as an additional or supplementary measure

Let me take the previous section just a little further – as Paul himself did. Having spoken of the years ‘from Adam to Moses’, and calling it the time ‘before the law was given’ (Rom. 5:13-14), the apostle went on to say that it was at that time that ‘the law came in’ (Rom. 5:20); that is, at Sinai the law ‘was added’ or ‘entered’, ‘came in alongside’ God’s promises to Abraham. And, as such, it was an additional measure, a supplement to those promises:

Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring... It does not say: ‘And to offsprings’, referring to many, but referring to one: ‘And to your offspring’, who is Christ. This is what I mean: the law... came 430 years afterward... a covenant previously ratified by God... Why then the law? It was added... (Gal. 3:16-19).

And that takes us onto the next point.

The law came in, not only as an additional measure, but as a temporary measure, designed by God to last only until the coming of Christ

Let me extend the previous extract a little:

Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring... It does not say: ‘And to offsprings’, referring to many, but referring to one: ‘And to your offspring’, who is Christ. This is what I mean: the law... came 430 years afterward... a covenant previously ratified by God... Why then the law? It was added... until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made... (Gal. 3:16-19).

According to God's promise, Christ fulfilled the law, bringing it to its God-intended terminus or goal

As Christ himself announced in his Sermon on the Mount:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them.²³ For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished (Matt. 5:17-18).

And as Paul stated:

Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes (Rom. 10:4).²⁴

²³ *plēroō*, to make full, fill up, complete, accomplish, fulfil. The word cannot here mean 'establish'. By no stretch of the imagination can Christ's words of contrast: 'You have heard that it was said to those of old... But I say to you...' (Matt. 5:21-22,27-28,31-32,33-34,38-39,43-44), be construed as Christ *establishing* the Mosaic law. Nor was he correcting rabbinical glosses. Furthermore, Christ's 'do not swear at all', does not *establish* Moses' 'not [to] swear falsely' (Matt. 5:33-34); 'not to resist an evil person', does not *establish* 'an eye for an eye' (Matt. 5:38-39); nor does 'love your enemies' *establish* 'love your neighbour' (Matt. 5:43-44). In these instances, at least, Christ was not establishing the Mosaic law, but was specifying something quite different and far more penetrating. Nor will it do to say that Christ was establishing the law by explaining it, giving its intended meaning. Take the commands I have just quoted; 'not [to] swear *at all*' cannot be squeezed out of 'not [to] swear *falsely*'; 'not to resist an evil person', cannot be the full meaning of 'eye for an eye'; nor can 'love your *enemies*' be the intended meaning of 'love your *neighbour*'. As before, in these instances, Christ was not setting out the intended meaning of the Mosaic law, but was specifying something quite different, something new and far more penetrating. Christ was not *expounding* the Mosaic law. He was setting out his own law: 'And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes' (Matt. 7:28-29). In John 13 – 16, Christ repeatedly spoke of his commands – commands issued in his own name on his authority. In other words, we are talking about Christ's own law, the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2).

²⁴ I acknowledge that the apostle is speaking here, in particular, about justification, but we must constantly bear in mind the law's indivisible

Christ, having fulfilled the law, rendered it obsolete

As the writer to the Hebrews declared:

If perfection had been attainable through the levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron? For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law²⁵ as well... a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness (for the law made nothing perfect)... And it was not without an oath... This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant... Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. For he finds fault with them when he says: ‘Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt... For

unity. The principle applies right across the board. Moreover, we must also remember the eschatological ‘but now’ of all this, the ‘but now’ of the new covenant (John 15:22,24; Acts 17:30; Rom. 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). The is of such importance, I have repeatedly referred to it in many of my works. Christ brought the age of the law to its ‘end’, because he, in his person and his work, is its ‘goal’, that which the law was looking forward to.

²⁵ Literally ‘a change of law’. ‘Paul frequently used the word “law” without the definite article – a fact which many readers of the English New Testament may not be aware of, since the translators have often introduced the definite article to make the text read “the law”, instead of what Paul actually wrote; that is, “law”. But the lack of the article, contrary to how it might seem, is Paul’s way of stressing his concept of law, not the opposite’ (my *New-Covenant Articles: Volume Four* p177). The same applies to the writer of Hebrews here. Christ did not merely change or adjust the Mosaic law. He fulfilled it and, therefore, rendered it obsolete (Heb. 8:13). ‘The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ’ (John 1:17). See my ‘The Invisible “But” of John 1:17’ (*New-Covenant Articles: Volume One*).

this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days', declares the Lord: 'I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach, each one his neighbour and each one his brother, saying: "Know the Lord", for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more'. In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away... Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant... Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant (Heb. 7:11-12,18-22; 8:6-13; 9:15; 12:25).²⁶

As Paul put it, Christ brought the law – the old covenant of the letter, the covenant of the flesh, the covenant in stone – to an end, thus establishing the new covenant of the Spirit:

God... has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it. For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory (2 Cor. 3:5-11).²⁷

So much so, believers have died to the law in order to be united to Christ in marriage and so produce the fruit of godliness

Paul could say: 'Through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God' (Gal. 2:19). And this, of course, is true of all believers:

²⁶ See my 'The Two Covenants in Hebrews' (*New-Covenant Articles: Volume Two*).

²⁷ See my *Glorious*.

My brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code... The law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Rom. 7:4-6; 8:2-4).²⁸

As he had previously said: ‘Sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace’ (Rom. 6:14).

Such is the new-covenant position on these disputed points. At least it is mine. In other words, I put it forward as the scriptural position on these disputed points. I ask you, reader, to be a Berean (Acts 17:11) and verify it for yourself.

And that position is as plain as a pikestaff. Consequently, the very idea that there can be a debate on whether or not the Mosaic civil law is obligatory on all men today, that two theologians can engage with each other, and devote more than two hours to it, and spend much of their life in general arguing the pros and cons of the case, is so far removed from scriptural reality as to be laughable – *if it were not so serious!* Nobody in Scripture ever talked about ‘the Mosaic civil law’ as opposed to ‘the moral law’ or ‘the ceremonial law’. No Gentile in Scripture was ever under the Mosaic law. No believer is under the Mosaic law – he has died to it in his marriage to Christ. If the early believers could come back and discover that believers were seriously debating such a motion as this, as whether or not the civil law of Moses

²⁸ See my videos: ‘The Believer’s Marriage’ and ‘Romans 7:4’. See also my ‘Who’s Your Husband’ (eDocs link on David H J Gay Ministry, sermonaudio.com).

binds all governments and peoples today, they would be dumbfounded.

So should we! For a start, we have Christ's dictum to let Caesar look after Caesar's business (Mark 12:17).²⁹ And as to the question of the believer and the Mosaic law, Paul, I am sure, would speak with a clarion voice. I have no doubt as to what he would say to the theonomists and covenant theologians, nor the tone he would adopt. Listen to him as he argues with the Galatians. Do not be tempted to dismiss the point because of the mention of 'circumcision' and 'justification'.³⁰ Remember the earlier note regarding the indivisible unity of the law. Indeed, that very principle undergirds the apostle's argument here:

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law... In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love. You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion is not from him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is. But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offence of the cross has been removed. I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves! For you were called to freedom, brothers (Gal. 5:1-13).

²⁹ Where did any apostle try to influence government policy, let alone urge politicians to enforce 'the Mosaic civil law'? Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Tim. 2:13; 1 Pet. 2:13-25 do not warrant the notion. I would argue (from 1 Cor. 5:12) that Paul would dismiss the very idea, retorting: 'It's none of my business. My business is to preach the gospel – Christ, him crucified and Lord (1 Cor. 2:2; 9:16; 2 Cor. 4:5). As Jesus told us: "Leave the dead to bury their own dead" (Matt. 8:22)'.

³⁰ As I say, I admit that in these verses, Paul is dealing particularly with justification. But this is a minor aspect of his overall argument throughout the letter. Which is? There is no sanctification by the law. See my *Christ* pp116-157,412-447.

A Must-See Debate

Can there be any doubt as to what the apostle would say about this current debate, and what he would say to those who engage in it?

All Men Under Law

Every man who has ever lived, without exception, has been under law. Every man now living is under law. Every man to be born will be born under law. Let me prove it.

Adam before he fell, was under law

God placed Adam under law:

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying: ‘You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die’ (Gen. 2:15-17).

Eve, in her first response to the serpent, admitted:

The woman said to the serpent: ‘We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said: “You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die”’ (Gen. 3:2-3).

And God, in addressing Adam in his judgement, was clear:

Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you: ‘You shall not eat of it’, cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return (Gen. 3:17-19).

Paul, writing to the Romans, declared:

Death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam (Rom. 5:14).
Death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam (NIV).

The apostle used the word *parabasis*, ‘transgression’, ‘the breach of a definite, promulgated, ratified law’, used elsewhere of the breach of the law of Moses (Rom. 4:15; Heb. 2:2; 9:15).

It is clear, therefore, that Adam, before he fell, was under law. It was not a written law, but it was a law.

All men, since the fall, have been under law

In addition to the evidence of nature, which he has given to every man, and for which he holds every man accountable (Ps. 19:1-6; 50:6; Acts 14:17; 17:24-29; Rom. 1:18-20,28,32; 10:18), God has expressly written a law within every man:

Gentiles, who do not have the law [of Moses], by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law [of Moses]. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus (Rom. 2:14-16).

This law, like the first, is not written in an outward sense. Nevertheless, it is a real law, and all men are held accountable to God for breaking it (Rom. 1:18-32; 2:14-16). All men ‘know God’s righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die’ (Rom. 1:32). ‘Sin indeed was in the world before the law [of Moses] was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law’ (Rom. 5:13), for: ‘Where there is no law there is no transgression’ (Rom. 4:15). As Paul stated, literally: ‘Through law [is] knowledge of sin’ (Rom. 3:20).¹ So there must have been a ‘law’ before the Mosaic law, a law under which all men were accountable and died as sinners, breakers of that law (see also Rom. 7:21-25; 8:2).

¹ What is said of the killing law in Rom. 3:20; 4:15; 5:13; 7:21-25; 8:2, of course, was especially true for Israel under the Mosaic law. But it also applies as a general principle for all men. All men are sinners both in Adam and in actual practice. All men are under law! Similarly, Rom. 7:7 literally reads: ‘Sin I knew not unless by law’. Yes, Paul was referring to the Mosaic law, the tenth commandment, but, as before, the principle is general.

Israel was given the law of Moses

Israel and Israel only, was given the law of God through Moses at Sinai:

And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land that the Lord, the God of your fathers, is giving you. You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you... See, I have taught you statutes and rules, as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say: 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people'. For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?... The Lord spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice. And he declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, that is, the ten commandments, and he wrote them on two tablets of stone. And the Lord commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and rules, that you might do them in the land that you are going over to possess (Deut. 4:1-2,5-8,12-14).

Moses commanded [Israel] a law, as a possession for the assembly of Jacob (Deut. 33:4).

[God] declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and rules to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know his rules (Ps. 147:19-20).

What advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God (Rom. 3:1-2).

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

Clearly, Israel had a law, the law of God through Moses, this law being written on stone (Ex. 24:12; 31:18; 32:15-16; 2 Cor. 3:3,7

and in the book of the law (Deut. 17:18; 28:58,61; 29:21; 30:10; 31:24-26; Josh. 1:8; 8:31; 23:6; 23:6; 24:26; *etc.*).

Christ was under law

We have the apostle's general statement:

When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law (Gal. 4:4-5).

Specifically:

At the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. And when the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord...) and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord... Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon... and he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law (Luke 2:21-27).

Jesus could say:

This charge [commandment] I have received from my Father (John 10:18).

I do as the Father has commanded me (John 14:31).

I have kept my Father's commandments (John 15:10).

The inspired writer gave us a commentary on all this:

When Christ came into the world, he said: 'Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said: "Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book"... "Behold, I have come to do your will"... And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Heb. 10:5-10).

And we read of Jesus' obedience:

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

Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered (Heb. 5:8).

‘Obedience’ speaks of ‘law’. Christ was under law.

The law to all men in the gospel offer

The gospel offer contains a law, a command, to be given to all men. Christ has commanded his disciples:

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

Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:15-16).

Forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in [Christ’s] name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things (Luke 24:47-48).

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8).

And in that gospel offer, there is a command to all men:

God... now... commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed (Acts 17:30-31).

The apostles showed the way:

Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out (Acts 3:19).

Your heart is not right before God. Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are

in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity (Acts 8:21-23).

‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ And they said: ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household’ (Acts 16:30-31).

I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:20-21).

I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance (Acts 26:19-20).

The believer is under law

The believer, though he has died to the law (the rudimentary law in his conscience and/or the Mosaic law) (Rom. 6:14-15; 7:4-6; 1 Cor. 9:20; Gal. 2:19), is under the law of Christ:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another (John 13:34-35).

If you love me, you will keep my commandments... Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him... If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me (John 14:15,21-24).

If you abide in me, and my words abide in you... If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love... This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you... These things I command you, so that you will love one another (John 15:7,10,12,17).

So the apostles are clear; the believer has been set free from the law of sin and death:

All Men Under Law

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

But he is under law to Christ:

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

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2).

The one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing... So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty (Jas. 1:25; 2:12).

And while this law of Christ is not a written code like the Mosaic law (Rom. 7:4-6; 2 Cor. 3:6-11; 1 Tim. 1:8-11), but is the inward working of the Spirit (Rom. 8:1-4) calibrated by the entire word of God (John 17:17; Rom. 15:4; 2 Tim. 3:16), nevertheless it is a real, objective, law (1 Tim. 1:5).

Thus all men have been, and all men will be, under law. All men are under the law of death to condemnation or under the law to Christ by his Spirit and thus to everlasting salvation.

Which law are you under?

Are Gospel Invitations to All?

The issue

Is it possible – is it right – for a preacher¹ to invite all sinners to come to Christ, and to do so without preparing them for the gospel, for Christ? Or does the preacher have to prepare sinners by preaching the law to them before he invites them to come to the Saviour? Do sinners have to undergo certain experiences before they can feel they are invited to trust Christ, or have any warrant to do so?

Many believers think the answer to such questions amounts to: ‘Yes! We must not invite sinners, *as sinners*, sinners as they are by nature, to trust Christ. First, we must prepare them, fit them, for the gospel, so as to get them ready to be invited. Sinners have no warrant to think that gospel invitations apply to them until they are so prepared’. This answer, or one very much like it, takes one of two forms.

1. It is given by those who hold to John Calvin’s first use of the law; namely, that the law prepares sinners for Christ. Preparationists think a preacher ought to begin, not with the gospel, but with the law. By preaching the law, the sinner will be prepared or made fit for the gospel invitation, fit for faith and fit for Christ. If many covenant theologians do not go this far, they do think that unless preachers start with the law, the gospel will have little or no meaning for sinners.²

¹ When I say ‘preacher’, I do not limit this to those who are engaged in what is commonly known as ‘pulpit work’. Every believer is a ‘preacher’ of Christ. See my *The Priesthood*.

² While I acknowledge that many covenant theologians are free offer (see below) preachers, I still say that their system inevitably turns them into incipient offenders in the way I am criticising – or else, at the very least, exposes them to the danger of it. Of course, I know that many of them act inconsistently with their system and standard works on the subject, but I am convinced that my observation is fair. I know they will say that they do not insist on a law work before sinners can feel warranted to trust Christ, but the evidence is against them. Many

Are Gospel Invitations to All?

2. It is given by hyper-Calvinists³ who say that only sensible⁴ sinners are to be invited to Christ, and only sensible sinners have warrant to trust Christ.

I categorically deny both claims. Both are utterly wrong, utterly unscriptural. And both cause immense damage to the preaching of the gospel and to sinners – to say nothing of believers.⁵ So important do I regard this issue, although I have tackled it repeatedly in my works,⁶ I am determined to raise it yet again in this article. To this end, I have edited some passages from my *The Gospel Offer is Free*.⁷ In that book, while I was mainly dealing

unbelievers have gone through years of struggle and torment in this ‘slough of despond’, and the legacy has stayed with them after believing. Men such as Richard Baxter and Jonathan Edwards spoke feelingly about their bondage under the system. Of my works, see in particular *Assurance*. See also my articles on David H J Gay Ministry on sermonaudio.com, under the eDocs link, and on christmycovenant.com.

³ By a ‘hyper-Calvinist’, I mean one who does not hold with the free offer, who does not hold with duty faith. The free offer is the invitation to all sinners to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, promising them salvation if they do, even though Christ’s atonement was neither intended for all, nor accomplished for all. Duty faith is the duty, the obligation, the responsibility, of all sinners to trust Christ. The gospel preacher must command all sinners to believe. Please note, it is not the duty of an unconverted sinner to believe that Christ died for him in particular; his duty is to trust Christ. In any case, the sinner cannot know the former until he has done the latter; and even if he could, he would be exercising historical faith, accepting a fact, when what is required is saving faith, reliance upon Christ.

⁴ Sensible sinners are the regenerate who, conscious of their sin and need of salvation, repent, and desire Christ. They are, therefore, demonstrating that they must be elect. To avoid cluttering the text, I have not put ‘sensible’ in quotes. The context makes it clear how I am using the adjective. The same goes for ‘fit’ and ‘prepared’.

⁵ See earlier note.

⁶ Where I have fully documented these claims. In addition to the previous note on this, see my books and kindles under David H J Gay on Amazon; also, my videos, ‘New-Covenant Theology Made Simple’, on youtube.com, with their audio content on sermonaudio.com.

⁷ *Offer* pp153-154,163-184.

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with hyper-Calvinists,⁸ and while many of the writers (though not all) I quoted were talking about hyper-Calvinism, even so their words have relevance to preparationists also.

So then, the question is this: Are gospel invitations⁹ universal – that is, indiscriminate to *all* sinners? or are they restricted to *prepared* or *sensible* sinners? In one way another, the latter, say both the preparationist and the hyper-Calvinist. Take the hyper-Calvinist, George M. Ella. He was unequivocal: ‘Does the Bible invite all men indiscriminately and everywhere to believe...? No, says the Bible’.¹⁰

Ella is not alone in this, of course:

We believe that the invitations of the gospel... are intended¹¹ only for those who have been made by the blessed Spirit to feel their lost state as sinners and their need of Christ as their Saviour, and to repent of and forsake their sins... We reject the doctrine that men in a state of nature should be exhorted to believe in or turn to God... While we believe that the gospel is to be preached or proclaimed to all the world, as in Mark 16:15, we deny offers of grace; that is to say, that the gospel is to be offered indiscriminately to all... Therefore... [it is wrong] for ministers in the present day to address unconverted persons, or indiscriminately all in a mixed congregation, calling upon them savingly to repent, believe, and receive Christ...¹²

Is this right?

⁸ The subtitle says it all: *A reply to George Ella's rejection of the gospel offer*.

⁹ What follows applies not only to gospel ‘invitations’, but also to ‘commands’ and ‘exhortations’. ‘Come’, for example, can be an invitation, a command or an exhortation.

¹⁰ Ella pp5,61. Even though, as Ella said, God commands all to repent (Ella pp58,71).

¹¹ God *intends* the salvation only of the elect, yes, but the question is whether the *invitation* should be to all, or to the sensible elect only. As is clear, these Articles restrict the invitation to the latter.

¹² Articles 24,26,29,33 of Articles of Faith of the Gospel Standard Aid and Poor Relief Societies, The Gospel Standard Societies, Harpenden. These same Articles also ‘deny duty faith and duty repentance – these terms signifying that it is every man’s duty spiritually and savingly to repent and believe’.

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Certainly not! Some gospel invitations or commands are obviously unlimited;¹³ Isaiah 45:22 and Acts 17:30, for example. This, of itself, puts the issue beyond doubt. God commands all sinners to look to him and be saved; he commands all sinners to repent, not just sensible sinners.¹⁴

Besides, if the gospel invitation is to be issued only to those who are sensible, then every invited sinner will come – since the sensible, by definition, are elect. But we know that God in the gospel invites many sinners who refuse his invitations, and never do come (Prov. 1:24-33; Isa. 65:2; Luke 14:17-24; Rom. 10:21).¹⁵

¹³ C.H.Spurgeon repeatedly dealt with the issue: ‘Don’t believe that the invitations of the gospel are given only to characters; they are, some of them, unlimited invitations’ (C.H.Spurgeon: *The New Park Street Pulpit... 1860*, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1964, Vol.6 p107).

¹⁴ Indeed, this command is superfluous for sensible sinners – who are, by definition, repentant.

¹⁵ Gill vainly tried to limit this call (in Proverbs) ‘to the natural duties of religion, and to an attendance on the means of grace’, and (in Luke) to ‘outward ordinances’, ‘to the house of God, and church of Christ; to come and hear the word... and attend the word and worship of God’, but it will not do. As he said on Isa. 65:2, ‘Israel... believed not in Christ, obeyed not his gospel’; on Luke 14:17, ‘John the Baptist... exhorted the people to believe in Christ... [and] Christ himself [was]... sent... to call sinners to repentance... [and] the apostles... were... sent... to preach the gospel’; and on Rom. 10:21, it speaks of ‘the ministry of the prophets... the preaching of John the Baptist, of Christ, and his apostles’. Quite! Preaching the gospel does not mean calling sinners to attend a place of worship! As Gill said on Matt. 11:28: ‘Christ... kindly invites and encourages souls to come unto him... by which is meant, not a local coming, or a coming to hear him preach; for so his hearers... were come already... nor is it a bare coming under the ordinances of Christ... but it is to be understood of believing in Christ, the going of the soul to him, in the exercise of grace on him, of desire after him, love to him, faith and hope in him: believing in Christ, and coming to him, are terms synonymous (John 6:35)’ (John Gill: *Gill’s Commentary*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1980, Vol.3 pp430,1035; Vol.5 pp101,507-508; Vol.6 p93).

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This means, therefore, that gospel invitations cannot be restricted to sensible sinners.¹⁶

But what of invitations such as Isaiah 55:1-7 and Matthew 11:28? Are *they* universal? or are they given only to those who show the characteristics (and these spiritual) stated in the invitations? If the latter, and this is said to govern all gospel invitations, then this is where hyper-Calvinism joins forces with preparationism; that is, gospel commands or invitations are given only to those who have had certain experiences which qualify

¹⁶ Gill, commenting on the command 'to bring in... the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind' (Luke 14:21), said 'the poor' are 'such as have no spiritual food to eat... nor any spiritual clothing, no righteousness... nor money to buy either... of which spiritual poverty some are sensible, and others are not'. As for 'the blind', Gill ruled out the possibility of their being sensible since they are 'blind... as to any saving knowledge of God in Christ; of Christ, and the way of righteousness, life, and salvation by him; of the plague of their own hearts, the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and the need of a Saviour; of the work of the Spirit of God upon their souls, and the necessity of it; and of the truths of the gospel, in a spiritual and experimental way. In short, under these characters are represented natural and unconverted men'. The gospel invitation is to such, but Gill, as above, tried to limit it to an invitation to attend preaching, to read the Bible, and so on, or a command 'to a natural faith' or 'natural repentance' (Gill: *Commentary* Vol.5 pp507-508; *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity; or, A System of Evangelical Truths, Deduced from the Sacred Scriptures*, W.Winterbotham, London, 1796, Vol.2 pp282-286). Spurgeon tackled this kind of evasion head-on: 'Certain persons have been obliged to admit that the apostles commanded, and exhorted, and besought men to believe, but they tell us that the kind of believing which the apostles bade men exercise was not a saving faith'. He called this 'an assertion so monstrous. Can we imagine for a moment apostles with burning zeal and ardour, inspired by the Spirit of God within them, going about the world exhorting men to exercise a faith which after all would not save them?... When our Lord bade his disciples go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature... the faith which was to be preached was evidently none other than a saving faith, and it is frivolous to say otherwise... It is, I repeat, a mere frivolity or worse, to say that the faith enjoined by the apostles was a mere human faith which does not save... That cause must be desperate which calls for such a defence' (Spurgeon: *Metropolitan* Vol.17 pp135-136).

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them to be so invited – hyper-Calvinism – and only those who are prepared by these various experiences are fit to come to Christ – preparationism. This opens a Pandora’s box, and starts the preacher on an impossible course of probing to see if the sinner really is sensible and qualified to be *invited* to come to Christ, and the sinner on what might well turn out to be an endless round of self-questioning as to whether or not he is sufficiently *prepared* to come to Christ. It puts the cart before the horse – an undertaking, not only futile, but the cause of much harm. C.H.Spurgeon:

At the present time there are large numbers of Calvinistic ministers who are afraid to give a free invitation to sinners; they always garble Christ’s invitation thus: ‘If you are a sensible sinner you may come’; just as if stupid sinners might not come... I do believe there are hundreds and thousands who remain in doubt and darkness, and go down to despair, because there is a description given and a preparation for Christ demanded, to which they cannot attain – a description indeed which is not true, because it is a description of what they feel after they have found Christ, and not what they must feel before they come to him.

About a year before, Spurgeon, speaking of ‘how wide is this [gospel] invitation’, challenged those ‘ministers who are afraid to invite sinners’; ‘then why are they ministers!’ he thundered. But he had a confession to make. Very early in my ministry, he admitted:

I somewhat faltered when about to give a free invitation. My doctrinal sentiments did at that time somewhat hamper me. I boldly avow that I am unchanged as to the doctrines I have preached; I preach Calvinism as high, as stern, as sound as ever; but I do feel, and always did feel an anxiety to invite sinners to Christ. And I do feel also, that not only is such a course consistent with the soundest doctrines, but that the other course is after all the unsound one, and has no title whatever to plead Scripture on its behalf. There has grown up... an idea that none are to be called to Christ but what they call *sensible* sinners. I sometimes rebut that by remarking, that I call *stupid* sinners to Christ as well as sensible sinners, and that stupid sinners make by far the greatest proportion of the ungodly. But I glory in the avowal that I preach Christ even to *insensible* sinners.

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And again:

Some of my brethren are greatly scandalised by the general invitations which I am in the habit of giving to sinners, as sinners. Some of them go to the length of asserting that there are no universal invitations in the word of God... [But] we have one here [Isa. 1:18]. Here is most plainly an invitation addressed to sinners who had not even the qualification of sensibility. They did not feel their need of a Saviour... A more accurate description of careless, worthless, ungodly, abandoned souls, never was given anywhere... In the first verse [of the chapter] you will perceive that the text was addressed to *senseless* sinners – so senseless that God himself would not address them in expostulation, but called upon the heavens and the earth to hear his complaints... What a fine poetical setting forth of the thought, that God appealed from man to dead inanimate creatures, for man had become more brutish than the stones of the field; and yet to such is the invitation given, ‘Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord’.

And one more word from Spurgeon on this topic:

The gospel comes to all who hear it... [and] it is the same gospel which comes to the unregenerate as to the regenerate... Some of our brethren who are very anxious to carry out the decrees of God, instead of believing that God can carry them out himself, always try to make distinctions in their preachings,¹⁷ giving one gospel to one set of sinners, and another to a different class. They are very unlike the old sowers, who, when they went out to sow, sowed among thorns, and on stony places, and by the way-side; but these brethren, with profounder wisdom, endeavour to find out which is the good ground, and they will insist upon it

¹⁷ Spurgeon was not saying that a preacher must be ‘inclusive’, treating all his hearers as believers (a fault, sad to say, all too common). ‘We must divide our congregation before we send you away’ (C.H.Spurgeon: *The Pulpit Library...*, Alabaster & Passmore, London, 1858, Vol.2 p95; see also same volume pp96-97,174; *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit... 1871*, Passmore and Alabaster, London, 1872, Vol.17 p529). A preacher must discriminate between believers and unbelievers, but he must preach the same gospel to both, leaving the distinction to the Spirit – the only one who can make it. See also Edward Morgan: *John Elias: Life, Letters and Essays*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1973, pp317-318,352.

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that not so much as a single handful of invitations must be cast anywhere but on prepared soil. They are much too wise to preach the gospel in Ezekiel's fashion to the dry bones in the valley while they are yet dead; they withhold any word of gospel till there is a little quivering of life among the bones, and then they commence operations. They do not think it to be their duty to go into the highways and hedges and bid all, as many as they find, to come to the supper. Oh, no! They are too orthodox to obey the Master's will; they desire to understand first who are appointed to come to the supper, and then they will invite them; that it to say, they will do what there is no necessity to do.¹⁸ They have not faith enough, or enough subjugation of will to the supreme commands of the great Master, to do that which only faith dare do; namely, tell the dry bones to live, bid the man with the withered hand stretch out his arm, and speak to him that is sick of the palsy, and tell him to take up his bed and walk. It strikes me, that refusing to set forth Jesus to all men, of every character, and refraining from inviting them to come to him, is a great mistake... [David, the prophets, the apostles] delivered the gospel, the same gospel to the dead as to the living, the same gospel to the non-elect as to the elect. The point of distinction is not in the gospel, but in its being applied by the Holy Spirit, or left to be rejected of man.¹⁹

¹⁸ That is, invite those who are in effect already converted. Spurgeon was here dealing with the second round of invitations spoken of in the parable, and did not contradict the point that since the servants were sent first to those already invited, and they refused, it proves that the gospel invitation includes those who will never come. Take Peter's command in Acts 2:38. We are expressly told: 'Those who received his word were baptised' (Acts 2:41). They all *heard* the command; those who *welcomed* and *obeyed* it were baptised. Clearly, some, at least, heard but did not obey. Did all the kings obey the psalmist's call in Ps. 2:10-12? Of course not! See Acts 4:25-29. See also Acts 3:12 – 4:4; 8:9-23; 13:13-48, especially 48; 14:1-2,15,19; 17:30-34; 28:23-31. And this applies not only to the apostles. See Prov. 1:20-33; Matt. 23:37; Luke 13:34; John 5:40; Rom. 10:21. See my *Septimus; No Safety*.

¹⁹ Spurgeon: *New Vol.6* pp397-398; *The New Park Street Pulpit...* 1859, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1964, Vol.5 p436; *The New Park Street and Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit...* 1861, Passmore and Alabaster, London, 1862, Vol.7 pp145-146; *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit...* 1865, Passmore and Alabaster, London, 1866, Vol.11 pp494-495, emphasis his; see also, for instance, *New Vol.5* p130;

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By considering Isaiah 55:1-7, I wish to probe this a little. This passage is particularly relevant since Ella raised it in response to Andrew Fuller, and, as he said, because it 'is used time and time again for free offer purposes'.²⁰ Here is the passage:

Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance. Incline your ear, and come to me. Hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you – the sure mercies of David... Seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

The picture is very clear. God, *speaking as a man*, pictures himself as a market trader or hawker who, desiring takers for his wares, lifts his voice and calls out to the passing crowd to come and accept his offer. Earnestly pressing his invitation, he commands, and seeks to persuade and encourage, all passers-by to step right up and buy, promising delight and full satisfaction to all who, feeling their need of his goods, do come and take. Observing the people spending their money on rubbish, he argues with them, trying to convince them of their stupidity, urging them to come to him to get what they really need. He appeals to them, pleading the superiority of his goods over the shoddy stuff they are at present wasting their money on, in hope of convincing them to turn to his stall and buy.

What is he offering? Salvation for sinners through Christ. What is his asking price? Nothing to the sinner; it is free.

Vol.6 p302; *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit... 1883*, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1971, Vol.29 pp337-348; '*Only A Prayer Meeting!*', Pilgrim Publications, Pasadena, 1976, pp301-305; Iain H.Murray: *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1966, pp52-59.

²⁰ Ella pp49-54.

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Does it need to be said? He would be a very odd market-trader, indeed, who put the slightest limit on whom he invites to come and buy. The trader of Isaiah 55:1-7 certainly does not. Rather, he does all he can to arouse an interest in his wares; so much so, he hopes that by spreading his goods before the crowd, raising his voice, appealing to his hearers' thirst, and spelling out the richness of what he is offering, he might in some way or another make the people want his merchandise. He realises, of course, unless they have an appetite for what he carries, and see that his wares *are* superior, he will get no takers – *but that does not stop him inviting*. Indeed, eager for a sale, he presses them all the more! No trader would dream of first asking the people if they like his merchandise, checking to see if they feel their need of it, and intend to purchase, *before* inviting them to buy! Of course not! This trader doesn't! Spreading his wares and extolling their value, he urges the crowd to walk right up and buy, assuring the penniless that their empty pockets will be no bar, pointing to the price-tickets which carry only zeros. Open-armed he stands, looking for takers.

This is how it should be with the preachers of the gospel. This is what God is saying in Isaiah 55:1-7.

Preparationists, however, will not have it. They think we should first preach the law to sinners. To put it no higher, this surely exposes such preachers to the risk of thinking that until sinners have been convicted by 'a thorough law work', there is little point in preaching Christ to them. I am not making it up! Listen to Walter J.Chantry:

[Without the moral law of God] the gospel will offer no one knows what to sinners... No doubt [Paul] wielded²¹ the ten commandments in preaching as he did in his letters²²... In the task of bringing men into the kingdom, the moral law and the gospel are the two major instruments in the arsenal of the Spirit... The moral law... is ever present at the heart of conviction, new birth, repentance and faith... A belief in the mercy of God through Christ will have no effect if preached

²¹ Weak. If Paul did what Chantry alleged, why not produce the evidence?

²² Where did he do that?

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without the moral law... [Without the moral law, Christ's] cross is a quaint story which provokes curiosity and sad emotions, but it makes little sense to modern man... If only the multitudes were instructed in the moral law! [Then] the loveliness of Christ and imputed righteousness found in the gospel would make sense to them.²³

What an incredible – grievous – statement from such a fine man in a work published by such a reputable publishing house! But it makes my point, I think.

But it is not only covenant theologians who have problems in this area. Hyper-Calvinists, however, will not have that Isaiah 55:1-7 shows us the way to preach the gospel to sinners. 'The text', Ella claimed, 'has to do with Christ and the people he chooses and not the masses... The passage can only be understood as God's providing of salvation for a specific people whom he has chosen for that purpose'.²⁴ Nothing here, apparently, about a free invitation to all to come to Christ; it is all to do with the elect, and only the elect. Since Ella quoted John Gill with approval, let us hear what he thought of the passage:

These words are no call, invitation, or offer of grace to dead sinners, since they are spoken to such who were thirsty; that is, who, in a spiritual sense, were thirsting after pardon of sin, a justifying righteousness, and salvation by Christ, after a greater²⁵ knowledge of him, communion with him, conformity to him, and enjoyment of him in his ordinances; which supposes them to be spiritually alive; for such who are dead in sin, thirst not after the grace of God, but the lusts of the flesh; they mind and savour the things of the flesh, and not the things of the Spirit; only new-born babes, or such who are born again, are quickened and made alive, [and] desire Christ... Besides, the persons called unto are

²³ Walter J.Chantry: *God's Righteous Kingdom: Focussing on the Law's Connection with the Gospel*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1980, pp74,90-93.

²⁴ Ella pp51,53.

²⁵ Note the gloss – 'greater' – which fundamentally alters the meaning of the passage. Gill spoke of the desire for '*more* knowledge of him, *more* communion with him, and *more* conformity to [Christ]' (Gill: *Commentary* Vol.3 p989, emphasis mine). See below for how Gill contradicted himself on this point.

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represented as having no money; which, though true of unconverted persons, who have nothing to pay off their debts... yet they fancy themselves to be rich... whereas the persons here encouraged are such, who not only have no money, but know they have none; who are poor in spirit, and sensible of their spiritual poverty; which sense arises from the quickening influences of the Spirit of God upon their souls... [the words] are not directed to [unconverted persons]... Neither Christ, nor the grace of Christ, are designed by 'the waters', but the ordinances... Now where should hungry and thirsty souls, and such that have no money, attend, but on the ordinances, the means of grace?... [The words, 'Seek the LORD...'] are an exhortation to public worship... These words ['Let the wicked forsake his way'] are [wrongly] represented as a promise of pardon, on condition of forsaking sinful ways and thoughts and turning to the Lord... [when, in fact, they are] declarations of pardoning grace and mercy... made... to encourage souls sensible of the wickedness of their ways... [They] contain no promise to dead men, but [are] a declaration of pardoning grace to sensible sinners... This passage of Scripture... is no promise of pardon to the non-elect.²⁶

Not only are there some big assumptions here, it is confused. On the one hand, Gill thought sensible sinners are here invited to Christ for salvation; yet on the other, he thought believers are invited to come to Christ for more grace. But the main thrust is clear: According to Gill, the characteristics listed – thirsty, penniless, wasters, unsatisfied – are qualifications which define and limit those who are invited; and they are spiritual qualifications. The invitation is not universal, therefore; it is limited to the sensible; that is, to the regenerate, the converted, believers; in short, the elect. Indeed, the passage, whilst it may be thought of as a call to sensible sinners, in reality is not a call to sinners at all – sensible or otherwise – but to saints; it is a call, not for justification, but for sanctification; believers are invited to come to the Lord for more grace that they may grow in the

²⁶ Ella pp51-52; John Gill: *The Cause of God and Truth*, W.H.Collingridge, London, 1855, pp19-21; see also Gill: *Commentary* Vol.3 pp989-992.

knowledge of Christ. Indeed, playing really safe, the invitation is, after all, an invitation to attend preaching services!²⁷

This misses the meaning of the passage by a mile. Isaiah 55:1-7 is a call to sinners to come to Christ for salvation, with a promise of mercy for those who come; it is not an invitation to believers. *First*, believers are regenerate; they are already living; but here God promises those he invites, ‘Your soul shall live’.²⁸

²⁷ When Christ told the woman at the well: ‘Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst’ (John 4:14), and when he said: ‘He who comes to me shall never hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst’ (John 6:35), was he speaking about attendance at preaching services? Certainly not! He was talking about the gospel, salvation and everlasting satisfaction found by faith in himself.

²⁸ Hypers disagree: ‘Some say that [this] proclamation is made to sinners dead in sin; and, as a proof of it, they say that it runs, “Hear, and your soul shall live”. But it would be very strange for a corpse to be invited to come to the [sovereign’s] palace in order to be banqueted. It would want something to move it; and if it was dead how could it “come”? The fact is, they are living souls who are here spoken of; but they are famishing, they are starving, they are wanting food; and when God the Spirit brings them to Christ, then they live, and live well too’. ‘Who is it that he is speaking to?... Some say... dead sinners. But can the dead do any work?... No indeed. Then they must belong to the people of God, those whom the Holy Spirit has quickened, who are poor, sensible, needy sinners, drawn by his power to the dear Redeemer, to all those who have spiritual faith given to them, and who are led to Christ for life and salvation; these shall hear the voice of mercy, and their souls shall live, and live well too’ (William Gadsby *Sermons by William Gadsby...*, Gospel Standard Trust Publications, Harpenden, 1991, pp126,144; see also pp347-348). In other words, Gadsby argued, since only the regenerate can come, only the regenerate may be invited; only the believing may be invited to believe. There are two points about commanding dead sinners. *First*, this is exactly what we must do. Dead sinners are to be exhorted to look and live; dead sinners are to be commanded to repent. Christ’s miracles illustrate it; he often commanded men to do what they could not do. *Secondly*, the Bible frequently leaves us with a paradox, a paradox which we must hold and proclaim in both its parts. It may be ‘very strange’, but human logic has to give way to biblical logic. In any case, as Gill said: ‘Though man by sin has lost his power to comply with the will of God, by an obedience to it, God has not lost his power, right, and authority, to command’. The

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Secondly, believers are already in an everlasting covenant with Christ, yet God here promises those he invites that he will make such a covenant with them. *Thirdly*, believers are not ‘the wicked’,²⁹ nor are they ‘unrighteous’. The whole tenor of the passage shows it is addressed to sinners not saints. I do not say that a backslider may not find great encouragement from the invitation – encouragement to return to God, and so on – but that is not its thrust. The passage is an invitation to sinners to come to God to find salvation in Christ.

But what sinners? *All* sinners, or *prepared* or *sensible* sinners? And do the characteristics listed qualify the invitation or the coming? In any case, are the thirst and poverty spiritual characteristics? Gill was sure they are, but is it certain it is so?

Let me take the last issue first. Might the thirst, the hunger, the waste of money on that which does not satisfy, describe the general dissatisfaction and misery and ruin which all sinners know, and not a specific spiritual experience wrought in the sinner by the Spirit? Are not all unconverted sinners thirsting, hungering, dissatisfied, and wasting their resources? Are they not all on a treadmill of slavery? Are not all unconverted sinners in desperate need, whether or not they realise it? Isaiah 55:1-7 certainly bears this out.³⁰ God reasons with those he invites, and expressly asks them why they are spending their money for what is not bread, their wages for what does not satisfy. In other words, by no stretch of the imagination can they be said to be looking for Christ! Their desires, far from spiritual, are carnal and futile. They want happiness and fulfilment, certainly, but they are not thinking about everlasting salvation and peace with God. Not at

gospel command does not speak of man’s ability but his duty. This is why, as Gill immediately added, ‘when... the gospel call [is] rejected, it is most righteously resented by the Lord; and such [as do reject it] are justly punished with everlasting destruction by him (1 Pet. 4:17; 2 Thess. 1:8-9)’ (Gill: *Body* Vol.2 p286).

²⁹ As Gill admitted: ‘The word for “wicked” signifies... ungodly, and is expressive of the pollution and guilt of sin all are under’ (Gill: *Commentary* Vol.3 p991).

³⁰ As do a score of other passages; Prov. 27:20; Eccles. 1:8; 4:8; Rom. 6:17,19-20; Heb. 2:15, for instance.

all! And the sort of satisfaction they are looking for, they seek from the world. In other words, they are far from being sensible, awakened, regenerate sinners who know the value of Christ and long for him! Of an awareness of their sin and need of Christ, they show not a trace.³¹ In short, are we not talking about natural men with natural desires?³² Of course we are! And yet these are the ones invited to Christ.

True, only those who spiritually thirst and realise they are spiritually penniless will come to Christ. Yes, a sinner must be regenerated before he can or will believe; he must know he is a sinner, yes, and want salvation from Christ. To borrow the language of the hyper-Calvinist, only sensible sinners will seek salvation. Yes, this is true. In fact, from a Calvinistic point of view – from a biblical point of view – it is a truism. *But we must not confuse the invitation with its acceptance.*³³ Are only the elect – indeed, the elect who have been made sensible – to be invited because only they will come? or, is the invitation general even though its acceptance is – like Christ’s atonement – particular? This is the issue.

Calvin, commenting on Isaiah 55, far from thinking the hearers were spiritually awakened, drew attention to the opening word, ‘Ho!’, noting:

So great is the sluggishness of men that it is difficult to arouse them. They do not feel their wants, though they are hungry; nor

³¹ They ‘lavish away time, opportunities, and strength, in reading and hearing false doctrine, which is not bread, but chaff... labouring to seek for happiness in worldly things’ (Gill: *Commentary* Vol.3 p989). In saying this, Gill contradicted his claim that these were sensible sinners who were thirsting after more knowledge of Christ (see note above).

³² Ella vehemently criticised this talk of ‘natural desire’ (Ella pp49-50).

³³ Above all, we must get the right emphasis. Hyper-Calvinists concentrate on the sinner’s fitness to be invited, and preparationists on the sinner’s fitness to accept. But the gospel invitation focuses on Christ. There is a great deep here, of course. The way the Spirit regenerates, convicts and converts a sinner, is his sovereign prerogative, and known to him alone (John 3:8). Human logic, though it might try to analyse the process, and sort out its order in precise detail, is probing where it ought not.

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do they desire food, which they greatly need; and therefore that indifference must be shaken off by loud and incessant cries... Besides, the invitation is general; for there is no man who is not in want of those 'waters', and to whom Christ is not necessary; and therefore he invites all indiscriminately, without any respect of persons.

Not a sensible sinner in sight! Awakened? They were sleep walking! Calvin was clear, however, there is a 'true preparation for receiving this grace' – *for receiving this grace*,³⁴ please note, *but not for receiving the invitation*. Before sinners will receive this grace, said Calvin, they must be spiritually 'thirsty'; those who are not, 'will not receive Christ'. Why not? 'Because', said Calvin:

They have no relish for spiritual grace... It is therefore necessary that we have 'thirst', that is, an ardent desire, in order that it may be possible for us to receive so great blessings... [The prophet] complains of the ingratitude and madness of men, in rejecting or disdaining the kindness of God who offers all things freely... Men... choose rather to... vex themselves in vain, than to rely on the grace which God offers to them... The prophet... exclaimed against all men, to whatever age they might belong; for all the posterity of Adam... in seeking the road to a heavenly life, they altogether go astray, and follow their own vain opinions rather than the voice of God.³⁵

This is clear enough. According to Calvin, Isaiah was addressing all men, 'the invitation is general', 'he invites all indiscriminately'. The prophet certainly was *not* preaching to prepare his hearers, but went straight to invitations, arguing the benefits of obedience, and the stupidity of refusal. Of course, it goes without saying that only those prepared of God will receive

³⁴ 'These passages [including Isa. 55] declare that none are admitted to enjoy the blessings of God save those who are pining under a sense of their own poverty' (John Calvin: *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, A new translation by Henry Beveridge, James Clarke & Co., Limited, London, 1957, Vol.1 p232).

³⁵ John Calvin: *Calvin's Commentaries*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1979, Vol.8 Part 2 pp156-158.

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the promised grace,³⁶ but Isaiah pressed his invitations with no thought whatsoever of trying to prepare potential buyers.

The Sum of Saving Knowledge: ‘Here... the Lord... makes open offer of Christ and his grace, by proclamation of a free and gracious market of righteousness and salvation, to be had through Christ to every soul, without exception, that truly desires to be saved from sin and wrath... He invites all sinners, that for any reason stand at a distance from God, to come and take from him riches of grace’.³⁷ This too is clear. The offer is ‘open’, God ‘invites all sinners’ whatever their condition, but only he who ‘truly desires to be saved’ will obtain that salvation.

Tobias Crisp:

Life now is reached out to such a person, that is a dead person... I am not fit for Christ... What is this to come without money, and without price? It is nothing but to take the offer of Christ, these waters of life, to take them merely and simply as a gift brought, and this is a sure mercy indeed...

³⁶ Calvin, however, contradicted himself when he went on to say the prophet does not speak of those who ‘take no concern about the spiritual life of the soul’ – and ‘there are many such persons’. Either the prophet addresses all men, or he does not. But whatever the explanation of that contradiction, Calvin lends no support to the hyper-Calvinistic interpretation of the passage. The prophet was not addressing sensible sinners, but ‘those who desire life, and yet do not understand the method or way of obtaining it’, using ‘methods which men contrive, in opposition to the word of God, for obtaining salvation... [using] all the industry, study, or labour which belongs to man... our idle attempts to worship [God]... labours foolishly undertaken [yet which] are reckoned valuable by the judgement of the flesh’. This does *not* describe sensible sinners – since they *are* seeking Christ, and, being taught by the Spirit, are seeking him in his appointed way. As for the ‘desire [for] life’ and the ‘obtaining [of] salvation’, does this not describe the overwhelming majority of men? Don’t most unbelievers cherish a vain hope that somehow all will be well with them in the end? Indeed, to judge by the confident pronouncements made at many an unbeliever’s funeral, they regard it as a certainty! But just because an unbeliever vaguely hopes, or presumes, he is going to heaven, it does not mean he is sensible!

³⁷ *The Sum of Saving Knowledge...* in *The Confession of Faith, The Larger and Shorter Catechisms...*, The Publications Committee of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, 1967, p332.

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The Father expects nothing in the world of men; no one qualification or spiritual disposition, before, or upon the communicating of his Son Christ to men... Consider... Isaiah 55:1; it is plain there... that God looks for nothing in the world of men; be they what they will, be they in the worst condition, no matter what it is, they are the men to whom Christ offers himself... that is, everyone that has but a mind to come to him, everyone that would take him, may have him... But what does God require here in the covenant? No money, no price... nor anything at all.³⁸

³⁸ Tobias Crisp: *Christ Alone Exalted...*, edited by John Gill, Old Paths Gospel Press, Choteau, Vol.1 pp37-38,100-101; *Sermons* Issue 1 pp41-42; Issue 2 pp42-43. Surprisingly, Gill made no comment on these extracts. He did, however, elsewhere try to limit – to sensible sinners – Crisp’s offer of Christ (Crisp: *Christ Alone* Vol.2 p27), as did the Christian Bookshop, Ossett (Tobias Crisp: *The Sermons of Tobias Crisp... with John Gill’s Notes*, Christian Bookshop, Ossett, 1995, Issue I p48). But this is wrong. In addition to the above, Crisp was clear: ‘The secrets of the Lord are with himself; only the names of particular persons are written in the book of life; but they are not written in the word... but... it is as sufficient for the satisfaction of a man, [that] the general tender of free grace and pardon of sin to all sinners... [is] as if his name in particular were set down in that tender’ (Crisp: *Christ Alone* Vol.3 p40). See also *Christ Alone* Vol.1 pp47,114-115; *Sermons* Issue 1 pp50-51; Issue 2 pp54-55. Gill, even though he admitted Crisp made ‘this general tender, or offer of Christ to all’, nevertheless stated that ‘the universal offer cannot be supported without supposing universal redemption’ (Crisp: *Christ Alone* Vol.1 p114; *Sermons* Issue 2 pp58-59). In this last, he was mistaken; the extent of the atonement has no bearing on the extent of the offer. Owen: ‘Christ died... only for the elect... Some then tell us we cannot invite all men promiscuously to believe. But why so? We invite... all men as sinners; and we know that Christ died for sinners’ (John Owen: *An Exposition upon Psalm 130 in The Works of John Owen*, Vol.6, edited by William H.Goold, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1966, p523). As for Crisp, he preached both the *universal* offer and *particular* redemption (Crisp: *Christ Alone* Vol.2 pp81-82), as Gill recognised (Crisp: *Christ Alone* Vol.1 p10; *Sermons* Issue 1 n5 (not n9) p19; Issue 2 p59). See also John Rippon: *A Brief Memoir of the Life and Writings of... John Gill*, Gano Books, Harrisonburg, 1992, p71; Murray: *Spurgeon* p132. With regard to the offer not specifying persons by name, Spurgeon made a telling point; namely, that if Scripture did put names to the promise, it would provide

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Matthew Henry dealt first of all with those invited:

We are all invited to come and take the benefit of that provision which the grace of God has made for poor souls in the new covenant... Who are invited: 'Ho, every one'... the poor and the maimed, the halt and the blind, are called to this marriage supper, whoever can be picked up out of the highways and the hedges. It intimates that... ministers are to make a general offer of life and salvation to all... and that the gospel covenant excludes none that do not exclude themselves. The invitation is published with an 'Oyez – Ho', take notice of it.

The invitation is to all. But 'what is the qualification required in those that shall be welcome'? This:

They must thirst. All shall be welcome to gospel grace upon those terms only that gospel grace be welcome to them. Those that are satisfied with the world and its enjoyments for a portion, and seek not for a happiness in the favour of God – those that depend upon the merit of their own works for a righteousness, and see no need they have of Christ and his righteousness – these do not thirst; they have no sense of their need, and are in no pain or uneasiness about their souls, and therefore will not condescend so far as to be beholden to Christ. But those that thirst are invited to the waters, as those that labour, and are heavy laden, are invited to Christ for rest. Note, where God gives grace he first gives a thirsting after it; and where he has given a thirsting after it, he will give it (Ps. 81:10).

And, finally, 'Whither they are invited':

'Come you to the waters'... Come to Christ...³⁹ The gifts offered us are invaluable and such as no price can be set upon... He who offers them has no need of us, nor of any returns we can make him. He makes us these proposals, not because he has occasion to sell, but because he has a disposition to give... The things

far less encouragement to doubting sinners. As he said, speaking for himself, he would wonder if there was another Charles Haddon Spurgeon! 'How much worse would it be for the Smiths and the Browns!' he declared (Spurgeon: *Metropolitan* Vol.32 pp645-646; see also Vol.11 pp705-706).

³⁹ Matthew Henry included 'ordinances' in the invitation, but majored on Christ himself.

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offered are already bought and paid for. Christ purchased them at the full value, with price, not with money, but with ‘his own blood’ (1 Pet. 1:19)... We shall be welcome to the benefits of the promise, though we are utterly unworthy of them, and cannot make a tender of anything... We are earnestly pressed and persuaded (and O that we would be prevailed with!) to accept this invitation, and make this good bargain for ourselves... That which we are persuaded to is to hearken to God and to his proposals... [to] accept God’s offers.

Jonathan Edwards, citing Isaiah 55:1 with other passages, declared: ‘Pardon is as much offered and promised to the greatest sinners as any, if they will come aright to God for mercy. The invitations of the gospel are always in universal terms’.⁴⁰ Once again, pardon is offered to all, but received only by those who come in faith.

Edward J.Young: ‘Redemption has been accomplished... and now the invitation is extended to all that are in need to come and to partake of the salvation the Lord offers... This [passage] is equivalent to the divine imperative of the gospel message, whereby men who are lost are commanded to come to Christ and in him to find the blessings that they so desperately need and that he alone can give... The invitation is universal, addressed to all who are wicked and men of iniquity’.⁴¹

Fuller: ‘This is the language of invitation... The thirst which [those who are invited] are supposed to possess does not mean a holy desire after spiritual blessings, but the natural desire of happiness which God has implanted in every bosom, and which, in wicked men, is directed not to “the sure mercies of David”, but to that which “is not bread”, or which has no solid satisfaction in it’.⁴²

⁴⁰ Jonathan Edwards: *Miscellaneous Remarks Concerning the Divine Decrees...* in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Revised and Corrected by Edward Hickman*, Vol.2, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1974, p112.

⁴¹ Edward J.Young: *The Book of Isaiah*, Vol.3, William B.Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1972, pp374-380.

⁴² Andrew Fuller: *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation, or the Duty of Sinners to Believe in Jesus Christ...* in *The Complete Works of... Andrew Fuller...*, Henry G.Bohn, London, 1866, p157.

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Thomas Boston:

That gospel offer (Isa. 55:1) is the most solemn one to be found in all the Old Testament; and that recorded [in] Rev. 22:17 is the parting offer made to sinners by Jesus Christ at the closing of the canon of the Scripture, and manifestly looks to the former; in the which I can see no ground to think that the thirsting therein mentioned does [in] any way restrict the offer; or that the thirsty there invited are convinced, sensible sinners who are thirsting after Christ and his righteousness; the which would leave outside the scope of this solemn invitation... the far greater part of mankind... The context seems decisive [on] this point; for the thirsting ones invited are such as are 'spending money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfies not' (Isa. 55:1-2); but convinced, sensible sinners who are thirsting after Christ and his righteousness, are not spending their labour and money at that rate; but, on the contrary, [they are spending it] for that which is bread and satisfies; namely, for Christ. Wherefore the thirsting there mentioned must be more extensive, comprehending, indeed, and principally aiming at that thirst after happiness and satisfaction which, being natural, is common to all mankind. Men pained with this thirst or hunger are naturally running, for quenching thereof, to the empty creation, and their fulsome lusts; so 'spending money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfies not', their hungry souls find no food, but what is meagre and lean, bad and unwholesome, and cannot satisfy their appetite. Compare Luke 15:16. In this wretched case, Adam left all mankind, and [this is where] Christ finds them. Whereupon the gospel proclamation is issued forth, inviting them [that is, all mankind] to come away from the broken cisterns, filthy puddles, to the waters of life, even to Jesus Christ, where they may have bread, fatness, what is good, and will satisfy... their painful thirst (John 4:14; 6:35).⁴³

And as Boston said on Matthew 11:28: 'I cannot agree with those that restrain these expressions to those that are sensible of their sins and misery, without Christ, and are longing to be rid of the

⁴³ Thomas Boston: Notes in Edward Fisher: *The Marrow of Modern Divinity...*, Still Waters Revival Books, Edmonton, reprint edition 1991, p143.

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same; but I think it includes all that are out of Christ, sensible or insensible'.⁴⁴

Spurgeon:

I am sorry that some of my brethren entertain the idea that the gospel is to be preached only to certain characters. They dare not preach the gospel to everybody;⁴⁵ they try to preach it to the elect; surely, if the Lord had meant them to make the selection he would have set a mark upon his chosen. As I do not know the elect, and have no command to confine my preaching to them, but am bidden to preach the gospel to every creature, I am thankful that the gospel is put in such a way that no creature can be too poor, too wicked, or too vile to receive it, for it is 'without money and without price'... If before I preach the gospel I have to look for a measure of fitness in a man, then I cannot preach the gospel to any but those whom I believe to have the fitness; but if the gospel is to be preached freely, with no conditions or demands for preparations or prerequisites... then I may go to the most degraded [pagans]... and tell them the good news; we may speak of mercy to harlots and thieves... we may penetrate the jungles of crime, and still with the same entreaty from heaven – 'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him turn unto the Lord, for he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon'. The fact that the mercy of God is 'without money and without price' enables us to preach it to every man, woman, and child of woman born.

Spurgeon on Matthew 11:28:

Labourers and loaded ones constitute the great mass of mankind, and the Lord Jesus invites them all without exception... Some have ventured to say that this describes a certain *spiritual* character, but I fail to see any word to mark the spirituality of the person; certainly I see not a syllable to limit the text to that

⁴⁴ Thomas Boston: *The Beauties of Thomas Boston...*, edited by Samuel M'Millan, Christian Focus Publications, Inverness, 1979, p261. Boston did not leave it there, but gave his reasons.

⁴⁵ Hypers, I acknowledge, claim they do preach the gospel to all, but Spurgeon was referring to the fact that they limit the gospel *invitation* to the sensible. Giving the invitation to *all*, however, is an essential part of preaching the gospel to every creature; without it, the gospel is not being preached as it should be.

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sense. Brethren and sisters, it is not our wont either to add to or to take from the word of God knowingly, and as there is no indication here that these words are to be limited in their meaning, we shall not dare to invent a limit. Where God puts no bolt or bar, woe unto those who shall set up barriers of their own. We shall read our text in the broadest conceivable sense, for it is most like the spirit of the gospel to do so. It says – ‘*all* you that labour’, and if you labour, it includes you. It says – ‘*all* you that are heavy laden’, and if you are heavy laden, it includes you, and God forbid that we should shut you out.

And as he had explained in a sermon preached fifteen years before: ‘While the invitation is given to the weary and heavy laden, you will perceive that the promise is not made to them *as* weary and heavy laden, but it is made to them *as* coming to Christ’.

Again:

In order that you may come to Jesus, no preparation is required. You may come just as you are, and come at once: only confess that you need him, desire to have him, and then take him by trusting him. He is like wine and milk, supplying delight and satisfaction, and you are to take him as men would take a drink. How could the invitation be put more broadly than it is? How could it be uttered more earnestly? It has a ‘Ho!’ to give it tongue. Tradesmen in certain parts of London stand outside of their shops and cry ‘Buy, buy!’ or call out ‘Ho!’ to the passers-by because they are anxious to sell their wares. Jesus is yet more eager to distribute his rich grace, for he longs to see men saved... There are many such invitations in the Scriptures, and if not all expressed by the same metaphor, they are all equally as free and as clear... Jesus entreats men to look to him and live: he bids them come to him and find rest unto their souls.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Spurgeon: *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit...* 1874, Passmore and Alabaster, London, 1875, Vol.20 pp140-141; *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit...* 1876, Passmore and Alabaster, London, 1877, Vol.22 pp614-615; *New and Metropolitan* Vol.7 p109; *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit...* 1880, Passmore and Alabaster, London, 1881, Vol.26 pp415-416, emphasis his; see also *The New Park Street Pulpit...* 1858, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1964, Vol.4 p342; Murray: *Spurgeon* pp69-71.

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Let me bring this to a conclusion: Reading the characteristics set out in some gospel invitations as qualifications which sinners must meet before they are invited, not only turns those invitations upside down, it demands the impossible, since no preacher, nor any sinner, can ever be sure the qualifications have been met in any particular case. The upshot is, whereas the characteristics spelled out in the invitations are intended to encourage – not hinder – sinners in coming to Christ, hyper-Calvinists turn them into barriers – impossibly high barriers – for both ministers and sinners. Ministers have to be sure sinners have surmounted the barriers before they can invite them; sinners have to be sure they have climbed over the barriers before they can be invited, let alone come to Christ. An influence more deadening on the gospel invitation it would be hard to imagine, the consequences of which are serious in the extreme.

I wish John Brown's wise and biblical counsel, based on the words of Christ in John 7:37-38, were known, remembered and acted upon. Rightly depicting those words as the gospel's 'unlimited invitation to participate in the blessings of salvation' – that is, stressing 'the unlimited extent of the invitation' – Brown declared:

The free and unrestricted nature of the invitation [to Christ]... deserves notice. Not only is the descriptive character of those invited, 'those who thirst', common to all human beings, but the invitation is so fashioned, that no human being can find the shadow of a reason for thinking himself excluded... It is not, 'If any man be deeply sensible of his guilt, depravity, and wretchedness, let him come to me and drink'. Such are invited; but if that were all, as some have taught, thus, however unintentionally, clogging with conditions the unhampered offer of a free salvation, men might think that till they had brought themselves, or were in some way or other brought, into a state of deep contrition, and earnest seeking after pardon, and holiness, and salvation, it would be presumption in them to come to Christ, or even look towards the Saviour for salvation. But the invitation is, 'Whosoever wishes to be happy, let him come to me, sinful and miserable as he is, and in me he shall find salvation. If you are not a brute, if you are not a devil – however like the one in sensuality, or the other in malignity – you are invited. If you are on earth, not in hell, you are invited'.

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As Brown had said: ‘A more comprehensive description of human beings, I believe, could not be conceived. “If any man thirst”, is just equal to, “Whosoever wishes to be happy”. If a man can be found who is perfectly happy, or who has no wish to be happy, that man is not invited. Till such a person is found, we must hold that the invitation has no limits’.⁴⁷

* * *

Forgive me, reader, but I cannot leave such a glorious subject there. Permit me to quote just one more free-offer preacher actually going about his business. Observe how Edward Payson makes the gospel invitation general, *but not generalised*; that is, he invites all his hearers, but makes sure that everyone in particular knows he is personally invited. Whilst the invitation is all-embracing, there is nothing vague about it.

First, let Payson state the facts:

My friends, God offers you the water of life, without money and without price. Everyone may come and take it if he will... [Christ] was... pleased to express his invitations in the most general and encouraging terms which language could afford... He intended that no man, who heard the gospel, should have any cause to pretend that he was not invited to share in its benefits. He therefore made his invitations as general and comprehensive as possible, so as to exclude none who did not exclude themselves.

Now let us hear Payson preach it:

Permit me then to apply the subject by pressing everyone present, who has not already embraced the Saviour, to come to him without delay. As the mouth of God, and in my Master’s name, I invite everyone of you to do this. Our Creator, our God has made a great feast, a marriage feast for his Son; a feast for the [reception] of sinners... To this feast you are now invited. No tickets of admission are necessary. The Master of the feast

⁴⁷ John Brown: *Discourses and Sayings of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, Vol.2, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1990, v, pp1,5-10. Note that Brown cited Bunyan’s *Jerusalem Sinner*, and linked John 7:37-38 to other gospel invitations including Isa. 55:1-3 and Matt. 11:28.

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stands at the door to receive you, declaring that not one, who comes, shall be cast out; and as his servant, sent forth for this very purpose, sent especially to you, I now invite you to come. I invite you, children; for there is a place for you. Leave your toys and follies then, and come to Christ. I invite you who are young; for your presence is especially desired. Leave your sinful amusements and companions then, and come to the Saviour. I invite you who are [middle-aged]. To you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men. Particularly do I invite you, who are parents, to come... to the Saviour's feast. I invite you, who are aged, to come and receive from Christ a crown of glory, which your grey hairs will be, if you are found in the way of righteousness. I invite you to come, you poor, and Christ will make you rich in faith and heirs of his kingdom. I invite you to come who are rich... I invite you, who are ignorant, to come and Christ will impart to you his treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I invite you who possess human learning... I invite you who are afflicted to come, for my God is the God of all consolation, and my Master can be touched with the feeling of your infirmities. I invite you, who feel yourselves to be the greatest of sinners, to come... I invite you, who have long despised, and who still despise this invitation, to come; for Christ's language is, Hearken to me, you stout-hearted, and far from righteousness. And if there be any one in this assembly, who thinks himself overlooked; if there be one who has not yet felt that this invitation is addressed to him, I now present it to that person, particularly, and invite him to come.

Then the warning:

And now, my friends, I have done. My directions were to invite to the Saviour's marriage feast as many as I should find. I have accordingly invited all and each of you. I take you to record, as witnesses against each other, that you have all received the invitation. I take each of your consciences to record, as witnesses against yourselves, that you have been invited, and as a witness for me, that I have discharged my commission. If then any of you do not come, you cannot ascribe it to the want of an invitation. If any of you perish, it will be, not because Christ did not offer to save you; nor because you did not hear the offer, but solely because you would not accept it. You are, therefore, left without excuse. I am aware, however, that you will fancy you have an excuse. You will pretend that you wish to come, but are unable. My friends, I know nothing of that. I am not directed to

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answer such objections. I have nothing to do with them. My business is simply to preach to you the gospel; to proclaim to you the glad tidings; to invite you to Christ, and to assure you, in his name, that, if you come, you shall most certainly be received. If you say that you cannot come; if you can make God believe it; if you dare go to the judgement seat with this excuse, and venture your eternal interests on its being accepted as sufficient, it is well. But if you determine on this course, permit me to remind you, that God's sentiments, as revealed in his word, differ very widely from yours, with respect to this excuse. He evidently considers your unwillingness, or inability, or whatever you choose to call it, to come to Christ, as your greatest sin. He, once and again, denounces upon you the most dreadful punishments for this very thing. He declares, not only that all who do not believe in Christ shall be condemned, but that they are condemned already. What you consider as your best excuse, he considers as your greatest sin. Beware then, my friends, how you make this excuse...

Instead, therefore, of seeking for excuses, which will only prove your destruction, let me persuade you rather to comply with Christ's invitations.

Payson returns to mercy:

The blessings which [Christ] offers and dispenses... cost him their full value. They cost thirty-three years' labour... No! more, they cost him his life. He paid the dreadful price in tears and groans and blood, in agonies unutterable. There is not a single blessing he offers you, O sinner, which did not cost him a pang. He purchased the privilege of offering you those very blessings which you have a thousand times rejected... Now he offers you, without money and without price, all that cost him so dear. He even beseeches you as a favour to accept it, and will consider the joy arising from your acceptance and salvation as a sufficient recompense for all that he suffered in procuring it.

To conclude:

Man is happy and free... if he... embraces the Saviour and the salvation thus freely offered; otherwise, [he is] lost, more fatally, hopelessly lost, than ever.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Edward Payson: *The Complete Works...*, Sprinkle Publications, Harrisonburg, 1987/8, Vol.1 p474; Vol.2 pp484,490-495; Vol.3 p156.

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Are gospel invitations universal? They are, praise God, they are. Thank God it is so, for it means that God invites me – and, reader, it means that God invites YOU.

Conclusion

God in the gospel offers every sinner everlasting salvation through the work, merit and person of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, promising it to all who repent and believe.⁴⁹ God makes this offer fully and freely, commanding all to repent and believe, because he desires all to turn and be saved. God attaches no pre-conditions whatsoever to the offer. The preacher does not have to ask if his hearers have had this-or-that experience, or are in such-and-such a state; the hearer, likewise, does not have to try to determine whether or not he is prepared or sensible – he is invited, commanded to come to Christ at once, and to come freely. The gospel offer *is* free! That which is said of the National Health Service⁵⁰ – free at the point of need – is abundantly true, really true, of the gospel. Salvation, of course, was earned by Christ; he paid the price for his people's sin. But it really is free at the point of need; the preacher offers it freely to sinners; every sinner is welcome; and all who come receive the gift of God's mercy. 'Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price' (Isa. 55:1).

Reader, if you should be unconverted, let me tell you yet again: God desires you to turn from your sin, desires you to turn to him in repentance, and desires you to trust his Son for salvation. He takes no pleasure in your death. Christ stands open-armed, ready to welcome you, never turning away any sinner who comes (John 6:37) – and that includes you. That which his enemies said in sneering indignation, Christ wears as one of the brightest gems of his crown: 'This man receives sinners' (Luke 15:2). And so he does! Note well the present tense, reader; Jesus receives sinners still (Heb. 13:8). He will receive you, if you

⁴⁹ Just in case it needs repeating yet again: I am not saying that Christ died for all. The offer is to all; the atonement is for the elect.

⁵⁰ I am writing in the UK.

Are Gospel Invitations to All?

come. There is nothing you have to bring, nothing you can bring, nothing you dare bring. Come as you are; come and welcome; come now.

How do I know all this? Because my Master has said it is so. He has told me what to say to you: ‘Come, for all things are now ready’ (Luke 14:17). Indeed, he has told me to press you to come: ‘Compel them to come in’, he said (Luke 14:23). But what if you refuse the invitation, and never come? Then you shall never taste the supper (Luke 14:24).

So what shall be my closing word to you? Hebrews 12:25. ‘See that you do not refuse him who speaks’. If the Jews did not escape when they refused God who gave them his law, how much worse will it be for you – if you reject God’s offer of mercy through his Son?

Duty Faith and The New Covenant

I readily agree that many covenant theologians hold to the free offer of the gospel and duty faith. Nevertheless, the Reformed, with their emphasis upon the necessity of preaching the law to sinners to prepare them for Christ – preparationism – have constructed for themselves a system which has an inbuilt hindrance to the free preaching of the gospel. So much so, I am convinced that it is only those who act in accordance with new-covenant principles who can reach full biblical freeness in their addresses to sinners.¹

In order to support this claim, I want to set out the biblical principles of duty faith, in order to show that it is the obligation of all sinners – ‘prepared’ or not – to trust Christ; further, that it is the responsibility of all preachers to call, command, invite, exhort and seek to persuade all sinners – ‘prepared’ or not – to trust Christ, and to trust him at once.

And this will only be accomplished, in the fully scriptural way, by preaching the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ immediately and directly to sinners, and not by preaching Moses and his law to them in order to prepare them for the gospel, and thus ‘fit’ them for Christ.

Let me define my terms:

The free offer is the invitation to all sinners to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, promising them salvation if they do, even though Christ’s atonement was neither intended for all, nor accomplished for all.

¹ For the arguments behind what I say here, see my books, sermons, articles, audio books and videos, which may be found at David H J Gay Ministry on sermonaudio.com (including the eDocs link) and christmycovenant.com, Amazon, Kindle and youtube.com. In particular, for this article I have lightly edited the opening chapter of my *Offer*. Although my book is a reply to Ella’s work, it stands on its own.

Duty faith is the duty, the obligation, the responsibility, of all sinners to trust Christ. The gospel preacher must command all sinners to believe.²

Let us start at the beginning – where George M. Ella and I agree.

A command implies a duty

Ella: ‘One can only have a duty towards the law when the law is given... the command to exercise duty applies to the law’.³ I agree. But the principle is general. Any law – not only the law of God – inevitably imposes a duty on all who are under it. Their duty is to obey, to carry out, to fulfil what is commanded.

In particular, since all men are God’s created subjects, he has the right to impose upon them any law or command he wishes, which command they are duty-bound to obey. Above all, when God in the gospel issues a command, then those he addresses – whether believers or unbelievers – are obliged to obey that command. And God in the gospel does issue commands, scores of them.⁴ Here are two: ‘Look to me, and be saved, all you ends

² Please note, it is not the duty of an unconverted sinner to believe that Christ died for him in particular; his duty is to trust Christ. In any case, the sinner cannot know the former until he has done the latter; and even if he could, he would be exercising historical faith, accepting a fact, when what is required is saving faith, reliance upon Christ.

³ Ella: *The Free Offer* pp57-58.

⁴ Contrary to John Gill: ‘The gospel... is a pure declaration of grace and salvation by Christ; it has no commands, but all promises’ (John Gill: *Sermons and Tracts*, Old Paths Gospel Press, Choteau, Vol.4 p183). As Gill himself said on Acts 17:30: ‘Repentance being represented as a command... a command to all’. I agree with Gill, of course, repentance is a gift of God’s free grace, and not in man’s power, but this does not alter the fact that God in the gospel commands all men to repent. Gill was wrong to try to water down Acts 17:30 by introducing the notion of ‘natural repentance’. The fact is, in the gospel, God commands all sinners to repent; to repent, full stop! And what did Gill mean when, speaking of ‘the gospel ministry’, he said: ‘Though in the gospel, strictly taken, there is no command, yet being largely taken for the whole ministry of the word, it includes this [the grace of evangelical repentance], and everything else which Christ has commanded, and was

of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other' (Isaiah 45:22). 'God... commands all men everywhere to repent' (Acts 17:30).

So this is the principle: When God issues a command, then those to whom he issues that command are duty-bound to comply.

But, it is vital to note, when God commands men, it does *not* imply they have the ability to perform. God commands his created subjects because he has the right, whether or not they can comply. The command implies their duty, their responsibility, their obligation, *not* their ability. As Gill said: 'The commands of God show his authority, and man's duty'. He drove the point home by saying that although 'the promises of God... are a relief to man's weakness... [they] no way lessen his obligation to duty... Nor does... prayer... excuse men from obligation...⁵ or any duty'; God's 'will of command... signifies [that] what is the pleasure of God should be the duty of man, or what he should do'. Referring to specific biblical texts in which sinners are commanded, he said these 'declare God's will of command, or what he has made man's duty'.⁶ I couldn't agree more. As John Berridge put it: 'It is not in man to direct his steps. Then, it may be asked, of what use are commands, exhortations, promises and threatenings? I answer, they do not respect [concern] our native ability, but our

taught by him and his apostles'? Gill had earlier (on Luke 24:47) called 'repentance and remission of sins' 'the sum of the gospel ministry', saying 'the doctrine of repentance is not of the law, which neither requires, nor admits of it, but [it is] of the gospel' (John Gill: *Gill's Commentary*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1980, Vol.5 pp589,939). Gill, it seems to me, was saying, quite rightly, that the gospel requires repentance; in other words, it is a duty under the gospel because it is commanded.

⁵ Gill's words, in light of what is to come below, are most interesting: 'God's requiring [internal conversion] does not suppose man's ability to perform it, but his need of it; and is done with a view to bring him to a sense of his state, and that he may apply to God for it... *Nor does such a prayer for conversion excuse men from obligation to turn to the Lord*' (emphasis mine). This is duty faith!

⁶ John Gill: *The Cause of God and Truth*, W.H.Collingridge, London, 1855, pp114-115,159.

duty; and are not designed to show us what we *can* do, but what we *ought* to do. The command directs our *duty*'.⁷

But we do not need Gill's or Berridge's support for the principle. Christ taught a parable in which a servant 'did the things that were commanded him'. Christ drew the lesson: 'When you have done all those things which you are commanded, say: "We... have done what was our duty to do"' (Luke 17:9-10). The principle is clear: A command implies a duty.

In this article I am concerned with the commands of the gospel. Let's get down to brass tacks.

The gospel commands all sinners to repent; therefore it is their duty to repent

Sinners, asserted Ella, are commanded in the gospel to repent: 'In Scripture, all sinners are called to repentance'. I agree. It is their duty to repent, said Ella: 'Scripture teaches man's duty to repent'. I agree.

I am also of the same mind as Ella when he said the command does not imply ability. Ella, on the command to repentance: 'Scripture also teaches that man has no natural abilities to do so'. I agree. God commands all sinners to repent but no sinner by nature has the power to comply. On this, I agree with Ella.

I am one with Ella when he said: 'The Christian's calling and duty in evangelisation is to follow Christ's example, and call and command sinners to repentance'. Indeed, I go further. It is the duty of believers to command sinners to repent, not merely

⁷ John Berridge: *Observations on Passages of Scripture in The Works of... John Berridge...*, edited by... Richard Whittingham, Old Paths Gospel Press, Choteau, pp165-166, first emphasis mine, the others his. Berridge continued: 'The command directs our *duty*, and the promise, or [the] grace in the promise, gives strength to perform it. Besides, God is pleased to make these exhortations and promises the means of conveying spiritual life and strength. Hence these effects are ascribed to the word, which are really and only wrought by the grace conveyed with the word. God may therefore order commands and exhortations to be used towards us, notwithstanding our inability to comply with them, since he can and does make them effectual to the end aimed at' (emphasis his).

because Christ himself did it, but because he *commanded* them to do it in preaching the gospel to every creature (Luke 24:47).

So I am in complete agreement with Ella when he said: ‘Sinners must be called, commanded, even beseeched to repent and turn from their evil ways. God commands all to repent, and grants repentance to some who would not otherwise repent’.⁸ Christ did it; he commanded his disciples to do it; the apostles did it; we must do it.

So Ella and I are agreed: Sinners are unable to repent, but in the gospel God commands them to repent. In other words, he commands them to do what they cannot do. Just as Christ commanded the man to stretch out his withered hand (Mark 3:5) – the very thing the man could not do, but by Christ’s power was enabled to do – so must dead sinners,⁹ unrepentant sinners, be commanded to repent. And this must be done even though God grants the gift of repentance only to his elect; God still commands *all* sinners to repent, and *all* sinners have a duty to repent. This surely is the teaching of Acts 17:30: ‘God... commands all men everywhere to repent’.¹⁰

⁸ Ella: *The Free Offer* pp58,71. Indeed, unless Christ grants repentance, no sinner can or will repent.

⁹ By ‘dead sinners’, I mean, of course, unregenerate sinners, the spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1).

¹⁰ Of course there is a difference between Christ’s miracle and the general gospel call. Even so, the miracle does illustrate the point in the way that I have said. Some hyper-Calvinists, however, try to restrict the gospel call on the basis of the logic of the miracle. I quote from my *Septimus Sears: A Victorian Injustice*, p67: ‘The first to teach that we cannot copy the apostles in seeking to persuade sinners to come to Christ, was, as far as I have discovered, Robert Hawker (1753-1827), vicar of Charles, Plymouth [not to be confused with Robert Stephen Hawker (1803-1875), Anglo-Catholic vicar of Morwenstow on the north coast of Cornwall]. In 1818, he wrote a tract, *The True Gospel: No Yea and Nay Gospel*, to which, following a reply by ‘Verax’ [‘Verax’ was James Bidlake, who argued that it is biblical to offer Christ indiscriminately (John Williams: *A Memoir of His Life and Writings in The Works of... Robert Hawker...*, Vol.1, Ebenezer Palmer, London, 1831, p153)], he added an Appendix, in which, even though he was muddled, he claimed that Christ and the apostles never made

But what about faith?

The gospel commands all sinners to believe; therefore it is their duty to believe

Repentance does not exist in isolation from faith. No man can truly repent without exercising saving faith. Nor can he savingly believe without truly repenting. He must turn from sin in turning to God. ‘Repent, and believe’, said Christ (Mark 1:15). ‘A great number believed and turned to the Lord’ (Acts 11:21). ‘Whatever is not from faith is sin’ (Rom. 14:23); repentance must, therefore, be from faith. And both faith and repentance are the gift of God to his elect (Acts 5:31; Eph. 2:8). What is more, the same benefits are promised to both repentance and faith, unitedly called ‘turning to God’ (Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 8:22; 10:43; 11:17-18,21; 13:38-39; 16:31; 26:18-20; Rom. 3:22; 4:24; 10:10; 1 Cor. 1:21; Gal. 2:16; 1 Thess. 1:3-6,9-10 *etc.*) To try to drive a wedge between faith and repentance is futile.

indiscriminate offers to sinners in general, but only to the elect; the apostles *presented* the gospel to all, but never *invited* all. And this is the way we must go on. He went further. Confusing the extraordinary and ordinary powers of the apostles, he jumped from our inability to heal miraculously, to argue that we have no power or right to command sinners to believe. Ridiculously, he claimed that whenever the apostles (by their extraordinary powers) knew that an elect sinner was present, then they would command and persuade such to believe [I know of no occasion when any apostle did as Hawker said. If he was right, then every apostolic command to sinners would have been 100% successful. But we know that Peter had less than 100% success when he commanded sinners to repent and be baptised, and that ‘those who gladly received his word’ did so (Acts 2:38-41). The rest – though they were commanded in precisely the same terms – they received precisely the same command – did not. See also Acts 3:12 – 4:4; 8:9-23; 13:13-48, especially 48; 14:1-2,15,19; 17:30-34; 28:23-31. And this applies not only to the apostles. See Prov. 1:20-33; Matt. 23:37; Luke 13:34; John 5:40; Rom. 10:21]. We, of course, [claimed Hawker,] not having apostolic powers, cannot command or seek to persuade any sinner to believe’.

Now this is where I part company with Ella. On repentance, we are of one mind; *on faith, we are not*. On repentance, Ella and I are agreed: Sinners must be commanded to repent, and it is their duty so to do. In other words, we both hold to duty repentance. But whereas I say the same for faith, Ella does not.

Does it matter? Very much so! R.J.Baldwin asked: ‘Is saving faith a duty?... Does God command all men to believe?’ As he said: ‘These are extremely important questions, because if God commands all men to believe, and we... preach it not, then we are not preaching all the counsel of God, and therefore our preaching is not consistent with our divine commission’.¹¹

What was Ella’s position? ‘Does the Bible invite [command] all men indiscriminately and everywhere to believe?’ he asked. Here is his unequivocal answer: ‘No, says the Bible. Repentance must come first... When God grants repentance we may talk of belief, but not before’.¹² In other words, only repentant sinners may be commanded to believe. Consequently, according to Ella, the unrepentant must be commanded to repent – even though they cannot – but the unbelieving must not be commanded to believe. Certainly the unrepentant must not be commanded to believe, even though they must be commanded to repent. It is only the repentant who are to be commanded to believe.

I strongly disagree with Ella. John Calvin was clear:

Those who think that repentance precedes faith instead of flowing from, or being produced by it, as the fruit of the tree, have never understood its nature.¹³

¹¹ R.J.Baldwin: *Is Saving Faith a Duty?*, being the paper read at The Strict and Particular Baptist Minister’s Fellowship Conference, London, on April 18th, 1961 p1, my numbering, the paper being unnumbered. Baldwin’s question was rhetorical. He did not believe saving faith is a duty for all men.

¹² Ella: *The Free Offer* p61.

¹³ John Calvin: *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, A new translation by Henry Beveridge, James Clarke & Co., Limited, London, 1957, Vol.1 p510.

I go further. Not only is Ella's logic baffling, it is not possible biblically to discriminate between faith and repentance as he did. John Colquhoun:

In the moment of regeneration the Holy Spirit implants... at the same instant the root or principle of saving faith and true repentance. He gives these two graces together and at once in respect of time; and therefore, though in our conception of them, they are to be distinguished, yet they are never to be separated from each other. The principle of faith in the regenerate soul... is not in point of time before that of repentance, nor is the principle of repentance before that of faith.¹⁴

C.H.Spurgeon made the same point in his usual pithy way: Faith and repentance, he said, 'are like the Siamese twins; they are born together, and they could not live asunder, but must die if you attempt to separate them.'¹⁵ Faith always walks side by side with his weeping sister, true repentance. They are born in the same house at the same hour, and they will live in the same heart every day... They are so united, so married and allied together, that they never can be parted'.¹⁶

¹⁴ John Colquhoun: *Repentance*, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1965, p105. Indeed, Colquhoun, entitling his chapter, 'The priority of the acting of saving faith to the exercise of true repentance' (Colquhoun pp105-118), argued faith comes before repentance. As did Gill: Repentance and faith – 'where the one is, there the other is; they are wrought in the soul at one and the same time... the one is not before the other in order of time... repentance is mentioned before faith, not that it precedes it... faith as to its inward exercise on Christ is full as early [as repentance], *if not earlier*; souls *first* look to Christ by faith, and *then* they mourn in tears of evangelical repentance' (Gill: *Commentary* Vol.5 p961, emphasis mine). I myself would not try to dissect the operation of the Spirit too precisely (John 3:8).

¹⁵ I am quoting the Spurgeon of 1860, needless to say, not a surgeon of the twenty-first century.

¹⁶ C.H.Spurgeon: *The New Park Street Pulpit... 1860*, Vol.6, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1964, p346; see also C.H.Spurgeon: *The Soul Winner, or, How to Lead Sinners to the Saviour*, Pilgrim Publications, Pasadena, 1978, pp31-32.

What is more, by saying only the repentant may be commanded to believe, Ella has opened a Pandora's box.¹⁷ Let me explain. How can a preacher tell who is repentant? But he has to know, otherwise he cannot command his hearers to believe. And the sinner has to know he is repentant – truly repentant – before he can believe. I will not digress to develop the point,¹⁸ but when this notion has gripped preaching, it has had a dire effect. It has its own vocabulary. Only those sinners who are 'fit for Christ', or 'prepared' or 'sensible',¹⁹ sinners, may be commanded to believe. But the truth is, there is no biblical way a sinner can know he is warranted to believe because he is repentant or 'sensible'. The Spirit convicts sinners of sin because they do not believe in Christ (John 16:8-9). We are never told he will convict repentant sinners that they are truly repentant so that they might then believe. Nor are we told the Spirit will inform a preacher when his hearers are repentant, so that he may call them to faith. Such promises do not exist in Scripture. In other words, there is no biblical way a sinner can know he is repentant and so may believe, and there is no way a preacher can know his hearers are repentant and so can command them to believe.

Spurgeon put it like this:

We have a new legalism to fight with in our... churches. There are men and women who think they must not believe on Christ till they feel their sins up to a most agonising point. They think they must feel a certain degree of sorrow, a high degree of sense

¹⁷ 'A process that once activated will generate many unmanageable problems' (*Concise Oxford Dictionary*).

¹⁸ Having already published much against preparationism. In addition, see, for instance, C.H.Spurgeon: *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit... 1863*, Vol.9, Passmore and Alabaster, London, 1864, pp529-540. Spurgeon frequently denied preparationism.

¹⁹ 'Sensible' sinners are the regenerate who, conscious of their sin and need of salvation, repent, and desire Christ. They are, therefore, demonstrating that they must be elect. Lest I should be misunderstood, although I speak against preparationism, I am convinced a sinner must be convicted of his sin, and will be convicted of his sin, before he comes to Christ, but his conviction is not the warrant for his being invited to come. He is invited because he is a sinner, and he must come as a sinner; but he will only come when he is a sensible sinner.

of need before they may come to Christ at all... Man... come and take Christ just as he is, and come to him just as you are. 'But, sir, *may* I come? I am not invited to come'. Yes you are: 'Whosoever will, let him come'. Don't believe that the invitations of the gospel are given only to characters [that is, those who meet certain conditions];²⁰ they are, some of them, unlimited invitations. It is the duty of every man to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. It is every man's solemn duty to trust Christ, not because of anything that man is, or is not, but because he is commanded to do it... Trust now in his precious blood [and] you are saved.²¹

'Many minds... make repentance a preparation for Christ',²² said Spurgeon, and consequently argue: 'Sir, I must repent before I come to Christ'. To all such, Spurgeon issued this challenge: 'Find such a passage in the word if you can'.²³

As I say, it is at this point that I part company with Ella. On repentance, we are of one mind; on faith, we are not.

For example, as I have shown, on repentance, Ella felt able to write:

Scripture teaches man's duty to *repent*... The Christian's calling and duty in evangelisation is to follow Christ's example, and call and command sinners to *repentance*... Sinners must be called, commanded, even beseeched to *repent* and turn from their evil ways. God commands all to *repent*, and grants *repentance* to some who would not otherwise *repent*.²⁴

But not:

Scripture teaches man's duty to *believe*... The Christian's calling and duty in evangelisation is to follow Christ's example, and call

²⁰ See Appendix 2, 'Are Gospel Invitations to All?' in my *Offer* pp163-184.

²¹ Spurgeon: *New* Vol.6 p107, emphasis his. And in the same volume (not to mention the rest of the books of his sermons), see pp59-64,171-172, 218-219,397-399,403-406.

²² C.H.Spurgeon: *The New Park Street and Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit... 1861*, Vol.7, Passmore and Alabaster, London, 1862, p204; see also same volume pp108-109.

²³ Spurgeon: *New* Vol.6 p60.

²⁴ Ella: *The Free Offer* pp58,71.

and command sinners to *believe*... Sinners must be called, commanded, even beseeched to *believe* and turn from their evil ways. God commands all to *believe*, and grants *saving faith* to some who would not otherwise *believe*.²⁵

Ella was right, of course, to say: ‘The Christian’s calling and duty in evangelisation is to follow Christ’s example and call and command sinners to repentance’.²⁶ But why did Ella stop short? Why did he tell only half the story? We are in no doubt as to what Christ did. We have his example. And, as Ella said, we must ‘follow Christ’s example’. Let us do as Christ did, therefore, when he went to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God. How did he preach? What did he say? He commanded all his hearers to ‘repent, and believe’ (Mark 1:14-15). Christ did not divide faith from repentance. He preached both at the same time, to the same sinners, and in the same breath. Christ knew nothing of Ella’s division between repentance and faith. So why did Ella not say we should ‘follow Christ’s example’, and command sinners to repent *and believe*? Notice Christ did not command sinners to repent, and, *when they had repented, then* command them to believe. Oh no! He commanded all his hearers to repent and believe at the same time. Repentance and faith go hand in hand. The gospel commands all sinners to repent *and* believe, and all sinners are duty-bound to repent *and* believe.

Paul certainly followed Christ, ‘testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ’ (Acts 20:21). It would be the merest quibble to say the word ‘command’ is not in the verse. No. It is not. But whatever Paul did as regards repentance – and, as Ella agreed, we know Paul commanded his hearers to repent – he did the same for faith, and did it at the same time. There is no suggestion he divided or distinguished the two in any way.²⁷ As he explained to Agrippa, he ‘declared... that [Jews]... and... Gentiles... should repent, turn

²⁵ As I noted above on repentance, unless Christ grants faith, no sinner can or will believe.

²⁶ Ella: *The Free Offer* p58.

²⁷ See Gill: *Commentary* Vol.5 pp960-961. Note how Gill said Paul was ‘urging and insisting upon’ both repentance and faith, and that both were spiritual.

to God, and do works befitting repentance' (Acts 26:20). Note the 'should'; sinners '*should* repent', they '*should*... turn to God'. This is the language of command, of duty. And if 'turning to God' does not include trusting Christ, what does it include? Should sinners 'turn to God' *in unbelief*? Thomas Goodwin: 'As Christ did... so did the apostles also; they did still put men upon believing as well as upon repenting... They always held it forth clearly and nakedly to them'.²⁸

John Owen connected repentance with the notion of 'duty'. As it is the duty to believe, so it is the duty to repent:

After the angels had sinned, God never once called them to repentance... He has no forgiveness for them, and therefore would require no repentance of them. It is not, nor ever was, a duty incumbent upon them to repent. Nor is it so unto the damned in hell. God requires it not of them, nor is it their duty... Assignation then, of repentance, is a revelation of forgiveness. God would not call upon a sinful creature to humble itself and bewail its sin if there were no way of recovery or relief... What, then does God aim at in and by [various scriptures]?... It is to bring [the sinner] to repentance... [And] no repentance is acceptable with God but what is built or leans on the faith of forgiveness... [For God] to prescribe repentance as a duty unto sinners, without a foundation of pardon and forgiveness in himself, is inconsistent with... all [the] glorious excellencies and perfections of the nature of God... Repenting is for sinners only... It is for them, and them only. It was no duty for Adam in Eden, it is none for the angels in heaven, nor for the damned in hell... [In] Isa. 55:7, [God] speaks... to men perversely wicked, and such as make a trade of sinning. What does he call them unto? Plainly, to repentance, to the duty we have insisted on.²⁹

Of course faith is the gift of God; but so is repentance.³⁰ This is not at issue. Repentance, according to Ella,³¹ is commanded – and

²⁸ Thomas Goodwin: *Of the Object and Acts of Justifying Faith in The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, Vol.8, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1985, p584.

²⁹ John Owen: *An Exposition upon Psalm 130 in The Works of John Owen*, Vol.6, edited by William H.Goold, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1966, pp437-440.

³⁰ As Ella stated (Ella: *The Free Offer* pp58-59).

therefore must be a duty – so why not faith? If Ella was right to dismiss duty faith by saying: ‘The command to exercise duty faith³² can only be given to those who have a faith to exercise dutifully’, why did he not apply the same argument to repentance – which he listed with faith – and which he said sinners are commanded to do, and which he joined with faith as the gift of God?³³ If the command to believe implies the ability to comply – as Ella alleged – why does the same not apply to repentance? But neither command implies any ability. When Ella cited Gill, who ‘could not believe [that it] was... the duty of the evangelist... to preach that sinners were duty-bound to exercise a faith savingly of which they knew nothing, and of which they had nothing’, what now of commanding the unrepentant to repent?³⁴ How

³¹ And Scripture, of course.

³² Does any free-offer preacher tell his hearers to ‘exercise duty faith’? I don’t. The same goes for duty repentance – see below. I tell sinners to repent and believe, that it is their duty so to do, or words to that effect.

³³ Ella: *The Free Offer* pp58-59,62.

³⁴ Ella: *The Free Offer* pp62,67. And what of Gill, who, when speaking of the one who ‘with his heart, or heartily... believes in Christ for righteousness; which righteousness... is imputed to him for justification’, declared: ‘Faith, as an act of ours, is a duty; for whatsoever we do, in a religious way, we do but what is our duty to do’? Gill, I realise, was here arguing for eternal justification, tortuously defending the truth that righteousness, not faith, is imputed for justification, and, as a consequence, he dismissed duty faith as belonging to the law. I do not want to digress into tackling eternal justification, so I will say no more about it here – except that I heartily agree with Gill when he said ‘it is God, and not faith, that justifies’, and ‘faith is not the cause... of justification’, but I disagree with him when he said ‘faith is... the fruit and effect of justification’ (Gill: *Sermons* Vol.4 pp185-187,197). No! Faith is the *means* of justification, and is the fruit and effect of *election*. See my note in chapter 5. To return to the main point: Gill’s words – that ‘faith, as an act of ours, is a duty’ – are right. Even so, I admit that Gill limited this requirement to the sensible: If God reveals his gospel inwardly to sinners, ‘by the spirit of wisdom, in the knowledge of Christ; or God by his word calls men effectually by his grace, and reveals his Son in them, as well as to them; this sort of revelation comes with such power and influence upon the mind, as certainly to produce a true and living faith in the soul, which infallibly issues in eternal life and

could Ella continue to argue it *is* the duty of the unrepentant to repent? If the argument destroys duty faith, it destroys duty repentance.

The truth is, the gospel never restricts God's commands to what sinners are able to do by nature.³⁵ It pays not the slightest attention to it; rather, it commands them to do what they cannot do. The basis of the command is God's authority, and not, I repeat, the sinner's ability. God demands repentance, nothing less, even though sinners cannot repent. And God also demands saving faith, nothing less, even though sinners cannot believe savingly. I have already mentioned Christ's miraculous cure of the man with the withered hand, by which he aptly illustrated the principle. Let me glance at it again. He told the man to 'step forward'; then he told the man to stretch out his hand. It was an impossibility, but 'he stretched it out' (Mark 3:3-5)! Observe the difference in the two commands. In the first, Christ told the man to step forward – something he could do; this does not illustrate the gospel. In the second, Christ told the man to do what was impossible for him to do; and he did it! This *does* illustrate the gospel! Likewise, the dead Lazarus came out of the grave, the widow's dead son got out of his coffin at Nain, Jairus' dead

happiness; and of such persons, and of such only, acts of special [that is, spiritual or saving] faith in Christ are required' (Gill: *Sermons* Vol.1 pp122,135). Gill, however, was clearly arguing in a circle; he required saving faith only of those who had already exercised it! Indeed, in the same sentence he actually called them 'believers'; as they were, since God had already produced 'a true and living faith' in them. But it is *unbelievers* who have to believe! And one thing unbelievers do not have is a living faith!

³⁵ Whoever and whatever Ella was speaking of when he said 'Fullerite' preaching 'combines the free offer of salvation with the notion that believing in Christ is the natural duty of all men according to natural abilities', and teaching 'two routes for salvation' (Ella: *The Free Offer* p19), I hope he exempted me and my preaching. I suspect, however, from what he said immediately after these words, he had me in his sights. If so, let me state my position loud and clear: I believe and preach nothing of the sort; nothing of the sort, I say! I do not 'preach to persuade men according to their natural abilities to repent and believe on... purely rational grounds' (Ella: *The Free Offer* p22).

daughter got up, the paralytic walked with his bed, the deaf man heard, the dumb spoke, the blind saw, the lame leaped, and so on – all miracles, impossible by human power, but all accomplished by Christ's command. Furthermore, it was Lazarus' duty to come out of the grave, Jairus' daughter's duty to get up, the paralytic's duty to walk with his bed, and so on.

It is exactly the same with the gospel. God commands the sinner to believe, and the sinner's duty is to obey. Ella, however, stoutly disagreed. He thought sinners may not be commanded to believe, because they have no power to believe, and have no faith to believe with.³⁶ Only awakened, sensible, regenerate, repentant – even believing – sinners may be commanded to believe. But this is wrong, utterly wrong. Christ did not command a man who had a healthy hand to stretch it out; he commanded a man with a withered hand. Christ did not command a man with excellent sight to see. Christ did not tell an able-bodied man to walk. In its call for salvation, the gospel does not command believers to believe, the repentant to repent, the awakened to live, the looking to look, the seeing to see. The preacher's task is not to command living sinners to believe; he is to command dead sinners! The gospel commands sinners to do what they cannot do, and although these commands do not inform them of their ability, they do tell them their duty. What is more, God gives grace with his command so that the withered hand can be stretched out. In the same way, the unbelieving are enabled to believe, and the unrepentant are enabled to repent of their sins.³⁷

³⁶ See above for Ella's citation from Gill.

³⁷ See Spurgeon: *Soul Winner* pp174-177. Compare God's command to Ezekiel to prophesy to the dry bones (Ezek. 37:1-14). Take the raising of Lazarus as an illustration of the principle. We have the sinner's state: 'Lazarus is dead'. We have the gospel call to the dead sinner: 'Lazarus, come forth!' (As above, the command to take away the stone (John 11:39) does not illustrate the gospel). We see the result: 'He who had died came out' (John 11:14,43,44). I admit, of course, that in the miracles, specific individuals were commanded and the 'success rate' was 100%. The preacher of the gospel, however, issues the gospel command promiscuously; it is God who, by his secret working, makes it effectual in the case of the elect.

Spurgeon raised the objection of one who ‘wants to know how it is that men are bidden to come – and yet we are taught in Scripture that no man can come – and he must have that cleared up; just as if the poor man who had a withered arm, when Christ said: “Stretch out your arm”, had replied: “Lord, I have got a difficulty in my mind; I want to know how you can tell me to stretch out my arm when it is withered”. Suppose when Christ had said to Lazarus: “Come forth”, Lazarus could have said: “I have a difficulty in my mind; how can a dead man come forth?”’

Spurgeon replied:

Why, know this, vain man! When Christ says: ‘Stretch out your arm’, he gives you power to stretch out your arm with the command, and the difficulty is solved in practice; though I believe it never will be solved in theory. If men want to have theology mapped out to them, as they would have a map of England; if they want to have every little village and every hedgerow in the gospel kingdom mapped out to them, they will not find it anywhere but in the Bible; and they will find it so mapped out there that the years of a Methuselah would not suffice to find out every little thing in it. We must come to Christ and learn, not learn and then come to Christ.³⁸

Berridge, commenting on Acts 16:31, said: ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith, as wrought in us by the Holy Ghost, is a grace of the Spirit; but as commanded in the word, it is a duty – a duty of high rank; and help may be had for its performance’.³⁹

I agree with Ella when he said ‘no true Christian would deny that man is responsible for not believing’.⁴⁰ But this raises an important question: How then can it not be man’s obligation to believe? As John Elias put it: ‘If [since] unbelief of the gospel is a sin, is not believing it a duty?’ Indeed, it is! But this in itself leads to an inevitable conclusion; in light of the fact that sinners have a duty to believe, ministers therefore must have a duty to

³⁸ C.H.Spurgeon: *The New Park Street Pulpit... 1858*, Vol.4, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1964, p439, emphasis his.

³⁹ Berridge p175.

⁴⁰ Ella: *The Free Offer* p55.

preach it. Otherwise, as Elias asked: ‘How can it be a duty of some to believe what is not the duty of ministers to preach?’⁴¹

But as for preaching duty faith, and the sinner’s duty to believe, some common misunderstandings cloud the subject. Elias swept them away:

No one ever saw before he believed in Christ that he was elected or redeemed. So there is no need of preaching general redemption as a ground to call lost sinners to Christ; and there is no need of preaching that man can of himself believe the gospel, as a ground to encourage ruined sinners to believe in Christ.⁴² Not the ability of fallen man is the rule or measure of his duty, or the ground for the justice of God to require it. [Conversely,] the inability of man is no excuse for his disobedience. His sin, his enmity, are his inability. He ought to be ashamed on the account of them... [Of course,] faith is the gift of God. But notwithstanding this, faith is the duty of man.⁴³

Ella thought ‘the New Testament method of preaching is to... preach the need for repentance and the need for faith in the Saviour’.⁴⁴ But this, reader, falls a long way short of ‘the New Testament method of preaching’. The New Testament preacher does not preach merely the *need* for repentance and faith; he calls for it, he commands it, he demands it. Ella himself said so concerning repentance, but stopped short of saying it about faith. Why?

‘The main weakness of the free offer dogma’, Ella argued, ‘is that in warranting and offering salvation to all, sinners are being

⁴¹ Elias was not saying that only some have the duty to believe; clearly, he held that it is the duty of all men. Rather, as I say, Elias was making the obvious point; namely, since sinners have the duty to believe, preachers have the duty to preach it.

⁴² Elias was not saying that it is acceptable to preach general redemption and creature power; both are false. He was rightly arguing that neither is the basis of duty faith or the free offer – mistaken allegations which are often made.

⁴³ Edward Morgan: *John Elias: Life, Letters and Essays*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1973, pp317-318; see also pp368-372.

⁴⁴ Ella: *The Free Offer* p58.

offered the gospel who have no ability of their own to accept it'.⁴⁵ This is not its weakness,⁴⁶ but allowing it for the moment, if Ella is right, what now of commanding all sinners to repent? All sinners must be called and commanded to repent even though no sinner has any power to comply. Ella, as I have shown, agreed with this. Why not, therefore, the same for faith?

Of course it is not right to appeal to the sinner's 'sense of duty' to repent or believe.⁴⁷ I don't know of any free-offer preacher who does it. Sinners are dead in sin, totally depraved, without any sense of the duty to repent or believe. There is nothing to 'appeal to'. But this is not the issue.

* * *

Enough of this skirmishing. It is high time we got to grips with the question. The facts are simple. The sinner must be commanded to repent; it is his duty. Ella and I agree. The sinner must be commanded to believe; it is his duty. So I say, but Ella disagrees. But what I say or Ella says is of little importance. What does Scripture say? What does Ella make of those places in Scripture where sinners – as sinners – are commanded to believe? In my book, *The Gospel Offer is Free*, for lack of space, I took just two, both of which Ella raised,⁴⁸ namely, Isaiah 45:22 and John 6:28-29.

But I leave this article at this point. As I say, it is only those who, rejecting preparationism, and preaching the gospel with all the freeness warranted by new-covenant principles, can address

⁴⁵ Ella: *The Free Offer* p56. The free-offer preacher, of course, can only warrant (guarantee) salvation to sinners on condition that they believe: 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved' (Acts 16:31).

⁴⁶ It is foolishness in the eyes of men, but it is God's ordained way of calling sinners (1 Cor. 1:17-21).

⁴⁷ Ella: *The Free Offer* p58.

⁴⁸ Unfortunately, Ella spent little time on his 'exposition' of the first, most of it attacking John Murray's view. And although he said he was going to 'look closely' at the second, he devoted only two small paragraphs to his 'exposition' of it, mostly attacking Robert Oliver concerning Andrew Fuller (Ella: *The Free Offer* pp26-28,54-55).

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sinner in a fully scriptural way. Consequently, I appeal to all those of us who are new-covenant theologians to demonstrate this by making sure that we really do preach the gospel in all its biblical fullness and freeness.

‘New-Covenant Theology Isn’t Monolithic’

In a recent interview,¹ Richard Barcellos spoke somewhat disparagingly about new-covenant theology because it is not monolithic.² This, in effect, can only mean that new-covenant theology cannot be taken seriously. In addition, I suppose, Barcellos is contrasting it to covenant theology, implying – boasting? – that the latter is monolithic. I think a comment is called for.

Of course, Barcellos is right in saying that new-covenant theology is not monolithic; that is, it is impossible to give it a definition to which every one of its advocates would be willing to sign up. Having said that, there would be overwhelming agreement between its advocates as to the essence of the theology. Nevertheless, let me grant Barcellos his point. New-covenant theology is not monolithic.

But let me take this a bit further. Does it mean that covenant theologians should not take new-covenant men and their theology seriously? More than that, that they have no need to weigh the leading claims of that theology, and test them against Scripture? Are they, in fact, turning this lack of a monolithic system into an excuse?

I take it further still. What about this cry for the monolithic? Would Barcellos show us *any* monolithic system in the religious world? How about the Roman Church? Surely, if anything is monolithic, Rome is? Ah! Put a Jesuit, a Dominican, a Franciscan, an Augustinian, a Cistercian, a Benedictine... in the same room, and see if the notion that the Roman Church is

¹ ‘New Covenant Theology & The Law’ (sermonaudio.com), 29th Jan. 2015.

² ‘A massive unchanging system with a unified structure’. Barcellos concentrated on the fact that there is some fluidity, some variation, in what new-covenant theologians teach.

monolithic stands up. And then think about Rome's history! Rome, for all its vaunted claims, is anything but monolithic! I remember the time when the food giant, Heinz, had an advert: '57 Varieties'. So popular has this proved, 'Heinz 57' has come into the English language. It could certainly be applied to the Roman 'monolith'. As it could to Islam, Hinduism, and all the rest.

What about Communism? Make no mistake, it's a religion. Surely Communism is a monolith isn't it? Try asking Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, Khrushchev, Gorbachev and Putin... And then add Mao Zedong to the mix.

Of course, there is a way of producing a monolith, if you really want one. A story has done the rounds. At a meeting which took place about 50 years ago, an advocate of Communism was encouraging party workers. 'Comrades', he bellowed, 'when the revolution comes, it will be strawberries and cream every day!' A young lady timidly raised her hand. 'But I don't like strawberries and cream', she said. 'Comrade', came the reply, 'when the revolution comes, you *will* like strawberries and cream!'

It is easy to smile at these glaring inconsistencies and the joke. But let me home in a bit. What about Barcellos himself? He's a covenant theologian. In fact, he is a *Baptist* covenant-theologian. Hmm! Interesting adjective, that. It differentiates him from infant-baptiser covenant-theologians, does it not? In their turn, some infant-baptiser covenant-theologians are Federal-Vision covenant-theologians, while other covenant theologians regard this as error.³ Not quite the monolith we were led to believe, is it, this covenant theology!

But let me concentrate on covenant theology as it stands. May I ask Barcellos to let us have his view of his system's two great covenants? I refer, not to the two biblical covenants we should be talking about – that is, the Mosaic and the new – but covenant theology's invented 'covenant of grace' and 'covenant of

³ Just to note that I regard both as unscriptural.

works'.⁴ Would he let us know if all his fellow covenant-theologians would agree with him?

The truth is, of course, as Barcellos surely knows, Reformed teachers are themselves far from clear or consistent about their two covenants – which some will admit to. Take the covenant of grace. Covenant theologians are not sure, for instance, about who is in their covenant of grace – some think even 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.⁵ But they are of their own making. What is Barcellos' view?

As for 'the covenant of redemption', although Kaspar Olevianus had hinted at the idea of this covenant in 1585, it had to wait until Johannes Cocceius (1648) and John Owen⁶ produced their works. This, too, has met with stiff opposition from other covenant theologians. Robert Letham (a sympathetic writer) summarised their objections: It leads to error over the trinity; indeed, the covenant of redemption itself is explicitly 'not trinitarian at all'. It sets the will of the Father and the Son in opposition. It excludes the Holy Spirit. In short, as Letham stated: 'The formulation is

⁴ To prevent cluttering the page and annoying readers, I will largely drop the quotation marks for these two covenants, *but they should be there all the way through!*

⁵ See my *Christ* pp64-110,360-408.

⁶ See, for instance, apuritansmind.com/covenant.../john-owen-and-the-covenant-of-redemption.

mistaken'.⁷ Does Barcellos hold to the covenant of redemption? Or does he agree with those covenant theologians who reject it as mistaken, or worse?

And what about the Mosaic covenant? Was it the covenant of grace or the covenant of works? Opinions are sharply divided, self-contradictory and, at best, muddled among Reformed teachers. Letham again:

There have been some differences [among covenant theologians] over the place of the Mosaic covenant, differences that are widely recognised as intra-mural and more apparent than real.

I can only remark that this smacks of whistling in the dark! But what does Barcellos think? Does he agree with those covenant theologians who think the Mosaic covenant was the covenant of grace, or those who think it was the covenant of works, or those who argue it was the covenant of grace looking like the covenant of works? I have fully documented all this.⁸ Where does Barcellos stand on this vital matter?

As for the covenant of works, as Letham explained, though it was hinted at by Augustine, and again in 1562 by Zacharias Ursinus, it owes its inception to Dudley Fenner in 1585. Following Fenner, 'a spate of theologians' produced works on the newly-defined covenant, but 'it was by no means universally taught at this time', and was not adopted by any Confession until Westminster, sixty years later. And 'even in the 1640s, unanimity was lacking in the existence of this covenant'. Indeed, some were opposed to the notion. Ever since – to this very day (even down to my works) – 'the covenant of works has come under severe criticism', and many, including covenant theologians themselves, have raised insurmountable problems with it. James B. Torrance, for instance, argued that it has produced a legal approach to the gospel, 'with disastrous consequences for both theology and piety'. Where does Barcellos stand on this?

⁷ Robert Letham: 'The Concept of Covenant in the History of Theology', Affinity Theological Study Conference: *The End of the Law?*, February, 2009, pp1-39.

⁸ As before, see my *Christ* pp64-110, 360-408.

I quote from my *Christ*:

Covenant theologians have their internecine differences, and some are prepared to own it in print: 'There are different representations respecting the parties in the covenant of grace. Some considered... others [considered]... and still others... distinguish two covenants [of grace], namely, the covenant of redemption... and... the covenant of grace. [There is a] great deal of confusion that is incidental [to one of these] representations, [whereas another] is easier to understand'. God is the first party in the covenant of grace, but, according to Reformed teachers themselves, 'it is not easy to determine precisely who the second party is... Reformed theologians are not unanimous in answering this question. Some say [one thing]... others assert [another]... The great majority of them, however, maintain that [God] entered into covenant relationship with the elect or the elect sinner in Christ... Even unregenerate and unconverted persons may be in the covenant'. Thomas Boston rejected 'the old and widely accepted way of distinguishing the covenant of redemption... from the covenant of grace'. Jonathan Edwards said 'he did not agree with how [Boston] set forth the covenant of grace. Indeed, he says he does not understand his scheme... The real significance of covenant theology, as it passed from [Heinrich] Bullinger to the Puritans, was not that it solved anything'. 'Although it stemmed from a branch of Reformed thinking which wanted to avoid scholastic definitions and mechanical metaphors, its real significance was its conscious ambivalence'. 'What induced these theologians to speak of the covenant as made with the elect in spite of all the practical difficulties involved?' Among Reformed teachers, 'there have been several deviating opinions respecting the Sinaitic covenant'. In light of all this internal dissension, the answer to the following question raised by Berkhof would seem to be self-evident: 'Why did this doctrine [of the covenant] meet with little favour outside of Reformed circles?'⁹

⁹ Louis Berkhof: *Systematic Theology*, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1959, pp265,273,288-289,298-300; John Macleod: *Scottish Theology in Relation to Church History since the Reformation*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1974, p147; Norman Pettit: *The Heart Prepared: Grace and Conversion in Puritan Spiritual Life*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1966, p219; ; see Boston:

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The right view, continuing to quote from my *Christ*:

We... agree in asserting the unity of God's purpose through the ages, but the selection of the word 'covenant' to describe this unity [has] lent itself to important misunderstandings.

In the New Testament the word 'covenant' is almost always used to assert discontinuity. The evidence for this is overwhelming.

This... strongly suggests that no such covenant [as covenant theologians speak of it] is referred to in the New Testament.

The covenant under which Christians now live is called *new*.

Whatever else this [new] covenant may be, it will be unlike the Mosaic covenant. The Mosaic covenant was one thing; this covenant is another.

The Lord declares its substantive dissimilarity to the covenant that preceded it.

The strong contrast between the Lord Jesus Christ, as the central figure in the new covenant, and his predecessors, argues strongly for a newness that recognises a large measure of discontinuity.

Continuing to quote my *Christ*:

In Hebrews 1:1-2, 'the writer... gives us three contrasts... By ignoring the common use of *covenant* in the New Testament' to indicate discontinuity, 'theologians have tended to subsume all the covenants under the single "covenant of grace", and in the process have largely ironed out the important differences between them'. 'The new covenant is *plainly* superior to the old'. 'While scholars [believers] may not agree on what exactly the "not like" [of Jer. 31:32] entails, it [is necessary for] everyone to discover [think out] in what way or ways the two covenants are different'. Even covenant theologians have to admit 'the fundamental and most obvious difference between the old and the new, namely, that the new is NEW', listing thirteen differences between the Abrahamic covenant and the new covenant.¹⁰

Memoirs of... Thomas Boston, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1988, xxviii.

¹⁰ Tom Wells: 'What is This Thing called the New Covenant?', *Reformation & Revival Journal*, editor John H. Armstrong, Reformation & Revival Ministries, Inc., Carol Stream, Vol.6, Number 3, Summer 1997, pp22-24; Carl B. Hoch, Jr.: 'The New Covenant: Its Problems, Certainties and Some Proposals', *Reformation & Revival Journal*, editor

The covenant theologian, Geoffrey Thomas, admitted that the covenant of works is 'something of a mystery', but, he replied, if we reject the concept, 'we do not have the biblical way of thinking – we are simply sinners thinking'.¹¹ Thus, in a stroke, Thomas writes off countless worthy men and women!

Yet even covenant theologians have to admit: 'The widespread denial of the covenant of works... makes it imperative to examine its scriptural foundation with care'. 'It must be admitted that the term... is not found in the first three chapters of Genesis'. The practice is 'justified' by reference to 'trinity'.¹² The answer to that, of course, is that "'trinity"... stands for a teaching of the Bible which cannot be expressed with any single Bible word'.¹³ 'Covenant', however, is a biblical word, and should be used only in the way the Bible uses it.

According to Berkhof, covenant theologians claim that 'the parallel which Paul draws between Adam and Christ... can only be explained on the assumption that Adam, like Christ, was the head of a covenant... The righteousness of Christ is imputed to us [the elect], without any personal work on our part to merit it. And... this... [is] a perfect parallel to the manner in which the guilt of Adam is imputed to us. This naturally leads to the conclusion that Adam stood in covenant relationship to his descendants'.¹⁴

But this, in turn is answered by another covenant theologian, John Murray:

John H. Armstrong, Reformation & Revival Ministries, Inc., Carol Stream, Vol.6, Number 3, Summer 1997, pp61-62, emphasis mine; Erroll Hulse: 'What is Covenant Theology?', *Reformation Today*, Leeds, 1980, pp24-25.

¹¹ Geoffrey Thomas: 'Becoming a Christian – Covenant Theology: A Historical Survey', The Westminster Conference, 1972: *Becoming a Christian*, The Westminster Conference

¹² Berkhof p213; Walter J. Chantry: *God's Righteous Kingdom: Focussing on the Law's Connection with the Gospel*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1980, p45; *The Covenants – Of Works and Of Grace*, p2.

¹³ Wells p25.

¹⁴ Berkhof pp213-214.

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This administration has often been denoted 'The Covenant of Works' [but] the term is not felicitous... [and] it is not designated a covenant in Scripture. Hosea 6:7 may be interpreted otherwise [than the usual Reformed view] and does not provide the basis for such a construction of the Adamic economy... It should never be confused with what Scripture calls the old covenant or the first covenant (Jer. 31:31-34; 2 Cor. 3:14; Heb. 8:7,13). The first or old covenant is Sinaitic. And not only must this confusion in denotation be avoided, but also [so must] any attempt to interpret the Mosaic covenant in terms of the Adamic institution. The latter could apply only to the state of innocence, and to Adam alone as representative head. The view that in the Mosaic covenant there was a repetition of the so-called covenant of works, current among covenant theologians, is a grave misconception and involves an erroneous construction of the Mosaic covenant, as well as a failure to assess the uniqueness of the Adamic administration... The obedience Christ rendered fulfilled the obedience in which Adam failed... but it would not be correct to say, however, that Christ's obedience was the same in content or demand. Christ was called on to obey in radically different conditions, and required to fulfil radically different demands. Christ was a sin-bearer and the climactic demand was [for him] to die. This was not true of Adam. Christ came to redeem; not so Adam. So Christ rendered the whole-souled totality [of?] obedience in which Adam failed, but under totally different conditions and with incomparably greater demands.

Unfortunately, Murray spoiled this somewhat because he thought 'the Mosaic covenant was distinctly redemptive in character and was continuous with and extensive of [as?] the Abrahamic covenant'.¹⁵ Nevertheless, his original point stands. What does Barcellos think? Does he agree with Berkhof or Murray? Or does he have a third view?

John Murray again:

It would not be... in the interests of theological conservation or theological progress to think that the covenant theology is in all respects definitive and that there is no further need for

¹⁵ John Murray: *The Adamic Administration*, in *Collected Writings of John Murray, Volume 2: Systematic Theology*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1977 Vol.2 pp49-50,58.

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correction, modification, and explanation... It appears to me that the covenant theology, notwithstanding the finesse of analysis with which it was worked out and the grandeur of its articulated systematisation, needs recasting.¹⁶

He could go further! Recasting? Rejecting, more like.

I think all this conclusively shows that covenant theology is far from monolithic. I wonder if we could have Barcellos' response to these facts? If Barcellos found fault with new-covenant theology because of the way it is developing, and because of the variation of the views expressed, within certain limits, by its advocates, how would he advise enquirers to regard covenant theology? Stones and glass houses spring to mind. And, far more weighty, talking of throwing stones, if I may accommodate Christ's words in John 8:7: 'Let him who has a monolithic system be the first to throw a stone at new-covenant theology'.

Conclusion

But let us grant Barcellos his desire. Let him have his monolith. Would he stop with John Calvin, and his system? Would that do for the definitive statement to which all covenant theologians could sign up? If so, would he like Calvin on the sabbath? on assurance?¹⁷ on the covenant of works?¹⁸ on the covenant of redemption?¹⁹ If not, would he select the Westminster Confession as the great fixed standard of covenant theology? I doubt it. Barcellos well-knows that it is an infant-baptiser document, a Presbyterian document.²⁰ So what about the 1689 Particular Baptist Confession? Should that be the definitive statement? If so,

¹⁶ Quoted in part by Jon Zens: *Studies in Theology and Ethics*, BREM, INC., 1981, p46 and in part by Daniel P.Fuller: *Gospel and Law: Contrast or Continuum?*..., William B.Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1980, p79.

¹⁷ See my *Sabbath Questions; Assurance*.

¹⁸ The idea had not been invented in Calvin's day.

¹⁹ See previous note.

²⁰ Though, as I am sure he is also aware, as Robert Baillie complained, the handful of Independents hindered the Presbyterians from getting the statement they would have liked.

it will rule out those many covenant theologians who would insist on the Westminster! And what about those who swear by the Savoy Declaration, the Heidelberg Catechism, and so on? In any case, Barcellos has surely not forgotten what C.H. Spurgeon said when he republished the 1689 Confession, has he? Just in case, let me remind him:

This little volume is not issued as an authoritative rule, or code of faith, whereby you are to be fettered, but as assistance to you in controversy, a confirmation in faith, and a means of edification in righteousness.

Judging by this, I doubt very much that Spurgeon would have been much bothered about a monolith. Indeed, I rather think he might have dreaded the thought. I certainly do. Why? Because I see no effort by any apostle to set out such a statement of faith.

Nor can I forget – I don't want to forget – John Robinson's parting words to the believers as they sailed from Delft Haven to the New World in 1620:

We are now ere long to part asunder, and the Lord knows whether ever we shall live to see one another's faces. But whether the Lord has appointed it or not, I charge you before God and his blessed angels, follow me no further than I follow Christ; and if God shall reveal anything to you by any other instrument of his, be as ready to receive it as ever you were to receive any truth by my ministry. For I am confident the Lord has more truth and light yet to break forth out of his holy word. I bewail the state and condition of the Reformed churches, who have come to a full-stop in religion, and will go no further than the instruments of their reformation. The Lutherans cannot be drawn beyond what Luther saw; the Calvinists, they stick where Calvin left them. This is a misery much to be lamented; for though they were shining lights in their times, yet God did not reveal his whole will unto them, and if they were alive today they would be as ready to and willing to embrace further light, as that they had received. Keep in mind our church covenant, our promise and covenant with God and one another, to receive whatsoever light or truth shall be made known to us from his written word. But take heed what you receive for truth – examine it well and compare it and weigh it with other Scriptures of truth before you receive it. It is not possible that the Christian world should come so lately out of such thick anti-

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Christian darkness, and that perfection of knowledge should break forth at once.²¹

I don't think I need say more. This demand for the monolith, if granted, alas, would fasten us believers in a strait jacket. It would mean that we could never try to emulate the Bereans and search the Scriptures. Just search the 1689, or whatever, and make sure our preachers preach that.²² If this should become the order of the day, we shall be a whisker away from idolatry, and we will need a Hezekiah to destroy our invented Nehushtan (2 Kings 18:4).

²¹ See my 'A Thanksgiving Day Thought' (in *New-Covenant Articles: Volume Three*).

²² This is no idle thought. Judging by the works of covenant theologians which I have consulted, their particular Confession seems to dominate their thinking. They often start with it. It seems to be a case of altering the Scriptures to read: 'To the law and to the Confession!... Search the Confession... They searched the Confession daily'. They quite often give me that impression.

New-Covenant Gems from Purnell

Robert Purnell (1606-1666) was by trade a carpet weaver, probably a native of Bristol, England, in 1640.¹ With four others, he became a founder member of the Broadmead Baptist church in the city. In the 1650s, the church became exercised over the question of infant baptism. So much so, in 1654 Thomas Ewins (the pastor) and Purnell (a ruling elder),² travelled to London and were baptised by Henry Jessey. Purnell wrote several books, among which were these that I have used in this article: *A Little Cabinet Richly Restored* (1657), being his largest work of 467 pages, *Good Tidings For Sinners* (1652), *No Power But Of God* (1652),³ *The Way To Convert A Sinner* (1652),⁴ and *A Serious Exhortation To An Holy Life* (1663).⁵

Very well. But why should I want to know anything about this man? The title gives it away. In his books, Robert Purnell left us with many gems relating to the glories of the new covenant,⁶ thus

¹ Until very recently, I had never heard of this 17th century Baptist, but having been introduced to some extracts from his writings by an American friend, Chris Hanna, I was eager to get hold of his works. Now, having found so much valuable material in what I have read in those works, I want to make the good man more widely known. Hence this article. An added twist to my hitherto ignorance of Purnell is the fact that I am also a Bristolian, albeit 350 years later.

² Purnell for several years had been convinced that he ought to obey Christ according to New Testament ordinance.

³ Which title I have not seen. Chris Hanna gave me the one extract I have used.

⁴ My copy breaks off at page 132, and from then on it is a reprint of *Good Tidings*, page 11 and on.

⁵ These are the most accurate details I have discovered.

⁶ I am not saying that I agree with everything Purnell wrote, nor that I would use all his expressions. For instance, he held the threefold division of the law. See also his views on assurance, the law as a rule of life, and the sabbath (*A Little Cabinet* pp301-302,355,357-359). Purnell mistakenly viewed the atonement as universal, making this a ground both of the free offer and duty faith. He commended Arminians for this.

making a valuable contribution to our appreciation of the new covenant. Moreover, he provides further testimony (if any is needed) to disprove the oft-made dismissive – but puerile – accusation that new-covenant theology only began in the 1980s.⁷ Purnell was writing the things I quote here the best part of four centuries ago.

Introduction

To show the kind of man Purnell was, I can do no better than let him speak for himself:

I believe that it is the office of the Father to elect; the office of the Son to redeem; and the office of the Holy Ghost to sanctify those, and only those, whom the Father has elected, and the Son redeemed. And I do believe my own interest in all these, without which the knowledge of it is nothing. The Father loves me, the Son manifests that love to me, and the Spirit evidences it in me. The Father loves me as redeemed by his Son; the Son looks upon me, and loves me, as being given by the Father for him to redeem; and the Holy Ghost, seeing the love of the Father in choosing me, and the love of the Son in redeeming me, he also sets his love upon me, and manifests this unto me, which is the earnest of my inheritance. I believe that... the cause why [God] made me, was for his own glory, and the end why he elected me in Christ was that I should bring forth fruit to him... I believe that I am in as near relation to Christ as the wife is to the husband (Rev. 1:9) [better, Rom. 7:4-6]. I do believe that I am a member of his own body (1 Cor. 12:12)... I do believe that I am joined to the Lord, and so [I am] one spirit with him (1 Cor. 6:17)... I do believe that my sins, by Christ, are taken out of the sight of God. I do believe that the design of Christ was to take it away out of my conscience, that there might be no more conscience of sin (Heb. 9:14). I do believe that as Christ has

Yet he himself believed in election. Was he of John Owen's or Moïse Amyraut's persuasion? See my *Amyraut*. I do not know. But he went on immediately to speak of particular redemption, rejecting the glosses Arminians put upon the texts he quoted (*Good Tidings* pp94-95).

⁷ See my 'New-Covenant Theology: New Kid on the Block?' (the eDocs link under David H J Gay Ministry which may be found on sermonaudio.com). See also my page on christmymcovenant.com.

taken away sin out of the sight of God, and out of my own conscience, so in due time he will take away sin out of my conversation [life], according to that scripture, 1 Peter 1:15 and Luke 1:75.⁸ In a word, I do believe my sins past, present and to come are all laid upon, and done away by, Christ (Isa. 53:6). I do believe that as there was no good foreseen in me that did cause the Lord to set his love upon me, so there is no evil that can be done by me that can cause him to hate me.⁹

So much so: ‘Now it is impossible for you, as you are made a new creature by Christ, to sin (1 John 3:6,9)’.¹⁰

Purnell summarised his position:

First, the Spirit shall convince me of sin (John 16:8). *Second*, the looking upon Christ, whom I have pierced, or if you will, Christ looking upon me after my sin, as he did upon Peter, will cause me to weep and repent (Rom. 2:4). *Third*, the sweet love of God is now become my schoolmaster to lead me into the paths of all righteousness (Tit. 2:11-12).¹¹

For such sentiments, covenant theologians of his day (as to this day) would, no doubt, have regarded Robert Purnell as an antinomian, classing him as such men as Tobias Crisp, John Eaton, William Dell and John Saltmarsh.¹²

Finally, in this introduction to my subject, I pity anyone who fails to be challenged by Purnell’s rebuke of the Independents, issued in a string of questions on the comparison of this world with the riches to be found in Christ:

Is your kingdom or glory of this world, or in things outward or fleshly, or even in vanity? Is it your work appointed, and your

⁸ As a believer, it is also my responsibility to live a godly life. After all, 1 Pet. 1:15 is a command. See below for ‘progressive sanctification’.

⁹ *Good Tidings* pp114-116. Throughout, I have slightly modernised spelling and grammar. I have also omitted many of Purnell’s cogent arguments and supporting scriptures.

¹⁰ *Good Tidings* p51. Purnell was not teaching sinless perfection, of course. Rather, he was proclaiming the truth of Rom. 5:19; 8:1; Eph. 5:25-27; Heb. 10:10,14.

¹¹ *No Power But Of God* p108.

¹² See my *Four*.

delight (you saints), to please the irrational fancies of your fleshly minds? Can you who are so distinct and distant in your principles from the carnal and ungodly, so suit and conform to them in those things, whose very fountain, or cause, is none other but ignorance of God...? Have you no better enjoyments, no better kingdom, than this? Is not your glory within? Is not the most Excellent [Christ] your satisfaction, his presence in your hearts your great refreshment, union and conversation with him your heaven and blessedness? Do you walk as Christ did, whose meat and drink was to do the will of his Father [John 4:34]? Are you like him?¹³

In posing such searching questions to others, we surely see into Purnell's own heart. A man of this stamp is worth listening to.

Now for my gathered-gems from Purnell. I set them out under four headings: the two covenants, preparationism, justification and progressive sanctification.¹⁴ These four are vital topics in the continuing debate over new-covenant theology. To change the figure from precious stones to choice morsels: I am merely trying to whet your appetite for a full perusal of his complete works.

The two covenants

Covenant theologians claim that the old and new covenants (the law and the gospel, the Mosaic covenant and the new) are one and the same, merely different administrations of the one covenant of grace. New-covenant theology, on the other hand,

¹³ *Good Tidings* pp86-87.

¹⁴ 'Positional sanctification' is the perfection the believer has in the sight of God by virtue of his union with Christ at his conversion: the sinner, on coming to faith, is united to Christ and is justified and positionally sanctified. Thus, in God's sight, in Christ he is accounted or made righteous, free of sin and condemnation, and perfectly separated unto God. See, for instance, 1 Cor. 1:2,30; 6:11; Eph. 5:25-27; Heb. 10:10-18; 13:12. In his Christian life, he has to work out his perfection in Christ, and he will be moved to do so by the Spirit under the direction of Scripture; this is his progressive sanctification or holiness of life. But this, alas, is imperfect. The believer will only be absolutely sanctified in the eternal state. I will set out my arguments on all this in my forthcoming book on sanctification.

fully argues the biblical position that the two covenants are distinct; indeed, that Christ fulfilled the old covenant and all its shadows, and so brought the law to its God-intended end, and thus rendered it obsolete.¹⁵ As for Purnell, he was clear on this important matter:

Christ and the apostles preached the gospel, and understand the law in a gospel way, bringing types and shadows into substances [Col. 2:17]... And the Scriptures call upon people to refine all their duties, and all their graces, and all their comforts, and all their assurance, and to act from an evangelical [gospel] principle; not so much to have the fear of punishment to compel, as the love of Christ to constrain them to walk in newness of life. The gospel is a ministration of life, and the ministration of the law is called a ministration of condemnation [2 Cor. 3:6-11].¹⁶

Before going on, I need to draw attention to Purnell's use of the terms 'covenant of grace' and 'covenant of works'. By 'the covenant of grace', he meant the new covenant; and by 'the covenant of works', he meant the old or Mosaic covenant.¹⁷ Unfortunately, this might well confuse modern readers – since covenant theologians use both phrases, but mean something very different to Purnell. When they speak of 'the covenant of grace', they mean the Abrahamic, the Mosaic and the new covenant, which, to them, are merely different administrations of the one covenant of grace. When they speak of 'the covenant of works', they are referring to their invented, unscriptural concept of a covenant made with all men in Adam.¹⁸ These two covenants

¹⁵ As with everything else in this article, I have fully argued the case in my works.

¹⁶ *The Way To Convert* p5-7.

¹⁷ 'Now this covenant [the covenant of grace] is sometimes called a new covenant because it succeeds in the place of the other covenant of works [that is, the law]' (*A Little Cabinet* p23).

¹⁸ This is simplistic. Covenant theologians are not all agreed about all the nuances of their system. For instance, they cannot make their mind up whether the Mosaic covenant is their covenant of works, their covenant of grace, a mixture of the two, or the latter looking like the former. I have fully documented all these charges in my *Christ Is All: No Sanctification by the Law*.

form the basis of covenant theology, which is a construct or template that they impose on Scripture, with serious damage and heavy consequences. Purnell had no thought of this when he spoke of ‘the covenant of grace’ and ‘the covenant of works’.

I fully understand Purnell’s use of the terms, of course. The two phrases, ‘covenant of grace’ and ‘covenant of works’, really do put the finger on the two central issues between the two theologies, new covenant and covenant; namely, the contrast between the new and the Mosaic covenants (in grace and works), on the one hand, and yet, on the other, the continuity of redemptive history throughout the two Testaments. Nevertheless, since Purnell’s terminology would only blur the issue today, I have taken the ‘liberty’ of replacing his ‘covenant of grace’ with ‘new covenant’, and his ‘covenant of works’ with ‘old covenant’.

Purnell:

The new covenant is called a testament or will... The new covenant is full of sure mercies and sweet promises that God will give a new heart, a heart to know him, and that he will write his law within us, put his fear into us, cause us to walk in his statutes, forgive our iniquities, cleanse us from all our filthiness, be our God, and make us his people (Ezek. 36; Jer. 31)... It is a free covenant, a full and complete covenant, a well-ordered covenant, a sure and firm covenant, a peaceable covenant, an everlasting covenant...

To close up all as to the nature of this covenant, let me tell you the main substance is in these words: ‘I will be their God, and they shall be my people’, but sprinkling with clean water, taking away the stony heart, and giving a heart of flesh, all these are nothing but the fruits of the covenant. So Christ is given for a covenant to the people; that is, the new covenant takes its being from Christ to us. All mankind was Adam, as all mankind was in Adam, in the loins of Adam, so Christ is the covenant, and all the covenant is as it were in the loins of Christ, and springs to us out of him. In this sense he is the covenant maker, he is the covenant undertaker, he is the covenant manager, he is the covenant dispenser. He does everything in the covenant... Hence Christ is also the Mediator of the covenant... Thus Christ is the covenant [Isa. 42:6; 49:8].¹⁹

¹⁹ *A Little Cabinet* pp20-25.

Again:

Consider the vast difference between the law and the gospel: The law affords not a drop of grace; it bestows nothing freely. The language of the law is do and live; if not, die: no work, no wages. But in the gospel, the yoke of personal obedience is transferred from believers to their Surety. There is nothing for them to pay. All they have to do is to hunger and feed. Their happiness is free, in respect of themselves, though costly to Christ who, by his merits, has purchased for them whatsoever they would obtain, and by his Spirit works in them whatsoever he requires. The first old covenant is old; the new covenant is new. The first is the law of the letter; the second is the law of the Spirit. The first is a law of death; the second is a law of life. The first was wounding; the second is healing. The first a natural law; the second a spiritual law. The first a law of types; the second a law of substance [Col. 2:17]. The first was to be done away; the second is to continue. The first a covenant of earthly blessings; the second a covenant of spiritual blessings. The first was to stand for a time; the second was to stand for ever... The difference between the old covenant and the new covenant may be reduced to three heads: 1. The first was a ministration of the letter, a naked commandment, carrying with it no aptness, disposition or ability to keep it. 2. It breeds enmity and fear, looking on God as a hard taskmaster, and so fills the soul full of terrors. 3. It is a ministration of death – namely by the curse to them that keep it not.²⁰

Again:

The apostles all along were very careful to keep this [new] covenant and doctrine of grace distinct from all other things. They all along to oppose law and grace, works and faith, our righteousness and Christ's righteousness, teaching us thereby how needful it is that they [that is, the two covenants] be kept each in [its] place asunder, and that we do not, as most do, jumble them both together.²¹

Finally:

²⁰ *A Little Cabinet* pp47-48.

²¹ *A Serious Exhortation* p4.

The Father enters into covenant with us, and promises to be a Father to us... Christ enters into covenant with us... The Holy Ghost makes a covenant with us: 'Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us' (Heb. 10:15-16), testifying of this covenant... In this covenant, God unbosoms himself, and shines forth upon us, and there is now a sweet intercourse of love between him and your soul. In the blessing of this covenant, there is remedy for every malady, promises suitable to every condition, for being and well-being, for this life and that which is to come.²²

Thus Purnell shines a clear light on the difference in the two covenants, and in so doing rightly draws attention to the glories of the new.

Preparationism

Covenant theologians, following John Calvin, say that the law must first be preached to sinners to prepare them for Christ. Calvin:

First, by exhibiting the righteousness of God – in other words, the righteousness which alone is acceptable to God – it admonishes every one of his own unrighteousness... convicts, and finally condemns him. This is necessary, in order that man... may be brought... to know and confess his weakness and impurity... So soon... as he begins to compare [his own powers] with the requirements of the law, he has something to tame his presumption. How high soever his opinion of his own powers may be, he immediately feels that they pant under the heavy load, then totter and stumble, and finally fall and give way. He, then, who is schooled by the law, lays aside the arrogance which formerly blinded him... After he is forced to weigh his conduct in the balance of the law, renouncing all dependence on [his] fancied righteousness, he sees that he is at an infinite distance from holiness... In the law we behold, first, our impotence; then, in consequence of it, our iniquity; and, finally, the curse as the consequence of both... To this effect is the apostle's declaration, that 'by the law is the knowledge of sin' (Rom. 3:20). By these words, he only points out the first office of the law as experienced by sinners not yet regenerated.

²² *A Little Cabinet* pp54-55.

But, according to Calvin, the law has contrasting effects on the reprobate and the elect. The former might well ‘give up all hope and rush headlong on despair... owing to their obstinacy’. The law’s effect on the elect, however, is altogether different. God uses it to bring them to Christ. His purpose is:

That divesting themselves of an absurd opinion of their own virtue, they may perceive how they are wholly dependent on the hand of God; that feeling how naked and destitute they are, they may take refuge in his mercy, rely upon it, and cover themselves up entirely with it; renouncing all righteousness and merit, and clinging to mercy alone, as offered in Christ to all who long for it and look for it in true faith... Augustine... writes... ‘The law orders, that we, after attempting to do what is ordered, and so feeling our weakness under the law, may learn to implore the help of grace... The utility of the law is, that it convinces man of his weakness, and compels him to apply for the medicine of grace, which is in Christ... God enjoins what we cannot do, in order that we may know what we have to ask of him... The law was given, that it might make you guilty – being made guilty, might fear; fearing, might ask indulgence... The law was given, in order to convert a great into a little man – to show that you have no power of your own for righteousness; and might thus, poor, needy, and destitute, flee to grace’.²³

This is preparationism, and it is quite wrong. Even so, it was adopted and expanded by the Puritans, and has become the received wisdom for many. Significantly, the 1644 Particular Baptist Confession specifically ruled it out:

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.²⁴

²³ John Calvin: *Calvin’s Institutes of the Christian Religion*, A New Translation by Henry Beveridge, James Clarke & Co., Limited, London, 1957 Vol.1 pp304-307.

²⁴ The date, 1644, is significant in light of the proceedings at Westminster and the antinomian controversy. See my ‘The Law and the

Purnell showed he was of the same mind:

And to you, fellow sinner, is the first word, because I see many of those that undertake to teach you, shutting the door of the kingdom against you, and instead of the gospel of Christ, they preach to you Moses... and that in the letter... In the first part of [my] book, called 'A Word to the World', is held forth in [a] few words the sweet tenders of grace from the Father, through the Son, to the poor dejected sinners; wherein God invites, calls, woos and entreats them to be reconciled to himself. He answers all the objections that lie in the way, he uses very strong and powerful arguments: he not only says, but swears [that] he delights not in the death of a sinner (Ezek. 33:11).²⁵

Again:

I have in this ensuing discourse²⁶ laboured and endeavoured, according to that little light and experience that God has given me, to point at the way of recovery; namely, how a man or woman may, by the assistance of the Almighty, lay hold on eternal life, and have an assurance of the pardon of all their sins, past, present and to come, by that new, and living, true and only way Jesus Christ, 'in whom are all treasures of wisdom and knowledge, in whom all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily in whom all the promises are yes and amen' [Col. 2:2-3,9-10; 2 Cor. 1:18-22].²⁷

Again:

That sinners have been, now are, and hereafter, shall be converted, is granted on all hands. What conversion and turning to God is also well understood by many, but whether it is the preaching of the law, or else the preaching of the gospel, that effectually works this great work in the creature, it is in dispute with some. The one party say that the law must first be preached

Confessions' (under the eDocs link under David H J Gay Ministry on sermonaudio.com).

²⁵ *Good Tidings* A2.

²⁶ Purnell wrote *The Way To Convert A Sinner* in order that men 'should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary, and preach the gospel first (not the law) to the poor' (*The Way To Convert* A3).

²⁷ *The Way To Convert* A2.

to fire sinners out of their nests,²⁸ and then the gospel to heal them. The other hold the gospel is first be preached to sinners, and if they reject that, then the law. The first, that say the law ought first to be preached sinners before the gospel, bring these and the like scriptures [for proof]: ‘For by the law is the knowledge of sin’ (Rom. 7:7). ‘The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul’ (Ps. 19:7). The other party, that hold the gospel ought first to be preached to sinners, for proof bring these and the like scriptures: ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature’ (Mark 6:15). And: ‘Into whatsoever house you enter, first say: “Peace be to this house”’ (Luke 10:5). So the gospel is to be published to all without limitation or restriction (1 John 2:1-2; Phil. 2:16; 1 Tim. 2:5-6 *etc.*).²⁹

After devoting much thought to the question, and searching of Scripture concerning it, Purnell gave his own opinion on the matter:

The gospel is first to be preached, and that to every creature. For I find that though by the law is the knowledge of sin, yet notwithstanding a man cannot see his sins fully but by gospel light: it is the work of the Spirit to convince of sin. ‘I will’, says Christ, ‘send you another Comforter (meaning the Spirit) and he shall convince the world of sin’ [John 16:7-9]. And where does the Spirit breathe but in the gospel? ‘Did you receive the Spirit’, says the apostle, ‘by the works of the law, or by the preaching of faith?’ [Gal. 3:2].

Purnell referred to the woman who loved much because she was forgiven much (Luke 7:47). He went on to speak of: ‘They shall look upon him whom they have pierced, and mourn as one mourns for his only son’ (Zech. 12:10), saying:

1. Here is the cause or ground of their repentance in these words, and they shall look upon Christ whom their sins have pierced. 2. Here is the effect of that cause: they mourned. 3. They repented...³⁰

He made the point that ‘there are many reasons why the gospel should be first preached’:

²⁸ I presume this means ‘to awaken them’.

²⁹ *The Way To Convert* pp1-3.

³⁰ *The Way To Convert* p3.

1. Because the gospel has a spiritual virtue in it, and power to draw the heart, and work upon the soul... 2. It is not so much the thing that is preached [that counts], as the thing that God will bless. But his blessings and presence go with the gospel (Matt. 28:20). 3. The commission that Christ has given us to go and 'preach the gospel to every creature' – not to saints only, but to sinners also, to every creature (Mark 16:15). 4. Because the Lord Jesus Christ has promised his presence to accompany those that preach the gospel, saying: 'I am with you to the end of the world' [Matt. 28:20]. 5. We find that the apostles did so wherever they came... (Acts 8:5; 17:13). So again, Paul gives us an account not only what he did preach, but what the Spirit of God in him did cause him to preach. First, saying: 'For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received of the Lord, how that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures' (1 Cor. 15:3). Indeed, Christ preached the gospel to Zacchaeus in the first place (Luke 19:5-8). Are there not a generation of men in these our days grown wiser than our Lord Christ and his apostles?... Christ and the apostles preached the gospel, and understand the law in a gospel way, bringing types and shadows into substances [Col. 2:17]... And the Scriptures call upon people to refine all their duties, and all their graces, and all their comforts, and all their assurance, and to act from an evangelical [gospel] principle; not so much to have the fear of punishment to compel, as the love of Christ to constrain them to walk in newness of life. The gospel is a ministration of life, and the ministration of the law is called a ministration of condemnation [2 Cor. 3:6-11]...

Well, but for all this, are not most men crying and calling for Moses to fit and prepare them for the gospel? And if... the gospel comes near them they run away from it, saying: 'Oh, it belongs not to me! I am not so and so qualified, I am not so and so broken, I am not showing so weary and heavy laden, and therefore these gospel promises do not pertain unto me. And thus many are kept in bondage on the one hand; and on the other, many thousands are made to believe they are Christians, and their state is good, when there is but a seeming faith and repentance wrought in them by a common illumination, or human resolution, but not by the Spirit of God in effectual calling; they have not yet had the graces of the Spirit of God wrought in them in power...

Now if the gospel were powerfully preached, the people that hear would find it to be either a quick and powerful word,

sharper than a two-edged sword, dividing between marrow and joints, and so making a thorough work upon the soul, or else, on the other hand, it would leave them without excuse. And that the gospel ought to be tendered to the worst of sinners, even while they are in their sins, I suppose it will further appear in these and the like scriptures following. Consider... the invitation to the great supper: the servants are sent forth to call in those that were bidden, and excuse themselves. Well, he sends out again, and invite others: 'Go to the highways, go to the hedges, and compel them to come in' [Luke 14:16-24]. So Revelation 3:20. Christ stands at the door and knocks: 'If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in and sup with him'. Christ stands here knocking by the voice of the gospel, and offers the greatest mercies that can be enjoyed in the world: fellowship and communion...

So again Proverbs 9:1... For whom? (may some say). 'Whoso is simple, let him come...' (Prov. 9:4-5). All that have the Spirit of God (the only key) to unlock and unfold these scriptures, they cannot but see abundance of unspeakable love in the most wise Creator to the poor, forlorn, nothing creature...

The sight of sin discovered [revealed] by the law, without the sight of free grace, love and goodness of God, held forth in the gospel, will rather drive a sinner from God, than bring him to God; for in these gospel days it is not so much the sight of sin, as the sight of love, grace, goodness and glory, that will lead a sinner to repentance, and humble him for his sin (Luke 7:42,47; Zech. 12:10; Rom. 2:4; Isa. 6:5). And that the gospel is first to be preached to sinners is clear by the command of Christ (Luke 10:5; Mark 16:15). And according to this commission, the apostles went and preached the gospel to the worst of sinners (Acts 2:22-37; 8:12; 1 Cor. 15:3). *Objection:* The law should be preached first, to convince of sin, and after that the gospel. *Answer:* 1. The way of Christ is to preach the gospel first to every creature. 2. The gospel rightly preached, through the assistance of the Spirit, sufficiently convinces of sin. It is impossible to preach Christ dying for sinners, but there is sufficient means of conviction (see 2 Corinthians 10:14). It is the Spirit of Christ that convinces of sin, and this Spirit is given forth in the ministry of faith, and not [in the ministry] of the law (Gal. 3:2; John 16:8).³¹

³¹ *The Way To Convert* pp5-12.

Purnell went on:

What is it then to preach the gospel? To preach the gospel is to preach Christ to the people. What is it to preach Christ to the people? 1. To set forth and to declare by the Scripture what he is, and what he has done for poor sinners. 2. To preach Christ is to declare to sinners what a glorious fullness there is in him, a remedy for every malady: 'In the Lord have we righteousness and strength' (Isa. 45:24). 3. To preach Christ is to clear up to all sinners the way of common interest; how you, as a sinner, may come to have a share in him, seeing he came to call and to heal such. 4. To preach Christ is to set forth to the world the necessity of being born again, of being [brought] out of the stock of old Adam, and being grafted into the new flock of the last Adam. 5. To preach Christ is to declare and hold forth the certainty of salvation to everyone that believes in him, for he shall be kept by the mighty power of God, the gates of hell shall not prevail against him, [and] nothing shall be able to separate him from Christ. 6. To preach Christ is to hold forth to all men what blessed privileges a poor sinner has as soon as ever he believes and is come to Christ; he has an interest in all the blessings promised in the gospel. 7. To preach Christ is to demonstrate and publish to all men the certainty of eternal damnation to all those that do slight Christ, and live and die in a state of unbelief. 8. To preach Christ is to manifest to every soul that has received Jesus Christ how he should walk in him, denying himself, and mortifying his sin, all through Christ enabling him. In a word, (a) whatsoever tends to the exalting of Christ, this is to preach Christ; (b) whatsoever tends to lead sinners to Christ is to preach Christ; (c) whatsoever tends to build up a soul in Christ is to preach Christ. But the gospel does all this. Therefore the gospel is first to be preached. [It is] the way to convert a sinner, the way to recover a backslider, the way to confirm, strengthen and establish those that stand... [The fact is,] the first step towards heaven is to see ourselves at the gates of hell. The way to get wisdom is first to see ourselves fools. The way to get Christ is to see our want of Christ. The way to be rich is to see ourselves poor and blind, and miserable and naked.³²

In short:

³² *The Way To Convert* pp12-15.

The way to convert a sinner... this is the sum of all hitherto. 1. That there is a necessity for a sinner to see that he is in a lost condition, undone without Christ. And the way to work this thoroughly, fully and effectually, is by the preaching of the gospel, which convinces the world of sin, righteousness and of judgement (John 16:7-10).³³

Moreover:

He that preaches the gospel is to declare to the people that the Lord 'would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth' [1 Tim. 2:4], and to acquaint them [with the fact] that Christ... invites all, and protests that he [desires] not the death of a sinner, but that he should rather repent and live. So the Lord calls upon all men and women, what person soever he is, what sin soever he has committed, what time soever he comes, he shall not be cast off.³⁴

Purnell made his point by a negative:

What is the reason there are so few that do believe and embrace the gospel, and lay hold of eternal life? *Answer...* [One] reason why so few truly embrace the gospel is because those that some have chosen to be our teachers teach Moses' law more than Christ.³⁵

In 'a word to the Presbyterians',³⁶ Purnell was blunt:

Lay aside, or leave off, that cold lukewarm letter preaching, received from tradition, having a form but not a power... 'We will preach the gospel'... [says the apostle]... Let me then appeal to your consciences, whether this be your practice... Leave off the idolizing of human learning, and use it only in its place... If you are the ministers of Christ, observe your commission given you, the sum of which is this: 'Go to all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature' (Mark 16:15; Matt. 28:19). And Paul elsewhere gives an account of his commission, and says Christ sent him to preach the gospel, and so he went preaching peace by Jesus Christ. Seeing God in these latter days speaks unto us by his Son (Heb. 1:2), why do you speak so much by

³³ *The Way To Convert* p28.

³⁴ *The Way To Convert* pp46-47.

³⁵ *The Way To Convert* p67.

³⁶ Covenant theologians, of course.

Moses? You say Moses must prepare us for Christ; sure that is not your commission. I think I hear you saying with Peter: Master, let us build here three tabernacles, one for Moses, one for Elijah, and one for you; and there appeared a bright cloud, upon the appearance of which, Moses and Elijah... vanished away. And God answered Peter from heaven, and told him: 'This is my beloved Son, hear him'. Why do you then build a tabernacle for Moses, and another for Elijah, seeing the bright cloud has expelled the dark administrations of them both? Oh then follow the advice of Christ, and keep close to your commission.³⁷

Purnell deliberately raised the point at issue: 'Which is first to be preached: the law or the gospel?' He was clear: 'The commission and message of Christ (Mark 16:15)... and... the practice both of Christ and his apostles [was] to preach the gospel in the first place'. He raised an objection: 'But I have heard some of our brethren of the Presbyterian congregations object against this truth and say, how can men come to see the want and need of Christ if the law is not preached to them?' In reply, Purnell was unequivocal:

The work of the minister is not now so much to show men the need of Christ first, but rather the love of God in giving Christ (John 3:16), and to show and set forth the riches of Christ's grace to sinners in general (Rom. 5:8).

He imagined the objector coming back: 'But is it not the first work of the Spirit to convince men of sin (John 16:8)?' He had his reply ready:

By 'sin' in that place is meant the sin of unbelief: 'Of sin', says [Christ], 'because they believe not on me' (John 16:9). And this sin is not convicted by the law, for that which does not command faith [that is, the law] cannot discover [reveal] the sin of unbelief.³⁸

As for duty faith and repentance, though, as far as I know, he did not use the terms,³⁹ when he was addressing the Independents on

³⁷ *Good Tidings* pp65-74.

³⁸ *A Little Cabinet* pp217-218.

³⁹ They probably date from a later century.

the way to approach sinners with the gospel, Purnell was excellent:

This is also a fault among you, that you do not pity the poor blind world, and endeavour to bring [sinners] into the knowledge of the truth by laying before them the free love of God through Jesus Christ. All your studies are how to build up saints; therefore to them do you altogether speak. Indeed, I have heard sermon after sermon in public, besides your practice in private, and you speak only to saints enlightened, though most of the people to whom you speak are in the old man, and have need of such a sermon as Christ preached to Nicodemus. And so you are blameworthy as the Presbyterians are; indeed more than they – for many of them do teach the practical part of divinity before the doctrinal, and [yet] you tell [speak] of great enjoyments before your hearers are truly principled. He that truly preaches the gospel must preach to sinners [as sinners] to convince them, as well as to saints to confirm them. If you will indeed be followers of Christ, you must not content yourselves to preach a piece of the gospel. For Christ, when he came among sinners was entreating and persuading them, and calling them to come to him that they might have life. He often encouraged them to come to him, telling them he came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. He bids come unto him, all... that are weary and heavy laden, and he will give [them] rest. And says: ‘They that come to me, I will in no wise cast off’ [Luke 5:32; Matt. 11:28-30; John 6:37]. And when he gave his commission to his disciples, he told them they must preach the gospel to every creature [Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8]. Oh then, pity the world, pray for the world; rebuke, instruct, exhort, persuade and beseech them to be reconciled to God. Your Father lets the sun shine and the rain fall upon them. And bids you learn of him to love them [Matt. 5:43-48].⁴⁰

In this very important statement, Purnell was facing up to issues which are as relevant today as ever they were: the free offer and duty faith, the promiscuous preaching of Christ to all sinners as sinners without exception, and our seeking to persuade them to

⁴⁰ *Good Tidings* pp89-90.

come to him, all of which is to be unrestricted by any notion of preparationism.⁴¹

Justification

Of course, theologians, both covenant and new-covenant, hold that justification is entirely by faith in the person and the finished work of Christ on the basis of grace. Christ was born, and he lived, suffered and died under the law, and the sinner who believes receives the Redeemer's imputed righteousness. Nevertheless, it is only new-covenant theologians who lay the full and proper, scriptural emphasis upon the freeness of the believer's justification and perfect positional sanctification in Christ. And this emphasis leaves them open to the false charge of antinomianism. But unless a man does leave himself open to such a charge, he is not preaching the gospel in the scriptural way.

As to be expected, Purnell was excellent on the freeness of justification:

O saints! consider a little upon what ground you stand, upon what foundation you are built. Do you believe there was such a Christ as the Scriptures mention? Do you believe that this Christ took your nature, and also your sins? Do you believe, that in this your nature he fulfilled the law, took it away, nailed it to the cross, and so is become 'the end of the law to all that believe'? Also, [that he] freed you from sin past, present, and to come, and so from death, the wages thereof?⁴²

Again:

You are a believer. Consider: 1. The law that you have broken, Christ has kept, fulfilled and taken away. 2. Your sins which were many, both original and actual, of omission and commission, your sins past, those present, and those to come, are all laid upon Christ, and the wages due to them he received. 3. Consider upon what account you now stand before the Father, not in your own righteousness, but the righteousness of Christ. 4. Consider that you, being made free from sin: 'Likewise reckon

⁴¹ I have repeatedly addressed these issues. In addition to my work on preparationism, in particular see my *Offer*; *Septimus*.

⁴² *Good Tidings* p37.

yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God' (Rom. 6:11).⁴³

He explained further:

The law that you have broken, Christ has kept, fulfilled, and taken away. The law required obedience of you; Christ comes and yields obedience for you, and imputes it to you: 'As by the disobedience of one many are made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous' (Rom. 5:19). The law required the keeping of every tittle of the first and second table. Christ comes and walks up to it step by step. So that the law could no sooner require obedience, but presently [immediately?] Christ yields obedience, as it was in the Old Testament prophesied, and in the New testified of him. The law required a holy life; Christ lived a holy life. The law required perfect obedience, as well in the principles as in the practice; Christ yields it in both. The law requires death for the least disobedience, and though Christ has not broken in it any tittle, yet, he, representing the persons of those that had broken it, became obedient to the law in this also: 'And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross' (Phil. 2:8). And [as proof] that the law is done away by Christ, see 2 Corinthians chapter 3. Four times in that chapter it is said to be done away. See also Romans 7 and Romans 10:4. See also Galatians 2, 3 and 4, and many other scriptures.

Consider, your sins which are many, both original and actual, of omission, of commission, the first table or the second, your sins past, present, and to come, are all laid upon Christ, and the wages due to them he received (Isa. 53:6; 1 Pet. 2:24; 2 Cor. 5:21; Matt. 8:17). Consider upon what account you stand before the Father; that is, not of your own righteousness, but upon the account of the righteousness Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:30; Phil. 3:9)... Consider, if the law is fulfilled, your sins pardoned, and you now stand before your Father by the righteousness of another, then you cannot but look upon yourself as free from sin,

⁴³ *Good Tidings* p45. He went on to speak of the believer's progressive sanctification: 'Now follows the fruit of this knowledge: the soul that is enlightened will not go on in sin, but the love of Christ will constrain him from a course of sin'. Thus, at a stroke, Purnell demolished the false accusation of antinomianism, which charge is sure to come against those who preach the full new-covenant doctrine of justification.

and to break forth as in: ‘Likewise, reckon yourselves dead unto sin indeed, but alive unto God’ (Rom. 6:11). ‘Being then made free from sin, you became the servants of righteousness’ (Rom. 6:18). ‘But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, you have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life’ (Rom. 6:22; Col. 1:22). ‘He has reconciled you in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable, and unreprouable in his sight’ (1 Thess. 3:13). Now one that is holy, unblameable, unreprouable, must needs be free from sin.⁴⁴

Again:

[Christ] took our nature... [and] in that nature, and for us, and in our stead, yielded obedience to whatsoever the law required of us. I must have obedience, says the law. You shall, says Christ. I must have perfect obedience, says the law. You shall, says Christ. I must have perpetual obedience, says the law. You shall, says Christ. I must be fully satisfied, says the law. You shall, says Christ.⁴⁵

Yet again:

The law that we have broken must have a perfect, personal, universal and perpetual obedience, or else we remain under the curse, from which there is nothing that can relieve us, but that which is answerable to the evil of sin. Now there is no righteousness in the world that is proportionate to the evil of sin but the righteousness of Christ only.⁴⁶

In short:

In the new covenant we may find the mouth of the law stopped, and all the accusations of Satan answered, and the justice of God fully satisfied.⁴⁷

In this way, Purnell draws our attention to one of the great privileges and responsibilities of those of us who hold to new-covenant theology. We must proclaim – trumpet – the believer’s biblical position in Christ, his perfection in the sight of God.

⁴⁴ *Good Tidings* pp46-48.

⁴⁵ *The Way To Convert* pp64-65.

⁴⁶ *A Serious Exhortation* p22.

⁴⁷ *A Little Cabinet* pp20-23.

Much depends on it – not least, as I have argued elsewhere, the believer’s assurance and progressive sanctification. Let us not be content, therefore, with preaching the desiccated view of justification which is so common today.

Progressive sanctification

Covenant and new-covenant theologians are agreed that a believer must show his justification and positional sanctification by a life of godliness, Christ-likeness; in other words, he must, by his life before others – that is, by his progressive sanctification – show his standing before God. Covenant theologians, however, following Calvin, think this is produced by the whip of the law, the law driving the believer, as a lazy ass, to the perfect rule of the law. Calvin:

The third use of the law (being also the principal use, and more closely connected with its proper end) has respect to believers in whose hearts the Spirit of God already flourishes and reigns. For although the law [begging the question as to which law is written on the heart in the new covenant] is written and engraved on their hearts by the finger of God, that is, although they are so influenced and actuated by the Spirit, that they desire to obey God, there are two ways in which they still profit from the law. For it is the *best* instrument for enabling them daily to learn with greater truth and certainty what that will of the Lord is which they aspire to follow, and to confirm them in this knowledge... Then, because we need not doctrine merely, but exhortation also, the servant of God will derive this further advantage from the law: by frequently meditating upon it, he will be excited to obedience, and confirmed in it, and so drawn away from the slippery paths of sin... The law acts like a whip to the flesh, urging it on as men do to a lazy sluggish ass. Even in the case of a spiritual man, inasmuch as he is still burdened with the weight of the flesh, the law is a constant stimulus, pricking him forward when he would indulge in sloth... It cannot be denied that it [the law] contains a perfect pattern of righteousness... one perpetual and inflexible rule... The doctrine of the law... remains... that... it may fit and prepare us for every good work... The general end contemplated by the whole law [is] that man may form his life on the model of the divine purity... The law... connects man, by holiness of life, with his God... [It is] one perpetual and

inflexible rule... The law... is given for the regulation of the life of men, so that it may be justly called the rule of living well and righteously... By the word 'law'... we understand what peculiarly belonged to Moses; for the law contains the rule of life... and in it we find everywhere many remarkable sentences by which we are instructed as to faith, and as to the fear of God. None of these were abolished by Christ... The law is the everlasting rule of a good and holy life... The law... not only contains a rule of life as to outward duties, but... it also rules their hearts before God and angels... The law acts like a whip to the flesh, urging it on as men do to a lazy sluggish ass... a constant stimulus, pricking him forward.⁴⁸

New-covenant theologians argue the contrary. As Scripture clearly states, it is the believer's death to the law which enables him to marry Christ and so produce a life of fruitfulness (Rom. 7:4-6). It is not the law, therefore, which is the believer's spring and motive for sanctification, but the gospel. The believer will be inevitably moved to holiness by the power of the Spirit working in him in the new covenant, and the Spirit does not do that within the believer by means of the covenant of death, the letter written in stone (2 Cor. 3:6-18)! As the apostle declared:

My brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code... There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Rom. 7:4-6; 8:1-4).

⁴⁸ Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.1 pp309-311,356; *Calvin's Commentaries*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1979, Vol.3 Part 1 p196; Vol.22 Part 1 p167; Vol.21 Part 1 p119; Vol.15 Part 2 p220, emphasis mine.

Purnell could not be clearer on this vital and contested point. Although I have already used the first extract, it is essential to repeat it here:

You are a believer. Consider: 1. The law that you have broken, Christ has kept, fulfilled and taken away. 2. Your sins which were many, both original and actual, of omission and commission, your sins past, those present, and those to come, are all laid upon Christ, and the wages due to them he received. 3. Consider upon what account you now stand before the Father, not in your own righteousness, but the righteousness of Christ. 4. Consider that you, being made free from sin: 'Likewise reckon yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God' (Rom. 6:11).

And now for the punch line, the kernel of new-covenant theology on this issue:

Now follows the fruit of this knowledge: the soul that is enlightened will not go on in sin,⁴⁹ but the love of Christ will constrain him from a course of sin.

Purnell again, showing how progressive sanctification is produced:

It is the preaching of this gospel, the doctrine of grace, that teaches men to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world (Tit. 2:11-12). And those blessed promises prevail with men to endeavour to cleanse themselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit (2 Cor. 7:1).⁵⁰

And again:

This doctrine of free grace... is the foundation and basis of all Christian religion... the inlet of all divine peace and consolation... the root and spring of all gospel obedience...

This doctrine is the root and spring of all gospel obedience. How do men write of a serious exhortation to a holy life and conversation, if they discover not [do not make clear] the way to it? Our Saviour says the tree must be made good before the fruit can be good (John 15:4) so that this doctrine is the root and

⁴⁹ *Good Tidings* p45.

⁵⁰ *The Way To Convert* p29.

spring of all true obedience. For this doctrine, being received and retained, works these five things in the heart and soul: faith, love, fear, willingness, and cheerfulness, and from these, as from five springs, do gospel obedience flow.

Purnell worked this out in detail:

Love constrains them in whom it is to walk holily (John 14:23; Ps. 26:3-4). True obedience springs from a holy fear (Ps. 119:161)... By all which it does appear that this doctrine of grace is the root and spring of a holy conversation, seeing in God are all our springs, and from him are all our supplies to enable us to perform any duty, to exercise any grace, to subdue any lust, to resist any temptation, to bear any affliction. In a word, the Lord tells us without him we can do nothing.⁵¹

Purnell faced the objection: ‘If our election, calling, regeneration, justification, acceptance, and sanctification are all of grace, and only of grace, what need is there [in Scripture] of so much crying up, and pressing of works, or a holy life and conversation?’ In reply, he declared:

There are many strong prevailing arguments to engage us and all people to a holy life, notwithstanding all is of grace. Take these few for the whole. Although good works and a holy life are not the cause of our salvation, yet they are the way to the kingdom, though not the cause of reigning. Christ did not free us from the debt of sin to deliver us from the debt of service, but he did the one freely that we might do the other cheerfully. We must be found in the way of holiness in point of conversation, otherwise we should walk unworthy of God, unworthy of the gospel, and unworthy of our calling... The blood of Christ both sanctifies and satisfies, both in respect of [progressive] sanctification and justification, so that we have need of a serious exhortation to a holy life and conversation... Because if our conversation is not answerable to our profession, we walk unworthy of God, unworthy of the gospel, and unworthy of our calling (Col. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:12; Phil.1:27; Eph. 4:1). We read: ‘This is the will of God, even our sanctification, that we abstain from fornication; that everyone of us should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour (1 Thess. 4:3-4; see verse 7). We shall never enjoy what is promised unless we at least endeavour to do

⁵¹ *A Serious Exhortation* pp7-14.

what is commanded, for without faith in Christ, and obedience to him, there is no promise of life and salvation by him... We shall not receive and enjoy what is promised unless we perform what is commanded...

Godliness brings true peace, quiet and comfort to the soul. More, it leads a soul to have communion with God and his people. So that godliness here is the way to eternal glory hereafter. A holy life and conversation is of necessity to distinguish between one that serves God, and him that serves him not. He that is a servant of God will let us know it by his obedience to him (Rom. 6:16). He that is one of Christ's flock will hear and obey his voice (John 10:27). He that has an interest in the promises will cleanse himself from the filthiness of flesh and spirit (2 Cor. 7:1). If Christ died for you, let us see it by your living to him (2 Cor. 5:15). He that is Christ's will crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts (Gal. 5:24). Those whom Christ has chosen to salvation, it is through sanctification of the Spirit,⁵² and belief of the truth (2 Thess. 2:13). He that has faith in Christ will let it appear by his works (Jas. 2:18)...

One would think that the love of Christ, the promises of Christ, the presence of Christ, the example of Christ, and the recompense of the reward held forth by Christ, should make us hold on, and hold out.. But if great love, great mercy, great forbearance, great entreaties, great wages, will not prevail with us to forsake our sins, and lead a holy life, Oh Lord! what will become of us? 'For without holiness no man shall see the Lord' [Heb. 12:14]...

Now obedience, sanctification or a holy conversation is necessary 1. In respect of God. 2. In respect of ourselves. 3. In respect of others.

Purnell, spelling this out over several pages, with many scriptures, went on to:

Enquire into... four things about a holy conversation. 1. The nature of what it is. 2. The means of attaining it. 3. The trials of how it may be known. 4. The motives or inducements to it.

He spoke of:

⁵² This refers to positional sanctification or even regeneration. Of course, progressive sanctification is an essential and inevitable demonstration of these two.

A heedful observing the word of God to be our rule, and his glory our aim... A holy life is the product or effect of a work of grace in our hearts... A Christian is to make the word of God his rule, and so walk and act as we have Christ, the prophets and apostles for our example, that we may go out by the footsteps of the flock...

True obedience has two companions: universality and sincerity; that is, [the believer] has a respect to all God's commandments (Ps. 119:6), and endeavours to keep them.⁵³

As Purnell said:

He that is a servant of God will let us know it by his obedience to him (Rom. 6:16). He that is a servant of Christ will let us know it by his love to his people (John 13:35). He that says he lives in the Spirit will let us know it by his walking in the Spirit (Gal. 5:25). He that abides in the vine will let us see it by his fruitfulness (John 15:5). He that has faith will show it by his works (Jas. 2:18). He that is indeed a wise man will let us see it by his good conversation (Jas. 3:13). He that has an interest in the promises will let us know it by his cleansing himself from all filthiness, both of the flesh and spirit (2 Cor. 7:1). A man must not dance and dine with the Devil, and yet think to sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.⁵⁴

Yet again:

This doctrine [of free justification] is the root and spring of all gospel obedience. Whatsoever men call obedience, if it does not arise from hence, it is but forced and legal. We must get gospel principles if we would get gospel practices. Wherever this doctrine of grace is received and retained in the love and power of it, it works five things in the soul: faith, love, fear, willingness and cheerfulness. And from these five things, all gospel obedience arises.⁵⁵

‘Some men will be ready to say [that] if the new covenant is every way thus free... we may live as we list [like]’. Purnell

⁵³ *A Serious Exhortation* pp26-27,30-35-59.

⁵⁴ *A Serious Exhortation* pp62-63.

⁵⁵ *A Little Cabinet* p65.

answered this in ten particulars, moving onto ‘sanctification, or a holy conversation according to a gospel rule’.⁵⁶ As he asserted:

Justification is... the spring and way to sanctification... Every discovery [revelation] of Christ and his righteousness to the soul for justification fits and heightens the soul’s resolution for sanctification and holiness.⁵⁷

Purnell used several motives or arguments to enforce his doctrine, turning first to:

Meditate much upon the free love of God... freely to love us and graciously to justify us, and then... the soul will say within itself: ‘Shall I sin against him who has freely justified me? No, no! How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?’⁵⁸

As I have said, one of the common charges against new-covenant theology is that it is, at best, doctrinal antinomianism. In making Purnell a spokesman for that theology, as I have done in this article, I defy any critic to repeat the charge in light of what they read here.

But I do not wish to end on a negative note. I have published these extracts from the works of Robert Purnell because I am convinced that such teaching needs to be heard in our generation – and in generations to come. I am delighted to have been able to let this man, long dead, put before us some of the sweet truths which lie at the heart of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Appreciating, experiencing and preaching such truths are essential – for the saving of sinners, for the comfort, assurance and progressive sanctification of saints, and thus for the glory of God. Consequently, the debate over new-covenant theology cannot be confined to academe, nor can it be the preserve of those who enjoy, as a hobby, theological debate. As I have just observed, vital issues are at stake, issues which affect the eternal welfare of the souls of countless men and women alive today, and who are yet to be born.

⁵⁶ *A Little Cabinet* pp85,88-100.

⁵⁷ *A Little Cabinet* pp102-103.

⁵⁸ *A Little Cabinet* p105. Indeed, as he went on he had much to say against sin in the believer (see pp135-155).

The Law of Christ Is Christ Himself

Introduction

In this brief article, I will say why I am convinced that Christ himself is the believer's law, the law of Christ.

The Scriptures show us that the aim of the believer's life can be summed up as Christ-likeness. To reach this goal, God, by his Spirit unites the sinner, at the point of faith, to Christ himself. The Spirit forms Christ in him. He is in Christ, and Christ is in him. For the believer, Christ is the standard, the pattern, the power, of his life. Christ is the covenant, the all in all (Col. 3:11). And, in that new covenant, the Spirit motivates and empowers the believer to grow in the knowledge and likeness of his Saviour.

I will not develop these points here, having done so in many other works. In particular, see my *Christ Is all: No Sanctification by the Law*. Indeed, this article is adapted from that volume.¹

Let me sum up the case I had made in the previous pages of that book. Christ is his people's lawgiver. His law is binding. It is a real law. Love is its goal. Love is its motive. It is a penetrating law. Christ gives power to keep it. It is not independent of Scripture. It is all about what a believer is.

¹ *Christ is All* pp258-261,509-510. See also my "The Law" in "The Law of Christ"; 'The Law on the Believer's Heart'; 'The Law the Believer's Rule?'; 'The Law as a Paradigm'. These may be found under the Edocs link on David H J Gay Ministry on sermonaudio.com; on christmycovenant.com; on the series 'New-Covenant Theology Made Simple' on sermonaudio.com and youtube.com. This note applies to all such references in this article. In addition, see Todd Braye: 'Five Reasons Why I Object to Classic NCT's Definition of the Law of Christ' (christmycovenant.com). While I think Braye was mistaken to exclude the external commands of Christ and the apostles from the law of Christ, he was right to stress that Christ himself is his own law, written on the hearts, formed in the hearts, of his people. Even though his article is brief, do not miss Braye's towering argument through a range of scriptures, including Isa. 42:1-6; Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 36:25-27; 1 Cor. 9:19-21; Gal. 2:20; 6:2.

But, as I then said, there is one further point to make. And it is the ultimate point, the supreme point. And that is what this article is all about.

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Who can plumb the depth of Paul's words: 'We preach Christ crucified... the wisdom of God... But of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for [to, NASB] us wisdom from God' (1 Cor. 1:23-24,30)? Christ, the wisdom of God? Christ became wisdom for us or to us? What does this mean? Wisdom! What a word for Paul (a converted Jew, an ex Jewish-teacher) to conjure with! Surely he had in mind the excellencies of wisdom found in Job 28; the first nine chapters of Proverbs, and such passages as Psalm 104:24; 136:5; not forgetting, of course, 'wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom' (Prov. 4:7). The point is: the apostle *unreservedly applied this scriptural language to Christ*. Thus he could declare that Christ 'is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things consist... in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' (Col. 1:15-17; 2:3). What telling statements! What staggering claims! How sweeping! How weighty! How significant!

Let me stress this. The Jews of Paul's day continued to think in terms of the *torah*, the law – principally the Proverbs – when speaking about wisdom, and the Gentiles were not backward in boasting of their intellectualism, their culture of 'wisdom' and 'philosophy'. It was to all such (1 Cor. 1:22-24) that Paul preached only 'Jesus Christ and him crucified', that he declared he was 'determined' to preach Christ, preaching him as 'Christ crucified... the wisdom of God' (1 Cor. 2:2,7).² He certainly

² Note how many times Paul used 'wisdom' (or 'foolishness') in the context of 1 Cor. 1:18 – 2:16, and on to 3:18-20.

confronted the cultures!³ His meaning could not be clearer. Let Jews and Greeks boast of their wisdom. Believers will boast of Christ and his cross (Gal. 6:14). Do not miss the apostle's litotes in: '*I am not ashamed of the gospel*, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written: "The righteous shall live by faith"' (Rom. 1:16-17).⁴ Believers know that in the new covenant, Christ is their wisdom. Christ is wisdom, full stop! Christ himself is the word of God (John 1:1; Heb. 1:2). CHRIST IS WISDOM!

The translation of 1 Corinthians 1:30 is debated. Its mistranslation has led to an ingrained misinterpretation and consequent misunderstanding. The AV gives the impression that Christ is four things for believers – wisdom, righteousness, sanctification⁵ and redemption. The NKJV makes a demarcation between wisdom and the other three: 'Christ Jesus... became for us wisdom from God – and righteousness and sanctification and redemption'. The NIV goes further with 'wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption'. Which is right? The last. Paul is saying that Christ is wisdom – this is the principal thing – wisdom which comprises righteousness,

³ See my 'The Clash of The Cultures' and 'Confronting The Cultures' on my sermonaudio page.

⁴ See my series: 'Glorying In The Gospel' on my sermonaudio page.

⁵ 'Sanctification' will come up repeatedly in this article. In particular, there is positional sanctification and progressive sanctification. By 'progressive sanctification', I mean the believer's imperfect (in this life) outworking of the perfect positional-sanctification he has in Christ by virtue of his union with Christ at his conversion. The sinner, on coming to faith, is united to Christ and is justified and positionally sanctified. Thus, in God's sight, in Christ he is accounted or made righteous, free of sin and condemnation, and perfectly separated unto God. (See, for instance, 1 Cor. 1:2,30; 6:11; Eph. 5:25-27; Heb. 10:10-18; 13:12). In his Christian life, he has to work out his perfection in Christ, and he will be moved to do so by the Spirit under the direction of Scripture; this is his progressive sanctification or holiness of life. But this, alas, is imperfect. The believer will only be absolutely sanctified in the eternal state. I will set out my arguments on all this in my forthcoming book on sanctification.

sanctification and redemption. The apostle is not listing four separate entities.⁶ Furthermore, Paul is speaking objectively. Christ is made by God to be wisdom. True, he is made wisdom ‘for us’; in Christ, therefore, believers have wisdom. But this is because he himself is wisdom. Being wisdom, *Christ* is his people’s wisdom; that is, they are justified, sanctified and redeemed in and by Christ. They ‘are complete in him’ (Col. 2:10).

Let us get to grips with this. We are approaching something of high significance. More! It is vital! Paul (as a converted Jew, as an ex Jewish-teacher) knew full well that, in the Old Testament, wisdom was closely associated with the law: ‘Be careful to observe [the statutes and judgements, the commandments, the law]; for this is your wisdom and your understanding’ (Deut. 4:6). ‘The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do his commandments’ (Ps. 111:10). This intimate connection between the law and wisdom had been ingrained in Paul, right from his days as Saul of Tarsus. How striking, then, that Paul, writing to Greeks and Jews, called the gospel ‘wisdom’ (1 Cor. 2:6-7). Writing to Timothy, ‘the holy Scriptures’, he said, bring wisdom, for they ‘are able to make you wise for salvation’ (2 Tim. 3:15). Moreover, the apostle emphasised wisdom in his prayers for believers – that they would be given ‘the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of [God]’ (Eph. 1:17), being ‘filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding’ (Col. 1:9). And he commanded believers to ‘let the word of Christ dwell in [them] richly in all wisdom’ (Col. 3:16). Above all (1 Cor. 1:23-24,30) – above all, I stress – he proclaimed that Christ himself is wisdom. See also Romans 10:6-8, where Paul quoted Deuteronomy 30:11-14, which referred to the law, and yet applied it unreservedly to Christ. Christ is the total, complete fulfilment of the law.

So let me spell it out: Christ is the new *torah*! Let me say that again. *In the new covenant, Christ, being wisdom, is the*

⁶ Weymouth New Testament: ‘Christ Jesus... has become for us a wisdom which is from God, consisting of righteousness and sanctification and deliverance’.

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believer's **torah**. Oh, that it might sink in! Christ is the *torah* of the new covenant. In light of this, can it really be argued that the law at Sinai was God's final word? that the ten commandments comprise the believer's *perfect* rule?⁷ Does Matthew 5 – 7; John 13 – 16, especially John 13:34; Hebrews 1:1-4, not shout otherwise? *Christ* is God's final word! Christ is all!

What am I saying? I am trying to do the impossible and get down on paper that which the New Testament reveals to be the topmost stone of the arch of Christ's law. In the new covenant, Christ is the believer's wisdom; that is, Christ is his people's law. Christ *himself* is the law of Christ. He not only gave, brought, taught the word of God; *he is the word of God itself*. See John 1:1-18. He declared himself to be the truth: 'I am... the truth' (John 14:6), a statement of tremendous import. He did not claim to have truth, or bring truth; he did not claim to be *a* truth! No! 'I AM **THE** TRUTH'. 'His name is called "The Word of God"' (Rev. 19:13). Let me quote some of the opening words of John's gospel:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God... In him was life, and the life was the light of men... That was the true light which gives light to every man coming into the world... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth... And of his fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him (John 1:1-18).

And Christ himself, *he himself as his law*, is revealed in the gospel. So important is this, let me make it as clear as I can:

Christ himself is the law of Christ

'Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse

⁷ I am referring here, of course, to Calvin's third use of the law, widely adopted by the Reformed.

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punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?' (Heb. 10:28-29). Note the 'balancing contrast' in Hebrews 10:28-29. The law of Moses is balanced by, contrasted with... what? It can only be the law of Christ. Which is? 'The Son of God... the blood of the covenant... the Spirit of grace'. Once again, the law of Christ is not a list of rules. The law of Christ is Christ himself.

Putting all this together, it is clear that, in the new covenant, Paul saw Christ as the wisdom of God, the new law, the law of Christ, the believer's *torah*, the believer's *nomos*, the believer's perfect rule. Thus the law of Christ is nothing less than his person, his words and works. Believers are to live as Christ lived, do as Christ would do, think as Christ would think, speak as Christ would speak. They must obey Christ's words and follow Christ's example. They must 'walk just as he walked' (1 John 2:6). Christ is their wisdom, Christ is their law, Christ is their life. Christ himself, Christ's words, Christ formed and living in his people (Gal. 2:20; 4:19; Eph. 3:17; Col. 1:27; 3:4) by his Spirit, is the motive, the means and standard of their sanctification. The believer lives, thinks, feels, speaks, acts and suffers as Christ. 'As he is, so are we in this world' (1 John 4:17). Believers are in Christ, and Christ is in them, as almost-countless scriptures declare.

Consider: 'Looking unto Jesus' (Heb. 12:2). How do we become Christians? By looking unto Jesus: 'Look to me, and be saved' (Isa. 45:22). 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever *believes* in him should not perish but have eternal life' (John 3:14-15). And what did God instruct Moses to do? 'Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he *looks* at it shall live. So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he *looked* at the bronze serpent, he lived' (Num. 21:8-9). Christ told us: 'My Father's will is that everyone who *looks* to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day' (John 6:40, NIV). What

will bring about our final consummation as Christians? Looking to, looking at, Jesus! ‘We know that when he [Christ] is revealed, we shall be like him, for we shall *see* him as he is’ (1 John 3:2). ‘For now we *see* in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face’ (1 Cor. 13:12). Just so! Christ prayed for it: ‘Father, I desire that they also whom you gave me may be with me where I am, that they may *behold* my glory’ (John 17:24). Ah! But what about the in-between? We began the Christian life by looking to Jesus. We shall end by looking to Jesus. What is it that keeps us walking in godliness? Looking to Jesus! ‘We... *beholding* as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image... by the Spirit of the Lord’ (2 Cor. 3:18). ‘Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, *looking* unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith’ (Heb. 12:1-2). In short: ‘*Seek* those things which are above, where Christ is... *Set your mind* on things above’ (Col. 3:1-2). Looking to Jesus! Looking to Jesus is how we begin the race; looking to Jesus is how we continue and finish the race; and looking to Jesus is our glory at the end of the race. Looking to Jesus; not Moses, not the law, not baptism, not anything or anybody else. The Lord Jesus Christ! Only the Lord Jesus Christ! Looking to him! Looking only to him!

The New Testament, I admit, does not explicitly state that Christ is the new law for his people (no more than it explicitly states, say, the doctrine of the trinity), but it is written large for all to read. Christ is God’s final word to man. And this takes us back to Hebrews 1:1-4. Christ is all.

This is what I understand by the law of Christ. Christ is his people’s lawgiver. His law is binding. It is a real law. It is a penetrating law. Love is its goal. Love is its motive. Christ gives power to keep it. It is not independent of Scripture. It is all about what a believer is. Above all, it is Christ himself formed in his people by his Spirit. Christ is all.

Extracts with comments

On 1 Corinthians 1:30, W.D.Davies: ‘The evidence suggests that... “wisdom... is constituted... of righteousness, sanctification

and redemption” is the best’ translation.⁸ Leon Morris: ‘The Greek seems... to mean that these three are subordinate to wisdom, and explanatory of it’.⁹ Gordon D.Fee: It is not ‘that Christ has been made these four things for believers. Rather, God has made him to become wisdom... true wisdom... to be understood in terms of the three illustrative metaphors’.¹⁰

In the new covenant, Christ is wisdom, and he is his people’s wisdom.¹¹ Deuteronomy 30:11-14 referred to the law, and yet Paul applied it unreservedly to Christ in Romans 10:5-13. Some have been too restrictive in their view of this. Douglas J.Moo, for instance: ‘The association of Christ with wisdom is perhaps not as widespread nor as important to Paul’s Christology as some have made it’.¹² I disagree. Davies went even further than Moo: ‘The appeal to this passage in proof of Paul’s wisdom Christology does not carry conviction’. Even so, Davies was right to note: ‘What is highly significant... is that the passage quoted from Deuteronomy 30:12-14 refers to the *torah*... whereas Paul applies it to Christ’.¹³ This is my point. Christ is his people’s law. Spiritual life begins with union with Christ; union with Christ is the believer’s life.

Davies:

To be a Christian is to re-live, as it were, in one’s own experience the life of Jesus, to die and to rise with him, and also at the same time to stand under the moral imperative of his words... Not only did the words of Jesus form a *torah* for Paul, but so also did the person of Jesus. In a real sense, conformity to Christ, his teaching and his life, has taken the place for Paul of

⁸ W.D.Davies: *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology*, S.P.C.K., London, third edition 1970, pp154-155.

⁹ Leon Morris: *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, The Tyndale Press, London, 1963, p50.

¹⁰ Gordon D.Fee: *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, William B.Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, reprinted 1991, p86.

¹¹ See Davies pp147-176.

¹² Douglas J.Moo: *The Epistle to the Romans*, William B.Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1996, p653.

¹³ Davies p154.

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conformity to the Jewish *torah*. Jesus himself – in word and deed or fact – is a new *torah*.

As Davies admitted, ‘it is true that at no point in the Pauline letters is the recognition of Jesus as a new *torah* made explicit in so many words’. Nevertheless, this fact is clearly taught and implied – especially in 2 Corinthians 3 and 4, where Paul proved that:

Jesus, not the *torah*, was the true revelation of the divine glory and the divine light. This probably means... that Jesus [is] a new *torah*... Jesus has replaced the *torah* at the centre of Paul’s life. [But] *torah*... is not merely to be understood in the restricted sense of legislation... Paul would think of Jesus as the *torah* of God not only in the sense that his words were a *nomos* but that he himself *in toto* was a full revelation of God and of his will for man.¹⁴

And this takes us back to Hebrews 1:1-3.

John Brown:

When a man becomes a true Christian, ‘Christ is formed in him’; that is, Christ’s mode of thinking and feeling becomes his. The mind that was in Christ is in him. He has the spirit [Spirit] of Christ; so that he thinks as Christ thought, feels as Christ felt, speaks as Christ spoke, acts as Christ acted, suffers as Christ suffered. He is just an animated image of Jesus Christ. This, and nothing short of this, is to be a Christian.¹⁵

In short, union with Christ is the key. This is how spiritual life begins, how it continues, and how it will be consummated – united for ever with Christ in glory.

Jon Zens:

The rule of the new Israel is a new creation... faith which works by love... the keeping of God’s commandments (Gal. 6:15-16; 5:6; 1 Cor. 7:19). The citations of Old Testament commands

¹⁴ Davies pp148-149.

¹⁵ John Brown: *An Exposition of the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians*, The Sovereign Grace Book Club, Evansville, Indiana, 1957, p226.

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come to us, [it is true, but] not as bare commandments, but only as contemplated in their relationship to Christ and the new age he has inaugurated.¹⁶

Now glance at the alternative; namely, the Reformed or covenant-theology approach. Take Robert L. Reymond as a case in point.¹⁷ We know that the law stressed the negative – ‘you shall not’; the apostles, however, majored on the positive. Travelling the negative road, trying to justify the Reformed third use of the law, Reymond asked: ‘How does one show concretely his love to God and to his neighbour, as Christ commands?’ Reymond’s answer consisted mainly of negatives – ‘never putting anything before [God]... not murdering... not committing adultery... not stealing... not bearing false witness... not coveting’. Oh dear! It shows the negative nature of the Reformed approach to holiness. Of course there are negatives, but how about ‘loving, being faithful, being generous, telling the truth, sharing’, *etc.*? In short, why not describe holiness ‘as Christ commands’ in the New Testament? Which is? Positively, ‘to be like Christ’. Should a believer aim not to be a law-breaker, or to be like Christ?

Returning to the scriptural position, take the 17th century so-called antinomian,¹⁸ Tobias Crisp: ‘Run through the several branches of sanctification, and you find that every particular is begun, continued, and perfected through the favour and bounty of God in Christ’.¹⁹

Reformed teachers (at best) ignore the sanctifying power of the gospel when they wrongly give it to the law. Hermann Witsius, for instance, claimed that ‘the promises of grace [ought to] be referred to the gospel, all injunctions of duty... [belong] to the

¹⁶ Jon Zens: *Studies in Theology and Ethics*, BREM, INC., 1981, p57.

¹⁷ Robert L. Reymond: *Paul, Missionary Theologian: A Survey of his Missionary Labours and Theology*, Christian Focus Publications, Fearn, 2000, p474.

¹⁸ See my *Four*.

¹⁹ Tobias Crisp: *Christ Alone Exalted in the Perfection and Encouragement of the Saints, Notwithstanding Sins and Trials; being the Complete Works of Tobias Crisp*, edited by John Gill, Old Paths Gospel Press, Choteau, Vol.4 p117.

law’.²⁰ Really? What version of the New Testament do such teachers possess?

Finally, take Archibald G.Brown, C.H.Spurgeon’s successor, and his account of Bill Sykes, who would refer to what he called, ‘that little bit’. ‘That little bit about Christ taking my place, and how he had my punishment for me’. Brown:

It would be no evil thing, but a matter for thankfulness, if there were a widespread impatience... in all congregations – a refusal to sit quiet unless ‘that little bit’ was given to the people. Everything lies in it. All truths spring out of it or circle round it. It is the acorn that contains within itself every limb and twig of the forest king. It is the centre of the solar system of grace. All the doctrines march in their courses round the cross. Whatever else the Christian worker may leave behind him, let him be sure that he carries ‘that little bit’. It works what nothing else can or ever will. Would he gain the attention of his audience? Let him tell ‘that little bit’. There is a never failing freshness about the theme... There is a heavenly fascination about the theme. The best cure for empty sanctuaries is plenty of ‘that little bit’.

And, I would add, ‘that little bit’, and plenty of it, is the way to holiness. As Brown concluded:

We vowed that, God helping us, ‘that little bit’ should be set as the central gem in every sermon preached henceforth. Fellow-preachers, teachers, labourers, may God make us all great on ‘that little bit’.²¹

In other words, let us follow the apostle (1 Cor. 1:23; 2:2), and preach²² Christ and him crucified, and Jesus as Lord (2 Cor. 4:5); in other words, the gospel (1 Cor. 9:16) – both for justification

²⁰ Quoted by Zens: *Studies* p35.

²¹ Archibald G.Brown: ‘Bill Sykes and “That Little Bit”’, *The Banner of Truth*, Dec. 2011, pp7,10.

²² Not only did Paul preach it. Read his letters. They are FULL of Christ for all – for all men and for all things for believers – whereas references to the law are remarkable for their virtual absence compared to the gospel. And when the apostle does refer to the law, he turns to it ‘merely’ as paradigm for the gospel. See my ‘The Law the Believer’s Rule?’

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and for sanctification, progressive as much as positional sanctification.

The Law Written

There are several places in the New Testament where the law in its *written* aspect is spoken of, where it is described as ‘the law of commandments contained in ordinances’, ‘the letter’, ‘the written code’, and so on.¹ This written law, Scripture explains, is at enmity with those it holds in its grip. It is a ‘ministry of condemnation’, a ‘ministry of death’ for those who are under it. Above all, these New Testament passages declare that, for his people, Christ has dealt with this ‘letter’, this ‘law of commandments contained in ordinances’, this ‘written and engraved’ law which was against them. He has removed it. They are no longer under it. In short, these passages concerning the written law teach the very same as Romans 6:14; 7:4,6; 8:4, Galatians 3:25-26; 5:18, and elsewhere.

Here are the passages in question:

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 [the written code (ESV)] (Rom. 7:6).

God... 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. But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, 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).

[Christ]... having abolished in his flesh the enmity; that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances... putting to death the enmity (Eph. 2:14-16).

¹ This article is taken from my *Christ* pp200-207,478-480, lightly edited.

[Christ] 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).

These four passages speak about the same thing, making the same point to the same sort of people. They speak to believers, teaching them the truth about their past and present relationship to the law. These passages tell us that the law was the *letter*, the *written code*, the law *written and engraved* on stones, the law of commandments contained in *ordinances*, the *handwriting*. And addressing believers, these passages all say this written law was a ministry of *condemnation*, at *enmity* with or *against* them. And they all say the written law, which was against them, was by Christ's work and gift of the Spirit *passing away*, *abolished*, or *wiped out*, so that believers are *delivered from* it.

Let me deal with the words I have just emphasised.²

The Greek for *delivered from*, *passing away* and *abolished* means 'to cause to cease, to put an end to, to do away with, annul, abolish, to make invalid'. Thus Romans 7:6, 2 Corinthians 3:11 and Ephesians 2:15 all speak of the same thing; namely, of the end of the law, of its being abolished, of its being done away with, of its being put away, its being made to cease. In other words, believers are released from the law by the work of Christ. He has done away with it. The word is used elsewhere in the New Testament, to speak of making the law *void*, of *destroying* the body, of *putting away* childish things and of *abolishing* death

² *katargeō*: 'To cause to cease, to put an end to, to do away with, annul, abolish, to make invalid'. *exaleiphō*: 'To wipe off, wipe away, obliterate, erase, blot out, remove, destroy'. *entolē* is used of 'the commandments of the Mosaic law, that which God prescribed in the law of Moses, particular precepts as distinguished from the body or sum of the law'. *nomos* refers to 'the Mosaic law – the volume or its contents'. *dogma* means 'the rules and requirements of the law of Moses' (Joseph Henry Thayer: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Ninth Printing 1991; William Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois, and The Syndics of the Cambridge University Press, London, 1957).

(Rom. 3:31; 1 Cor. 6:13; 13:11; 2 Tim. 1:10).³ This makes the meaning of our passages very clear. The law, for believers, has been abolished, put away, destroyed, made invalid, brought to an end, made void.

A different word is used in Colossians 2:14, translated *wiped out*. It means ‘to wipe off, wipe away, obliterate, erase, blot out, remove, destroy’. Hence it speaks with a similar voice to the other passages; Christ has obliterated the law for believers, wiped it away, erased it. Note the three steps. He ‘blotted it out’. Is that enough? No! ‘He took it out of the way’. Is *that* enough? No. He ‘nailed it to his cross’. It is finished, over and done with, for ever.

Ah! But what is the ‘it’? What, precisely, has been abolished, done away with, removed by Christ? What have believers been delivered from? *This* is the issue. It is the law (Rom. 7:6; Eph. 2:15), the killing letter, the ministry of death and condemnation written on stones (2 Cor. 3:6-7,9), ‘the handwriting of requirements’ (Col. 2:14). It is the law which is blotted out, not the law in ‘so far as it was against us and cursed us’. The law! Sadly, however, there is a great deal of confusion over this. Let me look at it in more detail.

Take the Ephesian passage. Paul spoke of ‘the law’, ‘the law of commandments’, ‘the law of commandments contained in ordinances’. What did he mean? He was speaking of the law of Moses written on stones and written in Scripture, the Mosaic law in its entirety. The same goes for the Corinthian and the Colossian passages.⁴ There is no difference between ‘the letter’ which ‘kills... the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones... the ministry of condemnation’ (2 Cor. 3:5-11), ‘the enmity; that is the law of commandments contained in ordinances... the enmity’ (Eph. 2:14-16), and ‘the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us’ (Col. 2:14).

³ While I recognise that Rom. 3:31 states that the gospel establishes the law and does not make it ‘void’, I am drawing attention to the use of the word ‘abolish’, which is used of the law in the other texts. As for Rom. 3:31 see my video and audio clips under David H J Gay Ministry, ‘New-Covenant Theology Made Simple’, ([youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com); [sermonaudio.com](https://www.sermonaudio.com)).

⁴ But see below.

In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul was certainly referring at least to the ten commandments given at Sinai. *They* were written on stones (Ex. 34:28; Deut. 4:13; 5:22; 10:4). Moreover, the Greek word for *letter* or *writing* in Romans 7:6 and 2 Corinthians 3:6, is the same as in Romans 2:27; namely, the written code, the written law of Moses, ‘his writings’ (John 5:47). And this, it goes without saying, is the law, including the ten commandments. Furthermore, in Romans 7:7, Paul quoted the tenth commandment. In addition, the Greek word for *commandments* in Ephesians 2:15 is used in Ephesians 6:2, speaking of the fifth commandment. So ‘the law of commandments’ (Eph. 2:15) must include the ten *commandments*. Furthermore, it is the word which is used repeatedly in Romans 7:8-13, where Paul undeniably was speaking of the decalogue, the commandments of the law, that law which God gave to Moses. In the Ephesian passage, Paul declares that the law of Moses itself is the dividing wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles, and that Christ made peace between Jews and Gentiles by destroying this hostility, the dividing wall, by abolishing the law of commandments in ordinances itself – that which gave rise to the hostility. This is further confirmed by the Greek word for *law* which is used in Ephesians 2:15 and many other places, including Romans 7; Galatians 3 and 4; and 1 Timothy 1:8-9. It refers to ‘the Mosaic law – the volume or its contents’, including the ten commandments. It is the whole of the Mosaic law, the ten commandments in particular, which ‘passes [fades] away’ (2 Cor. 3:11,13; Heb. 8:13).⁵ What is more, the Greek word for *ordinances*, which is used in Ephesians 2:15 and Colossians 2:14, means ‘the rules and requirements of the law of Moses’, and is linked as above with *commandments*. There is no doubt, therefore, that these four passages – in Romans 7, 2 Corinthians 3, Ephesians 2 and Colossians 2 – speaking of the written law, all refer to the Mosaic law including the ten commandments.

Exodus 34:27-28 is a crucial passage, showing that ‘the ten commandments’ and ‘the words of the covenant’ are one and the

⁵ Note the comparison with man’s likeness to a temporary and vanishing ‘vapour’ in Jas. 4:14 and associated passages.

same. The Reformed tripartite division of the law founders on this passage.⁶ The Mosaic law given at Sinai is one indivisible law, and this statement (Ex. 34:27-28) paints the background for Paul's declaration about its abolition. It is the law of Moses as a whole, and in all its parts, which has passed away, and this includes the ten commandments. 'The whole law' is embraced in Paul's declaration.

It is abundantly plain, therefore, that the four passages in question speak about one and the same thing; namely, the Mosaic law, that same law as is spoken of in Romans 6:14; 7:1-12; 8:2-4 and Galatians 3:10-25; 4:21-25; 5:14,18. If you have any doubt, reader, please read these passages, and compare them with the passages in question in this article. They all speak of the same law – the Mosaic law, including the ten commandments – and they consistently speak of it in terms of its rule, bondage, curse, enmity, requirements, and so on, and they consistently speak of its removal for believers by the work of Christ. So the believer – the person who has the Spirit of the Lord – is no longer in bondage, because in Christ 'there is liberty' (2 Cor. 3:17).⁷ 'For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery' (Gal. 5:1).

In 2 Corinthians 3:3-18, Paul was contrasting the glory of the gospel with that of the Mosaic economy, contrasting the

⁶ I have repeatedly dealt with this fundamental mistake of covenant theologians; namely, dividing the law into three, thus enabling them (they think) to jettison everything but the ten commandments, their so-called 'moral law'. In particular, see my 'Reading The Bible' under David H J Gay Ministry, 'New-Covenant Theology Made Simple' ([youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...); [sermonaudio.com](https://www.sermonaudio.com/...)).

⁷ Now a question might suggest itself. Since the law was given to the Jews and not to the Gentiles, how were these Gentiles ever under this 'handwriting' in the first place? How were they under the law? The answer is Rom. 2:14-15. Gentiles have 'the work of the law written in their hearts'. See my *Christ* pp38-48,342-347 for an examination of Rom. 2:14-15. This same difficulty arises elsewhere of course; Rom. 7:1-6, for instance. One thing is certain, however. If any Reformed writer wants to limit 'the law' in these passages to the ceremonial law, he needs to explain how the Gentiles were ever under the ceremonial law. See below.

ministries of the old and new covenants, contrasting their relative glories.⁸ 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 spells 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). The old covenant condemned; the new covenant is justifying (verse 9).⁹ The old covenant spelled bondage; the new covenant, liberty (verses 12,17). Note the new/old contrast; the new is established, the old is abolished; the new has power, the old was useless and ineffective.

The enmity of the law in Ephesians 2:14-16 came about because of its divisive nature. God built this separation into the law, making it a fundamental aspect of the law. God gave the law to Israel, and only to Israel, as a special mark to separate the Jews from the rest of mankind (Deut. 4:1 – 6:25; Ps. 147:19-20; Rom. 3:1-2; 9:4-5, and so on).¹⁰ The law separated Jew and Gentile, and both were separated from God (Rom. 3:19-20; 4:15; 5:20; 7:7-11). And this law can be none other than the law of Moses, the whole of it. The same goes for Colossians 2:14. Christ abolished the law, by fulfilling it. By his death, he has freed believers from the law. They are no longer under the law but under grace (Rom. 6:14). The word ‘ordinances’ must not be misunderstood. Paul was not talking about what Reformed people

⁸ See my *Christ* pp178-184,469-470.

⁹ Although the apostle spoke of ‘justification’ in 2 Cor. 3:9, he was encompassing much more; indeed, the whole of salvation. No sinner was saved by keeping the law. To clutch at a straw here, and try to use this verse to limit the passage – and all the other passages – to the law for justification is simply not worthy of serious teachers. If John Calvin’s third use of the law depends on such puerile exegesis, its case must be desperate. See below for more on Calvin’s threefold use of the law.

¹⁰ See my *Christ* pp27-37,337-341.

call the ceremonial law – he was talking about the whole law expressed in particular rules, regulations, commands and ordinances. It certainly included the fourth commandment – the sabbath. After all, the sabbath was a principal dividing marker between Jew and the rest of mankind (Ex. 31:12-18; Neh. 9:13-14; 13:14-22; Ezek. 20:5-26).¹¹

As for Romans 7:6, ‘the oldness of the letter’ is the law. It is called ‘the letter’ simply because it was an external written code, written on the two tablets of stone, and then in Scripture. Both the old and new covenants were (are) written; the old, externally on stone and in the pages of Scripture; the new, in Scripture and, above all, in the heart. The old was a killing covenant; the new brings life. 2 Corinthians 3:6 is a parallel passage. Christ has set believers free from the law.

In short, these four passages on the written law, Romans 7:6, 2 Corinthians 3:5-11, Ephesians 2:14-16 and Colossians 2:14, teach the same doctrine as we have seen in many other places of Scripture; namely, Christ has set his people free from the law of Moses. It cannot be, therefore, the believer’s perfect rule of godliness.

Sadly, it is not unknown for Reformed writers to gloss these passages. Let me give some examples.

Some say the law in question is the ceremonial law

This is a frequent claim, but inconsistently made. Some argue for instance that Ephesians 2:14 refers to ‘the ceremonial law’, but Romans 7 is the entire Mosaic law. And yet these two passages, as I have shown, speak of precisely the same law. Some argue that it was only the ceremonial law which divides Jew and Gentile. Yet they also admit that the ten commandments, like the ceremonies, were given to Israel. Some make much of the word ‘ordinances’ in Ephesians 2:14-16, deducing Paul was not talking about the ten commandments. But this is a mistake. Even in the ten commandments, there are ordinances, ‘rules and regulations’. Were these not an integral part of ‘the Mosaic code’ and its

¹¹ See my *Sabbath Questions*.

‘stipulations’? Does Colossians 2:14 not refer to the Mosaic law, including the ten commandments? Who wrote the handwriting in Colossians 2:14? and where did he write it? In other words, what or whose is ‘the handwriting of requirements’ which has been ‘wiped out’? I have answered all these questions. There can be no doubt that the writing and law of commandments which was against us includes the ten commandments, not merely the so-called ‘ceremonial law’. Ephesians 2:14-15 is ‘the law with its commandments and regulations’; not the *ceremonial* law. If anybody should try to argue that the ‘that is’ of Ephesians 2:15 proves Paul was referring to the ceremonial law, they should bear in mind that the translators have added the ‘that is’; Paul didn’t write it!

As for the ordinances in the ten commandments, take the fourth. Sabbath law was full of ordinances – ordinances about work, the family, servants, animals and immigrants. And the number of sabbath ordinances contained in the rest of Moses’ writings is, I might say, legion. So even if Paul had been speaking about the ordinances which flesh out the commandments, and not the commandments themselves, he would have destroyed the Reformed case: Christ, apparently, has delivered us from the sabbath *because he has delivered us from all its ordinances*. And if he has delivered us from the fourth commandment, he has delivered us from the entire system (Jas. 2:10-11). Since Reformed sabbatarians claim Christ has removed all ceremonial laws for his people, how can they argue for the retention of a commandment so obviously ceremonial?

And, reader, do not forget, when Paul was writing to the Ephesians and Colossians, he was writing to Gentiles. Were they ever under the ceremonial law (allowing the term) with all its Jewish fasts, feasts, foods, offerings and circumcision? Were the Ephesians labouring under such things before conversion? Was that their problem? No Reformed writer – as far as I am aware – has ever suggested that Gentiles were under what the Reformed call the ceremonial law. Where and when did God ever command and require – I use the word ‘require’ advisedly in light of ‘handwriting of *requirements*’ (Col. 2:14) – where did he command and require Gentiles to observe the fasts, feasts,

offerings and circumcision? Did Christ die to release Gentiles from *Jewish* feasts and rituals? Paul was not saying that Christ abolished the law of ceremonies, destroying its binding power. I am glad Christ has done far more than that for his people.

The Ephesian passage teaches us that the Jews were distinguished from the Gentiles, separated from them, that there was ‘a middle wall of division between’ them. This barrier, this wall of division, this demarcation line between the two, primarily comprised ‘the law of commandments contained in ordinances’. True, circumcision had become in the Jewish mind the great divider, the most visible, the most obvious, divider (Eph. 2:11),¹² the one the Jews boasted of more than any, but the fact is the Gentiles ‘at that time... 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’ (Eph. 2:12). Especially were they separated from the Jews – and from God – by the fact that God gave his law, ‘his word... his statutes and his judgements’, ‘the law of commandments contained in ordinances’, to the Jews and not to them (Ps. 147:19-20). They were not under the pedagogue of the law as were the Jews (Gal. 3:23-25). As I have shown, God gave his law to Israel and to no others.¹³ What law was this, which distinguished the Jews from the Gentiles? The law of Moses. All attempts to restrict this to a part of the law are very wide of the mark.

Some say the law in question is the judicial law

Disagreeing with those who think it was the ceremonial law which divided Jew and Gentile, some think it was ‘the judicial law’ which did it; it was the ‘civil regulations’ which comprised ‘the wall of partition’. Oh? How is it then that we are told (Ex. 31:12-18; Neh. 9:13-14; 13:14-22; Ezek. 20:5-26) that the sabbath¹⁴ was given to the Jews as a sign to mark them out from

¹² Not only was circumcision an obvious separating mark, so were the sabbath and dietary laws.

¹³ See my *Christ* pp27-37,337-341 for more on the law as the wall of partition.

¹⁴ See my *Sabbath Questions*.

all other nations, that it was a central part of his covenant with Israel, his special people (Deut. 4:1-8,44-45; 5:1-3; 29:1,10-15,25,29)? I mention this because the sabbath is not, of course, according to Reformed writers, part of the judicial law, but the moral! What is more, if Christ shed his blood to remove the handwriting of the *judicial or social* law, he must have died to grant his people liberty to eat pork, wear garments of mixed yarns, and so on.¹⁵ The idea is preposterous. And, as before, who will claim that the Gentiles were ever under the *Jewish* civil law?

Some show a reluctance to take the passages seriously, especially in their works on the sabbath

I have detected a seeming unwillingness on the part of some, or an inadequate examination of the passages, in their works on the law or the sabbath, to face up to John 1:17, 2 Corinthians 3:6-11, Ephesians 2:15 and Colossians 2:14, passages of high significance in this debate. Why is it that, in their works on the sabbath, so many Reformed writers seem reluctant to tackle these passages?¹⁶ And, even when they do, they frequently introduce (contradictory) glosses to circumvent them. Why?

Various other escape routes

Romans 7:6, Ephesians 2:15 and Colossians 2:14 clearly teach that the law is abolished; the believer is free of it. Christ did not abolish the entire law *except* the ten commandments. He abolished the law. Paul did not say that the believer is free of the law only in the sense of obtaining justification by it, that he is no longer under its curse. Christ has wiped out the law for the believer. Above all, Paul was not speaking only of justification when writing to the Ephesian and Colossian believers. The context of Colossians 2 is not justification but progressive

¹⁵ Or does this come under the *ceremonial* law?

¹⁶ Take, for instance, Joseph A.Pipa: *The Lord's Day*, Christian Focus, Fearn, 1997. He did not mention any of these passages.

sanctification.¹⁷ The letter starts with justification, but Paul's aim was his readers' progressive sanctification. By reading the letter through in one sitting, this becomes very clear. See especially Colossians 1:9-14; 2:6-10,16 – 4:18. In particular, in his letter, the apostle was not only telling the Colossians that there is no justification by law work – he was telling them there is no progressive sanctification by the law, either. He was speaking of justification leading to progressive sanctification. See Ephesians 4:1 – 6:24; Col. 1:10,22-29; 2:6,16-23; 3:1 – 4:18. Reader, you may verify this from Ephesians 2, for instance. Note how justification (Eph. 2:8-9) leads to progressive sanctification (Eph. 2:10) which leads directly to Ephesians 2:11 and on, beginning with the word 'therefore' (Eph. 2:11-22).

The ten commandments were written by the finger of God on two tablets of stone (Ex. 31:18; 32:14-15; 34:1,28; Deut. 5:22) – and it was *precisely* this system, the temporary ministry of death, written on stones, which was abolished when Christ fulfilled the law (2 Cor. 3:7,11). It is not only the glory of the law which was done away with – it was the law itself. 2 Corinthians 3:11,13 proves it. Yes, the glory of the old covenant was fading – but only because the old covenant itself was fading! It was temporary (Gal. 3:19,23-25); it was being annulled (Heb. 7:18); it was 'becoming obsolete and growing old' and was 'ready to vanish away' (Heb. 8:13). But, please note, it was *the entire system of law* which Christ abolished, not merely its glory. It was not merely the glory of the law which was becoming obsolete, growing old and ready to vanish away – it was the law *itself*. Indeed, only the covenant could be said to be 'abolished', not its

¹⁷ The sinner, on coming to faith, is united to Christ and is justified and positionally sanctified. Thus, in God's sight, in Christ he is accounted or made righteous, free of sin and condemnation, and perfectly separated unto God. See, for instance, 1 Cor. 1:2,30; 6:11; Eph. 5:25-27; Heb. 10:10-18; 13:12. In his Christian life, he has to work out his perfection in Christ, and he will be moved to do so by the Spirit under the direction of Scripture; this is his progressive sanctification or holiness of life. But this, alas, is imperfect. The believer will only be absolutely sanctified in the eternal state. I will set out my arguments on all this in my forthcoming book on sanctification.

glory. In any case, the evasion is the merest quibble. If the law has lost its glory, it has lost everything! For those who think it is just the glory of the law which is gone, what now of the suggestion that we are to think that Christ leads his people back to Moses? If this is so, it means that the law, far from losing its fading glory, has greater glory under Christ than ever it had under Moses! But Christ took away the first – law – to establish the second – grace (Heb. 10:9). Moses has given way to Christ. Christ has superseded him. Christ is better: ‘For this one has been counted worthy *of more glory* than Moses... Moses indeed was faithful in all his house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterwards [that is, Christ and the gospel], but Christ...’ (Heb. 3:1-6). See John 1:17.

Christ and his covenant have more glory than Moses and his covenant. Therefore, if the Reformed are right, and sinners, on conversion, are taken under Moses for their progressive sanctification, then they are taken under a covenant that has less glory than the new covenant Christ established for them. This, it seems to me, can only mean that the Reformed end up with a system that gives Moses more glory than Christ. Nonsense!

Nor will it do to try to argue that the law *as a piece of writing*, independent of the Spirit, was done away with, and *that* was the old, obsolete thing which was abolished, not the law itself. Such a view, of course, prepares the way for asserting John Calvin’s third use of the law,¹⁸ in which the Spirit takes up that same law and uses it as the perfect rule in the believer’s life. In plain English, it is not done away with after all! Rather, it is made stronger! No! ‘The letter’ means ‘the law in its written aspect’. ‘The letter’ is contrasted with ‘the Spirit’ (Rom. 2:29; 7:6; 2 Cor. 3:6), as is ‘the law’ (Rom. 7:6; Gal. 5:18). ‘The letter’ therefore is ‘the law’, not the law without the Spirit.

¹⁸ Calvin had three uses for the law. 1. To prepare sinners for Christ. 2. To restrain sin. 3. As the motive, spur, whip to beat believers into progressive sanctification, ‘the moral law’ being their standard, their perfect rule. I have fully documented this, and challenged it, in many of my works. In particular, see my *Christ* pp51-74,348-368.

The four passages we have looked at in this article, which all concern the written law, Romans 7:6, 2 Corinthians 3:5-11, Ephesians 2:14-16 and Colossians 2:14, all teach the same doctrine as we have seen in many other places of Scripture; namely, Christ has set his people free from the law of Moses. It therefore cannot be the believer's perfect rule of godliness.

True, the old covenant had a glory. But the new covenant is better, superior, and its glory, therefore, is all the greater. The old covenant of death and condemnation, which was temporary, has gone. The new covenant, of Christ, of the Spirit, brings justification, and is permanent. What is more, it brings progressive sanctification leading to glorification. Beyond all doubt, the new covenant is more glorious than the old. Notice how Paul, in 2 Corinthians 3, takes his argument on to progressive sanctification, the transformation of believers. It is as Christ is preached, believed and looked to – in other words, as the new covenant is declared and received – that believers, having and realising their freedom in Christ, are transformed more and more into his image:

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called the children of God... Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when he [Christ] is revealed, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure (1 John 3:1-3).

If that is not 'the law of Christ', what is it? If such passages do not tell us the motive, the spur, the way, and the aim of progressive sanctification – with no mention whatever of 'the law' – what do they tell us?

Extracts and comments

I start with Samuel Bolton, the great Puritan advocate of Calvin's view on the law:

By the 'handwriting of ordinances', I conceive is not meant the ceremonial law alone, but the moral law also... We can here observe the successive steps which the apostle sets out. 'He has

blotted out'. But lest this should not be enough, lest any should say, It is not so blotted out, but [that] it may [still] be read, the apostle adds, 'he took it out of the way'. But lest even this should not be enough, lest some should say: 'Yes, but it will be found again and set against us afresh', he adds, 'nailing it to his cross'. He has torn it to pieces, never to be put together again for ever.¹⁹

First-rate! But Bolton put a fly in the ointment – adding his own gloss; namely, 'so far as it was against us and bound us over to the curse'. Bolton simply failed to get the point the apostle was making! Or, did he get it, but simply had to trim (that is, expand!) the apostle to make him fit his system? Let's get back to Paul!

D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones on Romans 7:

What law is this?... [Some] say that this is a reference only to the law as given through Moses... Some even go further and say that it refers to the ceremonial part of [the Mosaic] law alone, and to nothing else... It would be quite unprofitable to spend time in refuting these false expositions. [What Paul said] is true of the Mosaic law, certainly, but not only of the Mosaic law... [Paul] is referring, of course [please note], to the written moral law that was given through Moses to the children of Israel. They referred to it as the 'writing' because God wrote it on the tables of stone which he gave to Moses.²⁰

I must say, I like Lloyd-Jones' 'of course', although I wish he had not introduced the unnecessary 'moral law'. Nevertheless, bearing in mind what the Reformed mean by it, I am rather glad he did, and I find I now like Lloyd-Jones' 'of course' very much indeed! Do the Reformed?

Colin G.Kruse: In the Ephesian passage:

Paul says that it is the law of Moses itself which gives rise to the dividing wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles... Christ made peace between Jews and Gentiles by destroying the

¹⁹ Samuel Bolton: *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1964, pp31-32.

²⁰ D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones: *Romans: An Exposition of Chapters 7:1 – 8:4. The Law: Its Function and Limits*, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1973, pp15,92.

dividing wall (that is, the hostility), and by abolishing the law of commandments [expressed – Kruse’s addition] in ordinances which gave rise to the hostility.²¹

Fred G.Zaspel:

It is the Mosaic legislation in its entirety and the decalogue specifically that Paul said ‘fades away’ (*katargesas*, 2 Cor. 3:11; cf. *exaleipsas*, Col. 2:14)... [Ex. 34:27-28 is a passage] of critical significance... where God identifies ‘the ten commandments’ as ‘the words of the covenant’. No dividing of Moses will fit here’. Nor anywhere else! ‘The legislation of Sinai is an inseparable unit, and this statement (Ex. 34:27-28) must inform the apostolic declaration of its abolition. It is the Mosaic code as a whole and in all its parts that has passed away, and the apostolic declarations to that end must therefore be seen to embrace even the decalogue... ‘The whole law’ stands or falls together as an indivisible unit. It would be wrong to forget this stated, essential unity of the old covenant/decalogue when reading New Testament statements of the covenant’s/law’s abolition... The statements are as broad and inclusive as they appear.²²

‘It would be wrong to forget this...’, I agree, but that is precisely what the Reformed do when they force Scripture to support their system. In fact, they more than ‘forget’ the apostolic statements; they gloss them to make them say the opposite!

On 2 Corinthians 3:7-18, Kruse:

Paul had occasion to compare and contrast the glory of the apostolic ministry with that of Moses... Here Paul compares and contrasts the ministries of the old and new covenants... [He] was contrasting the lesser splendour of the ministry of the law to the greater splendour of the ministry of the gospel.²³

²¹ Colin. G.Kruse: *Paul, The Law and Justification*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, Massachusetts, 1997, pp263-264.

²² Fred G.Zaspel: ‘Divine Law: A New-Covenant Perspective’, *Reformation & Revival Journal*, editor John H.Armstrong, Reformation & Revival Ministries, Inc., Carol Stream, Vol.6, Number 3, Summer 1997, pp154-155.

²³ Kruse pp151-153,155.

Richard Sibbes, in his ‘considerable volume’ on 2 Corinthians 3:17-18, spoke of three ‘distinct properties and prerogatives of the gospel in which it excels the law, [following which,] by inferences drawn from these properties... the apostle more largely illustrates the transcendent glory of the gospel, and how far it exceeds the glory of the law’.²⁴

On Ephesians 2:14-15, M.R.Vincent:

The enmity was the result and working of the law regarded as a separative system; as it separated Jew from Gentile, and both from God. See Rom. 3:20; 4:15; 5:20; 7:7-11... Law is general, and its contents are defined by *commandments*, *special injunctions*, which injunctions in turn were formulated in definite *decrees*.²⁵

On the same passage, Patrick Fairbairn: ‘The law of commandments in ordinances is but another name for the Sinaitic legislation, or the old covenant’. On Colossians 2:14: ‘What here is meant by the handwriting in ordinances... there can be no doubt, was the law, not in part but in whole – the law in the full compass of its requirements’.²⁶

On Ephesians 2:14-15, Charles Hodge:

Christ abolished the Mosaic law by fulfilling all its types and shadows... the abolition of the Mosaic law removes the wall between the Jews and Gentiles. This is what is here taught... This was done by abolishing the law... He abolished the law... Having

²⁴ Richard Sibbes: *The Excellency of the Gospel Above the Law*, in *Works of Richard Sibbes*, Vol.4, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1983, pp202-205. Sibbes worked this out over the next 100 pages or so.

²⁵ M.R.Vincent: *Word Studies in the New Testament*, Macdonald Publishing Company, Florida, Vol.2 p852.

²⁶ Patrick Fairbairn: *The Revelation of Law in Scripture*, Alpha Publications, Indiana, 1979, pp458,466-467. Yet in his *The Typology of Scripture Viewed in Connection With The Whole Series of... The Divine Dispensations*, Evangelical Press, Welwyn, 1975, Vol.2 pp175-177, Fairbairn contradicted himself, calling ‘the handwriting of requirements that was against us’ (Col. 2:14) ‘the ceremonial law’, ‘those ceremonies’, ‘the purifications of the law’, ‘the Old Testament ceremonies’, ‘the ceremonies of Moses’. No! ‘The law’ is the law.

by... his death abolished the law... Christ by his death has freed us from the law. We are no longer under the law but under grace, (Rom. 6:14)... The law which Christ has thus abolished is called “the law of commandments in ordinances”. This may mean the law of commandments with ordinances... or it may refer to the form in which the precepts are presented in the law... as commands... giving the contents of the law... The idea is probably the law in all its compass, and in all its forms, so far as it was a covenant prescribing the conditions of salvation, is abolished. The law of which the apostle here speaks is not exclusively the Mosaic law... it is the law of God in its widest sense... not merely the law of Moses... [But] (in the passage before us), special reference is had to the law in that particular [that is, the Mosaic] form... The doctrine of the passage... is that the middle wall of partition between the Jews and Gentiles... has been removed by Christ having, through his death, abolished the law in all its forms.²⁷

Do the Reformed agree with Hodge here? If so, how can the ‘abolished’ law, which ‘Christ by his death has freed us from’, be the believer’s perfect rule for progressive sanctification?

On Romans 7:6, John Murray:

‘The oldness of the letter’ refers to the law, and the law is called the letter because it was written. The writing may refer to the two tables of stone on which the ten commandments were written or to the fact of the law as contained in Scripture. It is law simply as written that is characterised as oldness, and the oldness consists in the law. This is apparent not only from the context where the apostle has been dealing with the powerlessness of the law to deliver from sin, and the confirmation it adds to our servitude, but also from the parallel passage in 2 Corinthians 3:6. The contrast there between the letter and the Spirit is the contrast between the law and the gospel, and when Paul says ‘the letter kills, but the Spirit makes alive’, the letter is shown by the context to refer to that which was engraven on stones, the law delivered by Moses.²⁸

²⁷ Charles Hodge: *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1964, pp130-131,134-136.

²⁸ John Murray: *The Epistle to the Romans...*, Two Volumes in One, Marshall Morgan and Scott, London, 1974, Vol.1 p246.

Charles Hodge, like Murray, rightly called 2 Corinthians 3:6 one of the ‘parallel passages... The letter [refers to] the law [which] is so designated because the decalogue, its most important part, was originally written on stone, and because the whole law, as revealed to the Jews, was originally written in the Scriptures, or writings... Believers then are free from the law, by the death of Christ’.²⁹ I repeat the questions I asked above. Do the Reformed agree with Hodge here? If so, how can the ‘abolished’ law, which ‘Christ by his death has freed us from’, be the believer’s perfect rule for progressive sanctification?

Richard C.Barcellos: ‘The middle wall of separation was the law of the old covenant... the old or Mosaic covenant’.³⁰ Of course, the law is used in the new covenant as a paradigm for believers,³¹ but, as Paul said, the law divided Jew and Gentile before the coming of Christ. Barcellos spoiled his comment by qualifying ‘law’ by adding ‘as old-covenant law’,³² a redundant phrase since that is precisely what the Mosaic law was! Let me illustrate. Take these two statements: *First*, the levitical sacrifices were old-covenant sacrifices. *Second*, the spiritual sacrifices of believers are new-covenant sacrifices. The first, as it stands, is a tautology. Linked with the second,³³ however, it is a powerful statement, emphasising the fundamental contrast of the two covenants, the oldness of the old covenant and the newness of the new covenant, and the radical difference in the nature of the sacrifices. So it is with Barcellos’ phrase: ‘old-covenant law’. The law of Moses is the old-covenant law. The law of Christ is the new-covenant law. And these two ‘laws’ are utterly different – not only in content,

²⁹ Charles Hodge: *A Commentary on Romans*, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1972, p219.

³⁰ Richard C.Barcellos: *In Defense of the Decalogue: A Critique of New-Covenant Theology*, Winepress Publishing, Enumclaw, 2001, p67.

³¹ See ‘The Law the Believer’s Rule?’ in my *New-Covenant Articles: Volume One* pp131-158. This material can also be found under the eDocs link on David H J Gay Ministry on sermonaudio.com, and on christmycovenant.com.

³² Barcellos pp67-68.

³³ See my *The Priesthood*.

but in nature. I do not for a moment think that Barcellos meant *that*. Thus his phrase was redundant.

Gordon D.Fee, linking Romans 6:14 and 7:6 with Romans 2:29 and 2 Corinthians 3:6:

The contrast between Spirit and 'letter' has nothing to do with the several popularisations of this language [euphemism for 'Reformed glosses']; *e.g.*, between 'the spirit and letter' of the law, or between 'internal and external', or between 'literal and spiritual'... [The language of the biblical text] is eschatological and covenantal language. 'Letter' has to do with the old covenant that came to an end through Christ and the Spirit... The new has thus replaced the old, which was ratified by Moses and Israel on Sinai and characterised by 'written regulations requiring obedience'.³⁴

³⁴ Gordon D.Fee: *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, Massachusetts, 1994, pp507-508.

The Long Night

Introduction

For the last thirty years or more, there has been a public debate among Christians over the relative merits and de-merits of covenant theology as opposed to new-covenant theology. As I write (in February 2015), this debate is being pursued with vigour. And I, for one, am delighted. Indeed, I have taken part in it.¹ But I suspect that many of the believers who know of this discussion might be dismissing it as being of academic interest only, an absorbing pastime for those who like a theological ding-dong, but of little or no practical importance. If so, they could not be making a bigger mistake! The fact is, the debate in question concerns matters which lie at the very heart of the gospel. Indeed, the issues involved cannot be confined to believers. They have vital consequences for all mankind.

As I have noted, in various ways I have tried to argue the biblical case for new-covenant theology. In this article I want to draw an important lesson from history. No! Don't switch off! History need not be boring. Indeed, no believer should ignore history. Read the Old Testament and see what Israel had to do with their history of what God had done for them in the past, and what happened when they failed to remember it (Exod. 12:26-27; Josh. 4:6-7; Judg. 2:10-12; 6:7-10; 1 Sam. 10:18; 1 Kings 18:36; Ps. 44:1; 77:5,11-12; 78:2-4; 106:6-7,13,21-23; 143:5; 145:4,10-12). And then, of course, we have the Acts. The Spirit did not record that history for nothing! No, the study of God's dealings in the affairs of men is not an optional extra for God's people.

As for the question in hand, by the time of the Reformation, for over a 1000 years western Europe had been in bondage to a system invented by the Fathers. The Fathers had mistakenly gone back to the old covenant, taken the priestly principles of that

¹ See my books (Amazon and Kindle), and my discourses, articles and videos under David H J Gay Ministry (which may be found on sermonaudio.com; christmycovenant.com; youtube.com).

covenant, and applied them directly to their churches. Further, they had also gone to the pagans and taken their principles, bringing them into their system; in particular, they adopted the idea of the ‘sacrament’. Then again, they had looked to the political machinations of the Roman Empire. By combining these disparate ideas, the Fathers had forged Christendom. It was tragedy, a sinful tragedy, a tragedy of massive proportions. From the time of the Fathers, western Europe would be cast into Christianised darkness. The rest of the world, of course, was left to languish in pagan gloom.

Early in the 16th century, the Reformers took a huge step back towards the new covenant. *Post tenebras lux* – ‘After darkness, light’ – summed it up. But... sadly, that’s not the whole story. True, the Reformers did recover the new covenant on the question of justification by faith. They failed, however, to go the whole hog, and left many ‘rooks to return to their nests’, as John Calvin would later speak of it when accusing the English of failing to reform fully. Alas, Calvin, himself, with many others, retained the medieval system of sanctification under the law, and, by and large, held onto old-covenant principles in the matter of the priesthood of all believers, especially as it concerns *ekklēsia* life. Consequently, after the Reformation, clericalism still reigned. In addition, the Reformers held onto infant baptism, thus failing to get back to the new-covenant principle of the dipping of believers upon profession of faith. Linked very closely to this, they also retained the idea of baptismal regeneration instead of baptism’s true status as an illustration of the inward spiritual work which has already occurred in the one baptised. And all this was bolstered by Reformed theologians in Germany who invented what became known as covenant theology. Theologians will always rise to justify any practice!

Of course, the Reformers did not go unchallenged. Rome fought back, and this goes a long way towards explaining why the Reformers held onto old-covenant principles as tenaciously as they did. They felt the sting of Rome’s accusations, but instead of using the new covenant to stave off such criticisms, the Reformers (like Rome) maintained kept their grip on the old covenant. In addition, the Reformers were challenged from the

other wing by the Anabaptists who stoutly called them to a full return to the new covenant. The Reformers responded virulently, becoming even more entrenched over such matters as infant baptism. Of course, some fringe Anabaptists did their cause no good by their sinful excesses, but in the main their arguments on the need to return to the new covenant were sound, solid and scriptural.

The upshot was, the Reformers, despite the invaluable contribution they undoubtedly made towards reversing the long centuries of decline under Rome, nevertheless failed to secure a thorough return to the new covenant. Instead, they forged a Reformed Christendom, an old-covenant/new-covenant hybrid. It was a grievous mistake, and it cast a long, deep and lasting shadow, one which, to this day, deprives many of full light and liberty in Christ.²

And this is why the debate over new-covenant theology *versus* covenant theology is always of vital interest to every believer. Never more so than today. And it explains why, in this article, I want to take a brief look at the time before the Reformation. I want to trace out what happened when men imported the old covenant into the new. For while covenant theology is a vast improvement on Romanism, nevertheless it is only if we can see a full return to new-covenant principles that we shall recover the full liberty of the gospel. To encourage this return and recovery is why I write.

The long night

The Reformation, when it came, though imperfect, was one of God's great interventions in the history of the world. He openly showed his power in the affairs of men in order to liberate them from Rome's tyranny, and thus glorify his name, advance the good of his people, and bring about the free preaching of the gospel to the salvation of sinners. Everyone has heard of Martin Luther. But long before Luther nailed his theses to the door at

² I have fully argued and documented all this in several of my works. See, especially, my *Battle*; *Pastor*; *The Priesthood*; *Baptists*; *Infant*. See also numerous articles.

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Wittenberg in 1517, many others had raised their voices, and shed their blood in their determination to hold to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ as revealed in the New Testament. And there was need, desperate need.

For the gospel had been well-nigh lost by the corruption which began soon after the last of the apostles had died (if not before), which corruption and apostasy eventually culminated in the towering domination of the Papacy over western Europe. True, at one time the Papacy had been weakened through its schism – there were two simultaneous Popes at one time, and then three – but for more than a 1000 years the Papacy ruled – terrorised – the west. There were pockets of resistance, but Rome's dominion was all-embracing. Indeed, the Papacy held Europe captive in a darkness which could be felt. Pause to think of the millions who perished in the Dark Ages, perished without the simplicity of the gospel of Christ. Sentimental folk may stand in awe of the splendour of medieval architecture with its statuary and stained glass, they may grieve over the loss of its sung liturgy and hallowed ritual, and long for its return, but the religion it represented exacted a price beyond computation for millions.

Nevertheless, though the days were dark, there was money, and lots of it, to be made by those on the look out for it in medieval Europe. Oh yes. The Catholic Church and the merchants of the earth were made fabulously rich by their trade with and through each other in those days. Trade? In what? Very much along these lines:

Merchandise of gold and silver, precious stones and pearls, fine linen and purple, silk and scarlet, every kind of citron wood, every kind of object of most precious wood, bronze, iron and marble; and cinnamon and incense, fragrant oil and frankincense, wine and oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and bodies and souls of men (Rev. 18:12-13).

Do not miss that last: the merchants of the earth and Babylon the Great traded in the 'bodies and souls of men'. Think of it! Life was cheap under the reign of medieval Rome, but misery was plentiful, while hope was in desperately short supply. Oh, a pretended salvation, a purported salvation, a 'salvation' dispensed

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by the Roman priesthood, could be had – at a price! But the soul-saving gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ – the only means of salvation which every human being desperately needs – was well-nigh buried under a welter of corruption, paganism, superstition, ignorance, and mumbo-jumbo dispensed for centuries in a dead language which the vast majority (including many of those who administered the system) did not understand. Rome perpetuated her hold over the souls of men by keeping the Bible locked in a language few could read. Millions, therefore, were born, eked out their wretched existence, and died in total spiritual darkness, cut off from the Lord Jesus, denied access to his mercy. And the misery, though things ebbed and flowed, dragged on in this way for well over a 1000 years. Think of it!

* * *

In the New Testament, we read that the early believers, travelling far and wide, preached³ the gospel to all and sundry – commanding, inviting, urging, exhorting sinners, seeking to persuade them to repent and trust Christ for salvation, warning them that if they refused they would perish. Some who heard the gospel did refuse; some procrastinated; but some – thousands – obeyed the gospel, repented and believed. All such were baptised by immersion, and thus added to the new body which Christ had set up – the *ekklēsia*. From now on there were two groups in the world; the *ekklēsia* and the rest. Men were either believers or unbelievers; subjects of the kingdom of light or subjects of the realm of darkness. Believers could say: ‘The Father... has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son’ (Col. 1:12-13). The words of the prophet had been fulfilled, and the old order of things had been well and truly shaken (Hag. 2:6-9, 21-23; Heb. 12:18-29). Christ, by his own work, and through his people, by his Spirit had ‘turned the world upside down’ (Acts 17:6).

Until that time, societies had been homogeneous, ‘sacral’; that is, all the citizens were incorporated into their particular society

³ By ‘preaching’, I am thinking not only of ‘pulpit work’. See my *The Priesthood; Pastor*.

(whether pagan or Jewish) at birth by the performance of a rite or ceremony at the hands of a recognised priest, and were ‘sustained’ and ‘nourished’ in the system by repeated priestly acts. In this way, everybody automatically became part of their society, lived in it and died in it. Indeed, death was the only way out – either natural, or violently enforced as punishment for any who dared to challenge its over-arching homogeneity.

But Christ, by founding his *ekklēsia*, put an end to all that. By setting up his own kingdom, his spiritual kingdom (John 18:33-37), his unique kingdom with its own distinctive way of entrance, he destroyed forever the old oneness. Through the regenerating grace and power of his Holy Spirit, sinners came to individual, personal and voluntary repentance and faith in Jesus as Saviour and Lord. In this way, the Lord Jesus Christ translated these sinners out of the realm of darkness into *his* kingdom.

Thus, from the day of Pentecost, thousands – by being born again, and coming to repentance and faith in Christ and demonstrating it by obedience to him in baptism – were quitting their native society to join this separate, distinct society – the *ekklēsia*. No longer thinking of themselves principally as citizens of any earthly realm, they knew and confessed themselves to be citizens of Christ’s heavenly kingdom. ‘Our citizenship is in heaven’ (Phil. 3:20; see also Eph. 2:19), they declared, even though such a profession brought down upon them the wrath of the sacral society they had forsaken. Rejecting Caesar as spiritual Lord, they submitted to Christ as their king, acknowledging *him* as their sovereign Lord, their ruler, their law-giver in the spiritual realm. And when Caesar’s (or any earthly ruler’s) law clashed with that of Christ, it was Christ whom they would obey (Acts 4:18-20; 5:27-29). And Caesar didn’t like it! He, in company with other earthly rulers (Acts 5:33), did not like it at all!

Christ, with his gospel, by fulfilling the old covenant and bringing in the new, had brought about a massive cleavage in the human race:

Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a

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daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household (Matt. 10:34-36).

Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law (Luke 12:51-53).

Sacral society, whatever form it took, reacted to this upstart kingdom within its very bowels – the citizens of this new-fangled realm who were daring to challenge its universal uniformity, daring to defy its arrogated power. Reacted to them? It hated them! It persecuted them to death. More precisely, it persecuted *Christ* in his members (Acts 9:5; 22:8; 26:14). For Christ, by his gospel, had opened the last and decisive phase in the war which had begun with God's pronouncement in Genesis 3:15, and which will last until he returns in glory to judge the world, end all sin and rebellion, and establish eternal righteousness in a new heaven and a new earth (2 Pet. 3:13).

Things continued thus for about 300 years. During those centuries, the great universal sacral society of the time, the Roman Empire, more-or-less continued to persecute the *ekklēsia* – this minority outcast and upstart society – for daring to challenge its monolithic all-embracing power. The Empire demanded conformity – or else. In the 4th century, however, a catastrophic change took place in the relationship between the two kingdoms.

After a period of toleration of the *ekklēsia* under the Emperor Constantine (following his so-called conversion), during the reign of Theodosius I, the State and the Church were fused to form a new monolithic sacral society which replaced the old pagan sacralism, yet retaining and adopting the old pagan principles. The Catholic Church, Christian sacralism, Christendom, had been invented. It was a satanic master-stroke.

Remember, as I said, all societies are sacral and have their rites of passage, *all* of them. Christendom (the new sacral society) took over the Latin name – the *sacramentum* – given to the initiating rite of the old pagan sacral society, and 'Christianised'

it. Hence ‘sacrament’ passed into Church vocabulary and practice, where it reigns, for many, supreme to this very day. Christendom applied the term to its own invented initiating rite – the ‘baptising’ of infants. The Church claimed that by this sacrament of infant ‘baptism’ it effectively conveyed regenerating grace to infants, thereby making them Christians. This, of course, was a staggering and appalling – diabolical – corruption of the New Testament symbol of believer’s baptism following faith. And in three ways: sprinkling or effusion had replaced dipping; infants, instead of believers, were being dealt with; and baby sprinkling was performed for the *conveying* of grace rather than the dipping of believers as a *representation* of the grace *they had already experienced*. In short, baptism, in the hands of the Church, had effectively come between the sinner and Christ, confining the souls of men to the keeping of the ‘tender mercies’ of Mother Church, to the power of her priests, and leaving the masses destitute, entirely at the Church’s disposal. In time, the second ordinance of Christ was also corrupted. The Lord’s supper was turned into a sacrament, and then into the sacrifice of the Mass with, eventually, its unintelligible and blasphemous doctrine of transubstantiation.

As night follows day, sacramentalism led to – as it always will lead to – sacerdotalism; that is, priestcraft – the power to convey grace through the sacrament by the hands of a professional appointed to perform the ceremony. And so it proved in the all-embracing State-Church. The new-covenant concept of *ekklēsia* membership through repentance and faith in Christ as Saviour and Lord, followed by baptism and commitment to his *ekklēsia* in a life-long submission to Christ and his law, had been replaced by the sacramental concept of Church membership by infant baptism (sprinkling), sustained by the sacrifice of the Mass, all being ‘effective’ when administered by an ordained priest repeating the right form of words and doing the required actions. More than that, regeneration itself, directly and sovereignly by the Holy Spirit – which Christ said is essential (John 3:3-8) – had been replaced by purported baptismal regeneration at the hands of a priest. In this way, Christendom – the Catholic Church, its priests and their alleged power of regeneration through infant baptism

(sprinkling) – began its long history of shutting millions out from Christ and his salvation.

The monstrosity thus invented was an organisation, not an organism; an institution, not a spiritual body; an inclusive corporation, not an *ekklēsia* – that is, a body of ‘out-called’ ones. This conglomerate gained its ‘shareholders’ by supposed baptismal regeneration, as pagans were thus made into ‘Christians’, even though they remained pagan in mind, heart and practice.

In contrast to Christ’s *ekklēsia*, in which regeneration, followed by saving faith and repentance, ensured that converts abandoned their old paganism (Acts 8:9-12; 19:18-19; 1 Cor. 12:2; 1 Thess. 1:9-10), in the new-fangled Church, baptismal regeneration enabled the ‘converts’ to keep their old paganism and cover it with a veneer of institutionalised ‘Christianity’. As I have said, it was Satan’s master-stroke.

Christendom, shortly to be dominated by the Roman Catholic Church ruled by its Pope – needed a theology to bolster or justify its sacramental system. Cometh the need, cometh the man! Augustine, Christendom’s leading theologian, more than any other man provided the required theology.

What were the marks of this Christendom? One word will sum it up. Darkness! The Bible had given way to fable and philosophy expressed in Church Councils, which were manipulated, behind the scenes, by men versed in political intrigue. Superstition, ignorance, paganism and politicking ruled. Babies were so-say made Christians by sprinkling at the hands of a priest. Real spirituality and true godliness were smothered. The gospel was well-nigh extinguished. Salvation by grace through faith had been obliterated, replaced by salvation through human merit, ‘good’ works, and observance of Church rites. Ceremony and ritual became the order of the day. Prayers were said for the dead. Starting with a gross abuse of the Old Testament – starting with it, I say, by going to the old covenant, and applying its fulfilled and abolished principles (Heb. 7:18-22; 8:13) – and, at the same time, copying the political constitution of the Empire, the Church had invented a hierarchy of governors and presidents, and cluttered itself with a multiplicity of ridiculous offices and

officers attended by all the trappings of titles, pomp, veneration, robes, priesthood and sacrifice. The State and the Church had become entwined, both parties striving for mastery. The Papacy bolstered itself by two huge forgeries – in the year 776, the ‘Donation of Constantine’, and, *circa* 845 the ‘Decretals of Isidore’ – and swept on in its arrogant, arrogated power, carrying practically all before it. Ignorance was the order of the day, not least among the clergy. Men were born, existed and died in fear and misery. Darkness is the word. Gross darkness.

But Christendom did not go unchallenged. Oh no! It was challenged from without. In the 8th century, the followers of Islam (that new-fangled religion recently invented by Mohammed) reached the banks of the Loire in France, and threatened Italy. Meanwhile the Lombards attacked Rome, the Pope escaping only by the skin of his teeth with the intervention of the military might of Charles the Hammer.

But the challenge to Rome was not only from without. Right from the 2nd century, the bishop of Rome had flexed his muscles and tried to impose his will on all the Church, but failed. He even excommunicated the eastern Churches because they would not submit to his decree concerning – of all things! – the date of Easter. I ask you! The New Testament forbids the observance of such days (Gal. 4:9-10), and yet, so soon after the last of the apostles had died, bishops and Churches were quarrelling and bitterly dividing over the trappings of such carnalities! Nevertheless, in the west, Rome triumphed and, having got its hands on the levers of power, it would not easily let them slip. Whatever the cost in blood to those who dared to oppose papal tyranny, Rome would maintain its hold.

Even so, voices from within the western Church were raised against her tyrannical rule. Let me cite a few. I speak of Ambrose of Milan in the 4th century; in the 6th century, Laurentius of Milan; in the 7th century, Mansuetus of Milan; Claude of Turin (who died in 827); the Waldensians of the 11th century and beyond; Arnold of Brescia (1110-1155); the followers of the French priest, Peter of Bruys, who lived in the 12th century; the Albigenses, who were crushed in the early 13th century; and two Englishmen – William Sawtrey (who was martyred in 1401) and

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John Colet (1466/7-1519);⁴ and many, many more. I am not saying that such protestors reached full gospel light, far from it, but I am saying that they were, at least, flickering candles in the gross and deepening darkness. In truth, they were more than candles. They were beacons. They were glorious lights, warning lights, encouraging lights, lights of hope, lights shining bravely in a dark and dangerous place. All honour to their name and memory! They were men and women ‘of whom the world was not worthy’ (Heb. 11:38). The world? They were men and women of whom the Church was not worthy!

I said voices were raised against sacramentalism and sacerdotalism. Voices? If only it had been their *voices* which had been called upon to protest! Rome fought back against the ‘heretics’. It had to maintain its interests! In 1223, for example, it set up the notorious Inquisition. The ‘heretics’, denying that salvation comes by sacraments under priestly manipulation, suffered ferocious persecution even unto death. No, let me put it bluntly! They were butchered – at the hands of the Roman Church.

But still the protest went on. Take, for instance, the 14th century, with John Wycliffe in England. Later, John Huss in Bohemia made his stand. Let us recall the dying words of Huss. In 1415, being fastened to a stake by a chain around his neck, as he was being consumed in the flames, Huss was moved to cry out: ‘It is thus that you silence the goose, but a hundred years hence there will arise a swan whose singing you shall not be able to silence’.

How prescient were Huss’ dying words. That swan, Martin Luther, nailed his theses to the Church door at Wittenberg in 1517, and the long night was over. At last, the sun had peeped over the horizon.

Conclusion

Thus ends my glance at the long night. But as I say, the Reformation, glorious as it was, failed to recover full new-

⁴ See my *Colet*.

covenant doctrine and practice. The battle to complete the job has been fought ever since – never more so than today. As we approach the 500th anniversary of Wittenberg, let us renew our efforts. Remember it was hammering of a few nails in a wooden door that was instrumental then. Who knows but God might use our feeble labours? Certainly the coming generations – both believers and unbelievers – need the full-flowering of all the glories of the new covenant.

In closing, I urge all believers – and in this I especially address my Reformed friends – I urge them to examine what the Scriptures have to say on the important issues which are raised in this debate over new-covenant theology. I exhort them to do this with an open Bible and, as far as possible, with an open mind uninfluenced by the Confessions and Catechisms framed by covenant theologians; in other words, to be a Berean (Acts 17:11).

In particular, I ask them to consider the following:

The law was given to Israel, and Israel only, as a temporary measure until the coming of Christ, to act as a child-custodian for Israel, and to separate her from all other peoples.

Christ came into the world under the law, fulfilled the law, brought it to its God-ordained end, and thus rendered it obsolete, its purpose having been fully accomplished.

The believer is not under the law, the Spirit having set him free from the law of sin and death.

Nevertheless, as part of all Scripture, the old covenant is of use to the believer as a paradigm, as an illustration of the gospel.

The law is a unity: there is no threefold division.

The law of Christ, Christ himself, by the Spirit, is written on the believer's heart, so that he serves God, not in the old way of the written code, but by the Spirit.

The full-orbed practice of the priesthood of all believers is essential, both for the individual and the corporate life of the *ekklesia*.

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I do not pretend that this list is exhaustive. Even so, these issues warrant – they demand – scriptural study by every believer.

The Penetrating Law of Christ

Many ill-informed and dismissive comments are made about those who advocate the law of Christ, and not the law of Moses, as the believer's rule. Speaking for myself, I do not merely resent this. It is a travesty. It hinders many in making a fair assessment of new-covenant theology. Worse, it is a direct offence against the Lord Christ himself. Christ's law is *not* foggy sentiment.¹ Christ is *not* content with a woolly obedience, a vague profession of some sort of 'love'. He demands total, unstinted, constant and continual obedience, out of the highest possible motives – because he loved me, because of all that he is, because of all he has done for me, because he has taught me to love him, because he has written his law on my heart, because he himself has been formed within me, and because he has given me his Spirit, the one who moves me to live in increasing conformity to my Redeemer's likeness to the glory of God:

My brothers, you... have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code... There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit... For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order

¹ See 'Fuzzy Sentiment' in my series: 'New-Covenant Theology Made Simple' ([youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com) and under the Edocs link on: [David H J Gay Ministry sermonaudio.com](https://www.DavidHJGayMinistry.com)).

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that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified... I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect (Rom. 7:4-6; 8:12-4,29-30; 12:1-2).

This Christ-likeness in the believer is both an inevitable and essential consequence of the new covenant. Anything less ‘wishy-washy’ could not be imagined. In this short article, I want to explore these things a little.²

Now there are two vital principles to make clear before we go any further. The law of Christ is not the law of Moses. It is not even a ‘law’ in the Mosaic sense. Since I have set all this out in detail elsewhere, I will not develop my line of reasoning here. Nevertheless, these two points are not trivial, and I urge you to read and weigh my supporting arguments.³

In saying that the law of Christ is not a list of rules, and in stressing that ‘we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code’, however, I am not implying that the believer is not under the rule of the entire Scripture (John 17:17; 2 Tim. 3:16). Nor am I saying that God’s demands under the gospel are easier than the demands of the law. Far from it. Why, the new covenant is more searching than the old. As the letter to the Hebrews makes crystal clear, to sin against Christ’s law is far worse than sinning against Moses. That letter was written, not to inform its readers that it would be a pity if they went back from Christ to the old covenant, but to tell them bluntly that it would be fatal! Don’t do it! Don’t even think of it! And that is what the

² For this article, I have lightly edited certain sections from my *Christ* pp162-163,232-236,252-253,494-495,508-509,535-536.

³ ‘The Law of the Believer’s Heart’; ‘The Law the Believer’s Rule?’; ‘What is The Law?’; “The Law” in “The Law of Christ”. These articles may be found in my series: *New-Covenant Articles* (various volumes), and under the Edocs link on: David H J Gay Ministry sermonaudio.com or on the christmymcovenant.com website.

sacred writer is saying to us, and saying to us now. We must not leave Christ.

The warning passages in Hebrews

Let me start with this:

Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? (Heb. 10:28-29).

Clearly, it is more culpable to sin under the new covenant than the old.

Furthermore, *ekklēsia* life plays a vital role in the law of Christ; in particular, the discipline of church life. Take the case of incest at Corinth, over which the believers were – yes – boasting! Paul rebuked them. They should have ‘been filled with grief’ (NIV) over it, and removed the offender. The apostle went on, setting out the way in which the law of Christ must be applied in such cases:

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore 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. I wrote to you in my letter not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner – not even to eat with such a person. For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not

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judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore ‘put away from yourselves the evil person’ (1 Cor. 5:1-13; see also Matt. 18:15-19; Acts 5:1-11; 8:18-23; 2 Thess. 3:6-15).

Do not miss the references to the old covenant, the law – the Passover and the extract drawn from several repeated Deuteronomy passages. The law of Christ knows how to make full – but properly nuanced – use of the law of Moses, the Mosaic covenant – as a paradigm.⁴ Do not miss the reference to leaven – echoes of Galatians 5:9. And while the severity aspect of the law of Christ stands out a mile, do not forget that its application at Corinth had a reforming effect, and all was put right (2 Cor. 2:5-11). This, too, is another heart-warming aspect of Christ’s law. But the point at issue stands. The law of Christ is anything but hazy sentimentalism, vague ethics, however often such dismissive terms are used by its ill-informed critics. Iron sits within the velvet.

The fact is, however, here we have what seems to be a contradiction. How can the new covenant be *more searching* than the old, and to sin against Christ’s law be *far worse* than sinning against Moses’ law (Heb. 10:28-29), and yet at the same time the ‘law’ of Christ, his ‘yoke’, his ‘burden’, be ‘easy’ and ‘light’ (Matt. 11:30)?

How do Reformed teachers, covenant theologians, deal with this?⁵ They say the law of Christ is the law of Moses shorn of its condemnation. I call this ‘pulling the law’s teeth’. The new law, according to this, is something *less* than the old, *less* severe. It is the old law *minus* the difficult part. Reader, how can this be reconciled with the fact that the new covenant is more penetrating than the old? Instead of explaining the problem, this approach explodes it! How ironic, it is, therefore, that the Reformed are so free with their accusations of fuzzy sentiment, woolly concept, and all the rest, when dismissing new-covenant theology! Glass

⁴ See my: ‘The Law the Believer’s Rule?’

⁵ See my ‘The Law: Reformed Escape Routes’.

houses and the throwing of stones comes to mind. Who's the real antinomian, after all?⁶

The question remains: How can the law of Christ be more severe than the law of Moses? What is the biblical answer? How can the new covenant be more penetrating than the old, and yet be easy and light? Clearly, although the Bible states the seeming contradiction, there can be none. As to the severity aspect of Christ's law, contrary to the Reformed approach, no teeth are to be pulled. The warnings of the new covenant *are* to be taken seriously and given their full weight. There must be no getting round them by semantics. The warning passages are real.

The fundamental sin of the new covenant is to depart from Christ. I have just quoted Hebrews 10:29. What sin does the verse warn against? Nothing less than the deliberate, wilful (Heb. 10:26) forsaking of Christ, the bitter rejection of him and his Spirit.⁷ Whoever breaks Hebrews 10:29 'has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace'. 'Worse punishment' than under Moses awaits such a man! And this warning note is sounded again and again throughout the letter to the Hebrews (Heb. 2:1-3; 3:12-14; 4:1,11; 6:4-8; 10:26-39; 12:14-17,25-29). Take also Romans 8:6,13: 'To be carnally minded [to have the mind of the flesh] is death... If you live according to the flesh you will die'. And Galatians 6:8: 'He who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life'. I stress the reality of the warning passages. They are not hypothetical. They are not put in Scripture as 'bogey men'. They are unfeigned. They mean what they say, and they say what they mean. I do not think they can be 'relegated' to dealing with the believer's reward. The believers who received the letter to the Hebrews were in danger of forsaking Christ.

Perseverance under Christ, holding to him and his law, is a sure mark of grace, the ultimate proof of spirituality. To depart from Christ is the worst of all sins. We are Christ's 'house... *if* we

⁶ See my video: 'Antinomianism!' (youtube.com).

⁷ Do Matt. 12:31-32; Mark 3:29; Luke 12:10 speak of this?

hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end' (Heb. 3:6). 'For we have become partakers of Christ *if* we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end... And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end... See that you do not refuse him who speaks' (Heb. 3:14; 6:11; 12:25). 'The gospel... by which... you are saved, *if* you hold fast' to the apostolic word, the gospel (1 Cor. 15:1-2). 'He who endures to the end shall be saved' (Matt. 24:13).

Is the punishment under the new covenant severe? It is indeed. To break the law of Christ – to reject Christ, to turn back from him, to forsake him – leads to: 'I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness' (Matt. 7:23; see verses 13-29). How harrowing, then, is Christ's question: 'Do you also want to go away?' There is only one satisfactory reply: 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God' (John 6:67-69). The ultimate testimony which counts is this: 'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith' (2 Tim. 4:7). Believer, Christ will 'present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in his sight – *if* indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel' (Col. 1:22-23).

But just a moment! Surely all believers sin? Sadly, they do! Well, when a believer sins, does he bring condemnation upon himself? Does he lose his salvation? Certainly not! Let me explain. The law of Christ is far more than a list of rules. 'We serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code' (Rom. 7:6). Of course, as I have said, the believer is under Scripture (John 17:17; 2 Tim. 3:16), but, I repeat, he does not serve God in the old way of the letter (2 Cor. 3:6). The law of Christ is not a sort of re-vamped law of Moses! In truth, it is not that at all. It is an entirely new system. To submit to the law of Christ is to yield to him, to receive him as Lord and Saviour, to honour and obey him, to learn of him, to cleave to him, to abide in him, to continue in him, to have him formed within, to have his Spirit, to walk according to his Spirit. Now although a believer may stumble into sin, this is a far cry from deserting the

Redeemer.⁸ While I would not excuse the least sin, there is a world of difference between *failing* Christ and *forsaking* him. The believer sins; sadly, it is so. But God has made abundant provision for such (1 John 1:5-10; 2:1-2, for instance). Nevertheless, the warnings are real. If professing believers do turn their back upon Christ, and abandon him, they will come under the severest of all judgments: 'For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have

⁸ The believer cannot go back to the old slavery, and sin. He dare not, it is unthinkable: 'What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!' (Rom. 6:15). So thunders the apostle. Before his conversion, the believer was a slave of sin, but now he is not; he is a slave of righteousness (Rom. 6:17-18). In his former slavery to sin he produced sin and death (Rom. 6:19-21). Now, being the slave of God, the slave of righteousness, he produces holiness (Rom. 6:22-23). I am not preaching sinless perfection. I do not say that a believer cannot sin. Of course not! But there is all the difference between 'sinning', and 'living in' or 'being a slave' to sin; between 'being in the flesh', and 'the flesh being in you'; between 'a sense of desertion', and 'living without God'; between 'a sense of darkness', and 'living in the kingdom of darkness'. I am not – *not* – teaching sinless perfection, I repeat. But I am restating Paul's doctrine: the unbeliever is a slave to sin; the believer is not. In Scripture, no believer is ever addressed as a sinner. John said: 'Whoever abides in [Christ] does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen him nor known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as he is righteous. He who sins is of the devil... Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for his seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God' (1 John 3:6-9). NASB has 'sins... sins... practices sin... practices sin... sin'; NIV has 'keeps on sinning... continues to sin... does what is sinful... continue to sin... go on sinning'. He does not 'sin wilfully' (Heb. 10:26), 'sin deliberately' (NIV). He does not live in the *realm* of sin. Above all, although I talk as though *I* am saying this or that, all I have done is quote the apostle and try to enforce what *he* is saying! And at the heart of Paul's doctrine is this glorious statement: 'For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace' (Rom. 6:14).

known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them' (2 Pet. 2:20-21). This, it goes without saying, is far worse than under Moses.

This, then, is the biblical answer to the seeming contradiction. I realise that this, in itself, raises other problems, problems connected with God's sovereignty, his purpose and decree. One the one hand, I know that God will bring all his elect to everlasting glory. I rejoice in it. But I also know that each one of the elect has to come individually to faith in Christ and has to continue in Christ. I do not try to reconcile these two. I believe them both because I find them both revealed in Scripture. However much I explored these matters, I would still end up with a seeming contradiction, something beyond my wit to understand or explain. But this happens so often with me, I do as I always do: after trying to reconcile the paradox as far as I can within biblical parameters, I accept the remaining tension, and press on by faith. And it not just me! All believers find the same. Of course they do! Unless, that is, they are prepared to trim Scripture to fit their system!⁹ Which they are!

So, although there is much that can be said – and must be said – about the gentle, kindly aspect of Christ's law,¹⁰ its severity aspect is real. We must take the warnings seriously. In the final analysis, to break the law of Christ is to depart from Christ, to desert him, to live according to the flesh. And the consequences are indescribably bad. But the law of Christ is far from negative. Although I have spent a little time on this negative aspect of it in order to tackle a seeming contradiction, there is far more to be said on the positive side. 'But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life... Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to God our Saviour,

⁹ On the seeming contradiction or paradox between God's sovereignty and the free offer, and between human inability and duty faith, see my *Offer*, especially pp75-152.

¹⁰ That is, there is more to be said about the 'easy' (the opposite of burdensome) and 'light' (easy to be kept) aspect of Christ's law.

who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and for ever. Amen' (Jude 20-21,24-25).

Nevertheless, I say again, the letter to the Hebrews was written, not merely to inform its readers that it would be a pity if they went back from Christ to the old covenant, but to make sure they persevered to the end. Departing from Christ would be fatal! Don't do it! Don't even think of it! That is what the sacred writer is saying to us, and saying to us right now: Do not leave Christ for anything or anybody!

The law of Christ as spelled out by Christ himself

As I have said, Christ's law is *not* foggy sentiment. He is *not* content with a woolly obedience, a vague profession of some sort of 'love'. Christ demands total, unstinted, constant and continual obedience, out of the highest possible motives – because he loved me, because of all that he is, because of all he has done for me, because he has taught me to love him, because he has written his law on my heart, because he himself has been formed within me, and because he has given me his Spirit, the one who moves me to live in increasing conformity to my Redeemer's likeness to the glory of God.

Having glanced at Hebrews, let me now go directly to Christ himself. We know what he declared in the Sermon on the Mount. Addressing his disciples, Christ took the Mosaic law for his springboard or starting point, saying again and again: 'You have heard that it was said... but I say to you' (Matt. 5:21-22,27-28,31-32,33-34,38-39,43-44). Christ always cut deeper than Moses. Instead of making obedience an external matter, Christ made (his) law-keeping a matter of the heart, which is far more penetrating and searching. He could not have made it any clearer: 'Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven' (Matt. 5:20).

At the highest pitch of all, the believer, as Christ declares, has to 'keep my [Christ's] commandments... just as I [Christ] have kept my Father's commandments' (John 15:10). Note the 'just as'. This is what Christ requires. This is what pleases him. He

demands the same quality of obedience from his people as that which he himself gave to his Father. Let *that* sink in! Moreover, such obedience not only pleases Christ, this is what makes his people truly happy: ‘If you know these things, blessed [happy, AV] are you if you do them’ (John 13:17).¹¹ More, obedience is essential; it is no option. And if anyone dares to dismiss this obedience to the gospel as sentimental vagueness, I urge him to think seriously about what he is doing. On a coming day, he will have to explain his words to Christ, the one who commands his people to show their love to him by obedience to his commandments, his law, and to do so with the same quality of obedience as he himself, while he lived on earth, showed to his Father.

Hear the word of Christ:

If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, **just as** I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another **as** I have loved you (John 15:10-12). Receive one another, **just as** Christ **also** received us, to the glory of God (Rom. 15:7).

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, **even as** [**just as**, NIV] God in Christ [**also**, NASB] forgave you. Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, **as** Christ **also has** loved us and given himself for us (Eph. 4:32 – 5:2).

Husbands, love your wives, **just as** Christ **also** loved the church and gave himself for her... **just as** the Lord does the church (Eph. 5:25,29).

In light of biblical commands of this nature and weight, all foolish, dismissive talk – cheap talk! – about the so-called inadequacy or vagueness of the law of Christ should cease forthwith. Such scorning of the law of Christ verges on the blasphemous.

¹¹ This is more than a warm feeling, of course. Such people are truly blessed in God’s eyes.

Extracts with brief comments

Robert Govett:

Let us now turn to another field in which the loftiness of the new rule of life is more fully exhibited. I refer to the Sermon on the Mount, in which the Saviour's doctrine is compared with that of Moses in many and most important points. The main difference between the two systems consists in this – that Moses' law embodies the spirit of JUSTICE; the teaching of our Lord, the spirit of MERCY. It is from this fundamental distinction that the superiority of the new rule of life flows... Jesus came in no hostile spirit against the law or the prophets. Both were sent by his Father; both must receive their entire fulfilment ere they passed away, as it was designed that they should. But... there is no 'unseemly opposition' here...

The Saviour begins to compare his new standard with the old. He takes the second table of the decalogue, and shows how much more he requires than Moses demanded of old. The Saviour announces his commands with the most studied contrast to the law: a contrast which has been blunted to English readers by our translation. We read [in the AV of Matt. 5:21]: 'You have heard that it was said *by* those of old time', instead of '*to*', which beyond just question is the correct rendering; and which is given in the margin [of the AV, and is the translation in the NKJV, NIV; the NASB has 'the ancients were told']. [Christ] begins with the sixth command. The law forbade murder, and announced to the murderer the judgment of the appointed court. Jesus assures his disciples that even anger between brethren would come before his future court; and that a malicious word would expose the utterer to the danger of hell-fire. Here is a heightening indeed of the offence and of the penalty. That which was no misdeed against the law of Moses is now to be visited with a sentence greater than that belonging to the highest crime under the law (Matt. 5:21-22).

When he speaks of the seventh command, there is a similar raising of the standard. That which was no misdeed at all as reckoned by Moses is by Jesus announced to be adultery, and exposed to the visitation of Gehenna. With like words does Jesus exalt the rule of life concerning theft, false witness and coveting a neighbour's goods (Matt. 5:27-30).

But he does not halt at the decalogue. That was not the Jew's entire rule of life.

Let me break in. What a very important point Govett is making. It must not be missed. The ten commands comprised only a part of the rule for Jews. So, if the Reformed are right, believers, who according to the Reformed have only the ten commandments as their rule, have a lesser regime than the Jews! The Jews had 613 commands, whereas believers have only ten! Remarkable.

And that's not all. Govett:

The Saviour therefore shows how his new commands rise above and set aside the law. He forbids divorce in cases permitted by Moses. Moses allowed oaths and vows... the Saviour forbids them... Moses' general doctrine was that goodness and kindness were to be exhibited towards men, specially towards the holy nation of Israel; but it admitted of two exceptions – criminals and enemies... Criminals... pity was forbid (Deut. 13:8; 19:21). The enemies of Israel might be smitten to death with the sword. The priests with the trumpets of God were to encourage and bless their warfare. Now [under the law of Christ] this is forbidden. The law of grace is to encircle even the cases excepted by Moses. The disciple is not to prosecute the offender; nor is he permitted on any occasion to take the sword against a foe. His Father in heaven is sparing criminals and enemies; he is to resemble him (Matt. 5:38-48).

Jesus next drops a word of warning. He confesses the extreme difficulty to fallen man of a rule of life so high and heavenly as this. 'Tis a narrow gate and a strict way indeed! But he tells us not to imagine that he was asking of disciples born of God only conduct such as might be exhibited by the lowest of mankind. Was such a life difficult indeed? Yes, but an especial reward was also promised thereto. Were they born again of God? Let them show it by grace like that of the Father in heaven.

In regard of religious service, the Saviour next exalts the standard greatly beyond the law. Moses... required only that the offerer should be a circumcised Jew, not ceremonially unclean, and that the offering... should be without blemish. But now our Lord brings into view the motives of the worshipper... (Matt. 6:1-18).

The law promised, and gave as its blessing, treasures on earth. Filled barns and overflowing storehouses were the sign of Jehovah's favour. Now the disciples were to give up these for treasures in heaven, and for a recompense at the resurrection of the just (Matt. 6:19-34). Under the law, to be a magistrate and ruler was an honour, rightly desired by an Israelite... The

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Saviour now forbids this to his disciples... (Matt. 7:1-2). The law admitted to its sacred rites every circumcised descendant of Abraham. No matter how sensual, bloodthirsty, deceitful and unbelieving a Jew might be, he had a right to partake of the Passover. Judas the betrayer had as good a right to the Paschal lamb as our Lord. Wicked as a high priest might be, if he were not ceremonially unclean, he had a right to enter the holiest. But that defect is removed in the Saviour's new scheme. His disciples were to exclude from the sacred rites appointed by our Lord all the unclean and unrenewed in spirit (Matt. 7:6).

Thus I have rapidly gone over the Sermon on the Mount, and have exhibited our Lord as indeed the author of a new doctrine, affecting all the Christian's life, and standing in constant contrast with the commands of the Mosaic law. Jesus is no mere expounder of Moses.

What a vital point this is. Govett went on:

Most would make Jesus only a land-surveyor, pointing out afresh the old boundaries of the fields, scraping from the surface the stones, the moss and lichens which in the course of ages had covered them; or rooting from their neighbourhood the brambles that concealed them. But now evidence in plenty has been adduced to prove that this view is mistaken. Moses brought LAW: Jesus brought GRACE (John 1:17). The prophet who was to come, according to God's own promise, was not merely one who was to recall attention to the words spoken by Moses. He was to bear a new doctrine ['his law' (Isa. 42:4)]: and woe to him that refused it! The two schools of doctrine taught by Moses and by Christ, respectively, have been briefly presented. You, my reader, must decide by which you will be led. Some, as the Saviour foresaw, would prefer the old and easier rule of life. For them, he draws the consequence of such a choice... (Matt. 5:20).¹²

Let me emphasise this last point. As Govett rightly shows, the law of Christ is more penetrating than the law of Moses, and its punishment ultimately more severe. The warning passages are real! Please remember Jesus' words about judgment were largely delivered to his disciples and for them. Most evangelicals today

¹² Robert Govett: *Is The Law The Christian's Rule Of Life?*, Fletcher and Son, Norwich, Third edition, 1874, pp48-53.

are quite content to forget the context and apply them to unbelievers. So, taking up Govett's expression, those who opt for the Mosaic law as the way of progressive sanctification have actually opted for the 'easier rule of life' – the wrong one, but easier!

John G.Reisinger as editor of *Sound of Grace* in an 'Open Letter to Dr Sproul':

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

James D.G.Dunn, commenting on Galatians 5:14, quashed the notion that the biblical call for 'love' is 'imprecise':

On the contrary, just because it is less prescribed beforehand what love of the neighbour demands, and depends on who the neighbour is and his/her situation in each particular instance, *it is all the more demanding*. Moreover, the demand is open-ended: we do not know beforehand who our neighbour might be at any one time (see also... Gal. 6:10)... It is a call for a practical love, a concentrated love, not a vague feeling for humankind stretched so thin as to be non-existent.

I agree, further, with Dunn when he once again observed how an emphasis upon 'the freedom of the Spirit can easily degenerate' into all sorts of carnal behaviour, unless it is accompanied by the equally biblical emphasis on the all-embracing law of Christ. As Ben Witherington likewise observed, carnal behaviour 'is the lot

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

of those who throw over the law without a principle as penetrating as love of neighbour to guide them, and without a genuine commitment to serve one another. Without that, the call to freedom can open a floodgate which sweeps away every foundation'.¹⁴

Conclusion

So, paradoxically, Christ's law is both more penetrating and yet easy (Matt. 11:30). I see both in Scripture, I state both with equal vehemence, and, by God's Spirit, I seek to apply both with equal fervour, beginning with myself. The is the new-covenant theology I espouse.

I praise God for his grace, and I use all necessary means to hold on my way by his Spirit. Oliver Cromwell's 'trust in God my boys and keep your powder dry' is an excellent dictum.

No, I am not teaching that any of the elect can be lost. But the warning passages (the Gospels, *Hebrews*) are real, not hypothetical. My works don't save or keep me. Only God's grace does that. But I have to persevere:

For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live (Rom. 8:13).

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

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and

¹⁴ James D.G.Dunn: *The Epistle to the Galatians*, A & C Black, London, 1993, pp289,292-293, emphasis mine; Ben Witherington III: *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on... Paul's Letter to the Galatians*, T.&T.Clark, Edinburgh, 1998, pp384-385.

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covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Col. 3:1-17).

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:3-11)

Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And

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count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen (2 Pet. 3:14-18).

Three Questions in One

Just the other day, someone posted a comment on one of my ‘New-Covenant Made Simple’ videos on YouTube, and this showed me that in my sermons, articles and videos I had inadvertently produced a little series of pertinent questions on the new covenant. I further thought it might be useful if I simply gathered these questions into a short article, with appropriate references to particular works. And here is the result. I am very grateful to the person who posted the original comment.

The three questions are:

1. Which mountain are you living on?
2. Who’s your mother?
3. Who’s your husband?

1. Which mountain are you living on?

This question is raised by Hebrews 12:18-24:

For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given: ‘If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned’. Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said: ‘I tremble with fear’. But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.¹

¹ Google David H J Gay Ministry: ‘The Two Mountains’; ‘On Which Mountain Are You Living?’; ‘Hebrews 12:18-24’. Or else go directly to David H J Gay Ministry on sermonaudio.com, including the eDocs link;

So, which mountain are *you* living on? Sinai or Zion? Law or grace?

2. *Who's your mother?*

The question is raised in Galatians 4:21 – 5:1:

Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written: 'Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labour! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband'. Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. But what does the Scripture say? 'Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman'. So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman. For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.²

So, who is *your* mother? Hagar or Sarah? Law or grace?

3. *Who's your husband?*

The question is raised in Romans 7:4-6:

Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for

youtube.com; and christmycovenant.com. In the following note, I will give only the titles.

² 'Slavery Or Freedom'; 'Galatians 4:21 – 5:1'; 'Liberty or Bondage: Sarah or Hagar?'

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God. For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.³

So, who is *your* husband? Moses or Christ?

These three questions, of course, boil down into one: Which covenant or ministry do you belong to? The old, in stone, of death or the new, in the Spirit, of life? (2 Cor. 3:6-11).⁴

³ ‘Illustration: Marriage’; ‘Romans 7:4’; ‘The Believer’s Marriage’; ‘Who’s Your Husband?’

⁴ Many of my sermons, articles, videos and books. Of the latter, see, in particular, my *Glorious*.

